

CHAPTER - V

AGRARIAN UNREST IN NORTHERN BENGAL

During the early days of East India Company's rule there was, as we are aware, tremendous agrarian unrest in many parts of Eastern India. The Province of Bengal was undergoing a period of turmoil especially because of the transfer of power from the Bengal Government to the East India Company. In Northern India the disbanded soldiers of the Mughal army and numerous landless peasants formed themselves into large or small groups and moved from place to place resorting to plunder and decoities to eke out a livelihood.<sup>1</sup> Many of them had settled in some Bengal districts.<sup>2</sup> But their ranks were again swelled by the joining of large number of peasants evicted from land due to the Bengal famine of 1771.<sup>3</sup> These people and some religious sects of Northern India namely Gosain, Naga, Purbia, Bhojpuri etc. came to be known as Sannyasi and Fakir rebels. Very often the bands of Sannyasi and Fakir rebels passed through Northern Bengal, the principal purpose of their over-running the region being pilgrimage to holy places like Mahasthangarh in Pogra district, the holy Shrines of Hasrat Pandua in Malda and those of the Dinajpur district.<sup>4</sup>

The Sannyasis became very powerful in the late eighteenth century and intermeddled in the power struggle for the throne of

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1. Roy, S., Bharater Krishak Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram, p. 24, Calcutta, 1980.
  2. Ibid, p. 21.
  3. Chandra, A.N., The Sannyasi Rebellion, p. 31, Calcutta, 1977.
  4. Sengupta, J.C., West Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda, p. 58, Calcutta, 1969.

the kingdom of Coochbehar and occupied that state. But very soon they had to retreat since they were defeated by a contingent sent by the East India Company. The Skirmishes between the two parties took place at Dinahata in Coochbehar in 1766.<sup>5</sup> The Sannyasis built up their citadels in places like Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Bogra etc. while Rajshahi, Malda and Purnea were the places where they made frequent inroads.<sup>6</sup> The activities of the Sannyasis continued till the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Also in the first half of nineteenth century a number of peasant uprisings took place in Bengal. Of those the risings of the indigo cultivators of Bengal and the militant movement launched by the Wahabis which spread to different regions of Northern and Eastern India deserve special mention. Even in the second half of the nineteenth century the movement launched by the Wahabis continued for sometime while the indigo cultivators agitated again in the late fifties and early sixties of the century. It is interesting to note that very often the followers of the Wahabi faith joined hands with the indigo cultivators.

The Wahabi movement was basically a religious movement. Its early leaders like Syed Ahmed of Pareilly and Titumir of Barasat in Bengal had gone to Mecca on a 'Haj' pilgrimage and were immensely influenced by the Wahabi preachers there who wanted practice of

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5. Chandra, A.N., OP. Cit., p. 130; Roy, S., p. 30.

6. Ibid, p. 34 ff.

7. Ibid, p. 50.

Islam to be reformed with a view to bringing it closer to Islamic theology.<sup>8</sup> Both Titumir and Syed Ahmed were aware of the aberration in the practice of Islam in India and wanted it to be reformed in the lines prescribed by the Wahabis of Arab.<sup>9</sup>

Returning to India Titumir built up a strong following and fought against the oppression of the landlords as well as the Indigo planters. Eventually they rose in rebellion which was put down by the Government in 1831.<sup>10</sup>

We should for a better understanding of the growth of the Wahabi movement in Northern Bengal briefly discuss the pattern of their organisation as well as the leadership in the region.

One of the pioneer Wahabi preachers in Northern Bengal was Abdur Rahaman, a native of Lucknow who settled in Malda accepting the job of a school teacher. In or about 1841 he initiated his activities in the area with raising of a fund for his organisation and recruiting zealous workers like Rafique Mondol who was originally a peasant.<sup>11</sup> Rafique was arrested by the authorities for his organisational activities. Although released after a brief imprisonment Rafique had to resign 'his office as religious tax gatherer to his son' Amiruddin.<sup>12</sup>

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8. Roy Suprakarh, OP. Cit., p. 269.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid, p. 280; Dey, Amalendu, Roots of separatism in nineteenth century Bengal, p. 19, Calcutta, 1974.

11. Hunter, W.W., The Indian Mussalmans, p. 71, Delhi, 1969 (Reprint).

12. Ibid.

Operating from the district of Malda Amiruddin continued his activities for quite sometime in the districts of Rajshahi, Murshidabad and Malda.<sup>13</sup> In 1869 he was arrested. Cases were started at Malda, Rajmahal and Patna. Both Amiruddin and Ibrahim Mondol of Islampur, front rank leaders of the movement in Northern Bengal, were sentenced to life imprisonment. Their properties were also confiscated by the Government.<sup>14</sup>

As regards the Indigo cultivators they agitated against the planters in the thirties and the forties of the nineteenth century. Their agitation again flared up in 1859-60.<sup>15</sup> In this period the districts of Pabna, Rajshahi and Malda were seriously affected.

The Indigo factory situated at Bakrabad in the district of Malda was ransacked by the rebel peasants.<sup>16</sup> Many factories in the districts of Pabna, Jessore and Nadia were also attacked. In villages like Piari in Pabna and Mallickpur in Jessore fierce struggle between the police and the planters on the one hand and cultivators on the other followed. Exploitation of the peasants continued even in the late seventies of the nineteenth century as we learn from the petition of Jaduram Mundle\* of Kaliachak, Malda and his 173 compatriots.<sup>17</sup> The petition complained that the

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13. Ibid; Buckland, C.E., Bengal under the lieutenant Governors, p. 433, New Delhi, 1976.

14. Hunter, W.W., OP. Cit., p. 77 ff; Roy, S., Bharater Baiprabik Sangramer Itihas, p. 51, Calcutta, 1980; Ahmed, Q., The Wahabi Movement in India, p. 288, Calcutta, 1966.

15. Proceedings of the Govt. of Bengal (Judicial Dept.), Progs. 79-80, April, 1860.

16. Ibid.

17. Proceedings of the Govt. of Bengal (Judicial Dept.), file 146A Progs. 20-24, July, 1877.

\* Jaduram Mundle was a peasant cultivator of Malda.

Managers of Indigo factories 'commenced to force them to write an agreement for cultivating indigo' to which they did not agree 'on account of their lands becoming unproductive by continually cultivating indigo'. Consequently the managers exercised much 'oppression on them'. Jaduram's petition states further<sup>18</sup> :

1. 'That they had filed a petition to the commissioner of the district representing their helpless state and complaining of the oppression of the above managers but received no reply'.

2. 'That the above managers forcibly cultivate indigo in their jote land intended for cultivating paddy'.

3. 'That their peas and other grain stalks have been destroyed by the trampling of cows belonging to the above factories'.

4. 'That the above managers brought a false charge against them and got some 18 of them unfairly punished by the Court'.

5. 'That they have been unfairly charged by the above managers with the braking of a bund belonging to the above factories, and that the case is still pending in the court; that they can hardly procure their maintenance and consequently they are too poor to meet always the expenses of the court'.

6. 'That the above managers have employed some burkundases who generally go to their villages to bring them by force to the factory; that in this way the above managers have obtained some agreements from them'.

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18. Ibid.

7. 'That the dewan of the factory threatens them, saying that if they would not consent to agree with the managers of the above factories, he will put fire to the straw, in Rajgunge belonging to the factory, and bring a false charge against them'.

8. 'That when they submitted a petition to the Magistrate of Maldah complaining of the oppression of the above managers, the Magistrate instead of properly investigating into their case and relieving them from their anxieties, unfairly sentenced one of them to two month's rigorous imprisonment. They pray that the above man may be released as in similar cases people have been released by the High Court...'

'... Thanadar do not give them proper help at proper time as they are afraid of the above managers and as they are on their side...'

However, in reply to the queries of the Commissioner of Bhagalpore about the oppression on the cultivators, Herbert Mosley, the officiating Magistrate of Malda wrote that the petition was 'untrue' and the 'oppression on the part of the factory' was a 'myth'<sup>19</sup>.

Earlier in 1860 the Government had appointed the Indigo Commission since there was widespread protest against the oppression of the Indigo planters.<sup>20</sup> The commission which submitted its report in 1860 found the system of Indigo cultivation as 'radically

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19. Ibid.

20. Roy, S., Bharater Krishak Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram, p. 395.

unsound' and recognised the fact that the cultivators were exploited by the Indigo planters.<sup>21</sup>

The period is all the more important since the Wahabis continued their activities concurrently with the indigo cultivators. As a matter of fact many indigo cultivators were influenced by the Wahabi preachers. We may also note in this connexion that Rafique Mondol, a noted leader of the Wahabis in the district of Malda had led the agitating indigo cultivators in the area.<sup>22</sup>

The Wahabi movement gradually came to an end but the discontented peasants of Northern Bengal agitated several times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Before going into the details of the major uprisings of the peasants between 1885 and 1947 we may note that the revolt of 1857 did not spread to Northern Bengal and we have virtually no evidence to suggest that the peasant masses of the region had any link with the revolt. The officers of the 11th irregular cavalry stationed at Jalpaiguri cantonment that was brought into existence a little before the outbreak of the revolt foiled a plot engineered by some native sepoys.<sup>23</sup> One of them was sentenced to transportation for life while some others were discharged from service. The rebel sepoys from the Dacca cantonment had planned to march through Jalpaiguri. This had led to the reinforcement of the Jalpaiguri

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21. Ibid.

22. Kabiraj, N., Swadhinatar Sangrame Bangla, p. 118, Calcutta, 1969.

23. De, Barun et al., W.B. District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, p. 63, Calcutta, 1981.

cantonment for which purpose a contingent of 400 men under the command of captain Curson moved to Jalpaiguri from Darjeeling. The sepoys of Dacca cantonment were tipped off about the movement of troops from Darjeeling to Jalpaiguri by the sepoys of 11th irregular cavalry. The Dacca sepoys had decided to alter their programme but the two messengers entrusted with the task of informing the Dacca sepoys of the troops movement were arrested and executed.<sup>24</sup>

Although the peasants of Northern Bengal did not rise in revolt sympathising with the rebel sepoys a large section of the Muslim peasants ventilated their grievances through the Wahabi movement. In some areas adjacent to our area of study the peasants rebelled in the early seventies of nineteenth century. At Siraganj in the district of Pabna the peasants revolted against the oppression of the landlords. The Pabna rising was immensely significant since unlike the Wahabi movement it was devoid of any communal elements.<sup>25</sup> In the period that followed peasant movements took place in the districts like Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Bogra situated on the Northern part of Bengal.

In the second decade of the twentieth century there was widespread discontent in some areas of Northern Bengal. A number of Hats were looted by the villagers in the district of Dinajpur. These were Jasai in Parbatipur Police Station, Raniganj in Ghoraghat

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24. Ibid.

25. Sarkar, Sumit, Modern India, 1885-1947, p. 51, New Delhi, 1984.

police station and Pirampur in Phulbari Police Station. In every case the mob which looted the Hats consisted of Muhammedans, Hindus and Santals. All these incidents took place in 1917. The great war had invariably told upon Indian economy and prices of essential commodities had gone up. A.G. Hallifax, the District Magistrate of Dinajpur in a letter to commissioner Rajshahi Division had attributed the crisis in his district to sudden rise in the price of salt and piecegoods.

However, a special tribunal under the defence of India Act was appointed to try the cases mentioned above and more than a hundred villagers were sentenced to imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

But in the districts of Malda, West Dibrugarh, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Darjeeling, the most significant peasant uprisings took place during the period between 1920 and 1947. This was actually a period of turbulence in which a series of mass movements like the Non Co-operation and the Civil disobedience had taken place. By then the peasants became mellowed in political understanding and very often political figures who belonged to the middle class or 'Bhadralok' provided leadership. We should also note that the communists led a number of peasant movements during the period and enlisted the wholehearted support of the peasantry.

However, the increasing political consciousness of the peasants did not essentially mean that all violent acts of the peasants

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26. Progs. of the Govt. of Bengal, Home (Police) Dept. File p. 5R-8, Progs. 167-182, August, 1918.

lacked spontaneity and were planned by the 'Bhadralok' leaders. The looting of the Matigara 'Hat' strengthens our hypothesis. Here the tribal peasants living in and around this area in Darjeeling district looted the shops, caused damage to goods and assaulted a Sub-Inspector of excise on duty.<sup>27</sup> Significantly this looting took place in 1921 when the Non Co-operation Movement was in progress in the district under the leadership of Dalbahadur Giri, the devoted leader of the Congress.<sup>28</sup> The political environment of the district was tense. But we have no evidence to suggest that the preachers of Non Co-operation who adhered to the doctrine of non-violence had any connexion with the looting of the 'Hat' and the assault on the excise official on duty. Poverty and economic deprivation common to a tribal area inhabited by peasants and tea-estate labourers in that period of time caused the violent outburst.<sup>29</sup> The incident had led to sensation in a period which had already appeared to be tumultuous. The authorities were appreciably perturbed over the affair and there was apprehension of its repetition.<sup>30</sup>

In some areas of Northern Bengal particularly in the district of Dinajpur a non-violent movement was started in the early twenties led by the local leaders of the Congress. This came to be known as the 'Chhatrishamovement' the object of which was to protest against the oppression of the landlords.<sup>31</sup> At Balurghat its leadership

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27. The Indian Daily News, May 10, 1921.

28. Ibid, May 14, 1921.

29. Masumdar, S.N., Amar Biplab Jijnasa, Calcutta, 1973. p. 27 ff,

30. The Indian Daily News, May 10, 1921.

31. Chakraborty, K., 'Swadhinata Sangrame Balurghat', (Article in) Madhuparni, Aswin 1372 B.S., p. 15.

was vested with Surendra Chandra Bagchi, Sureshranjan Chattopadhyay and Amiruddin Choudhury, all of whom were Congress leaders of the area. The movement spread to interior villages like Tapan, Agradugun, Moradanga etc. Some other persons in the leadership of the movement were Congress workers like Bhagabati of Tapan, Latu Mohammad of Agradugun, Pitambar Mondal of Tepukhuria, Fulchand Mondol of Moradanga etc. Led as it was by the Congressmen it had a secular character. As a matter of fact, the Congress wanted to strengthen its mass base in the area enlisting the support of the peasants who formed village committees as basic units of the organisation for the purpose of protecting the interests of the peasants. The village committees often offered arbitration in land disputes and organised social boycott of persons opposing its verdict.<sup>32</sup>

As regards the secular character of the movement we should mention that its name was derived from the word 'chhatrishah' (thirty-six), signifying involvement in the movement of thirty-six traditional castes of Bengal.<sup>33</sup>

Even before the chhatrishah movement subsided in the late twenties the seeds of a violent rising of the tribal peasants were sown in an area not far from Balurghat. This uprising of the Santals took place in the 'Barind' area of the district of Malda contiguous to western part of Dinajpur.

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32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

Curiously enough the Santals who rose in rebellion were converted Hindus who worshipped the goddess Kali.<sup>34</sup> Their conversion to Hinduism was the result of a movement led by Kasishwar Chakraborty, a pleader of Dinajpur who was also a leader of the Congress. Kasishwar Chakraborty had suspended his legal practice<sup>35</sup> in pursuance of the call given by the Congress during the Non Co-operation movement of the early twenties to boycott British Institutions including courts. Earlier in or around 1905 he founded the 'Satyam Sibam' sect of the Santals with the object of Sanskritising\* them or bringing them into the fold of Hinduism.<sup>36</sup> Kasishwar, it has been suggested was under the influence of the Arya Samaj founded by Dayananda Sarasvati.<sup>37</sup>

However, in the twenties one Jitu Santal became the leader of the 'Satyam Sibam' sect. Trouble arose in 1927 when Jitu and his fellow converts organised a 'puja' of goddess Kali.<sup>38</sup> Since it was opposed by the Hindus, the officiating Magistrate of Malda issued

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34. The Amritabazar Patrika, May 3, 1927.

35. Police (Dept.) confidential file No. 669/32, Govt. of Bengal, 1932; The Indian Daily News, April 7, 1921; The Mussalman, April 8, 1921.

36. Mitra Asok, District Census Handbook, Malda, 1951, Appendix, P. xxii.

37. Ibid.

38. The Amritabazar Patrika, May 3, 1927.

\* M.N. Srinivas describes 'Sanskritisation' as the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' cast. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community'. (Vide Social changes in Modern India, p. 6, Bombay, 1977).

an injunction under section 144 prohibiting the puja. But within a short period realising the gravity of the situation Peddie the District Magistrate withdrew the prohibitory orders and invited Kasishwar Chakraborty from Dinajpur to attend a meeting with him. Eventually the Santals were allowed to celebrate the Kalipuja on May 7, 1927. The police cases against the Santals were not withdrawn but the trouble was averted for the time being.<sup>39</sup>

But with the advancement of time Jitu succeeded in establishing himself as a great religio-political leader of the Santals. In 1928 an aerial survey of the district of Malda was made.<sup>40</sup> When the survey aeroplane flew past the areas within the jurisdiction of Habibpur police station Jitu declared it to be an incarnation of lord Krishna which the Santals cordially believed.<sup>41</sup> His influence increased day by day. Soon after Jitu himself was immensely influenced by the ideals of the Congress. To deliver the Santals from the exploitation of Money lenders and landlords Jitu and his close associates Arjun and Agat decided to raise funds from their fellow tribesmen and establish some kind of co-operative Bank which they named after Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>42</sup> From many Santals of the area they took one rupee each as fees in advance. They also promised to sanction loans to people in need of it. But the authorities were opposed to the operation of the so-called 'Mahatma Gandhi's Bank'

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39. Ibid.

40. Chowdhury, Rajendranarayan, Maldaha Zillar Bibaran, p. 40, Malda, 1928.

41. Mitra A., OP. Cit., Appendix. xxii.

42. The Advance, August 26, 1931.

and decided to do away with it. The police intervened and arrested Jitu, Agat and Arjun under section 420 and 120 F of the Indian Penal Code in June 1931.<sup>43</sup> Thus they were accused of cheating the people. The defence counsels namely Rohini Nandan Das, Nikunja Behari Gupta and Surajlal Lahiri pleaded that the accused advised the people to use charka and for this purpose they received one Rupee as advance as the price of the charka.<sup>44</sup>

But the petty cases started against them could not restrict the activities of Jitu and his associates. Advancing a step forward Jitu asked the Santals to stop the payment of rent to the landlords and insisted on payment of a basketful of paddy to him as the rent or 'Khajna'<sup>45</sup>. Next came the historical declaration of the 'Gandhi Raj' or a 'Raj' of their own by the Santals. Under the leadership of Jitu, Chhotka and Samu hundreds of Santals took possession of the colossal 'Adina' mosque<sup>46</sup> built in the fourteenth century and converted it into a citadel. It seems that they were conscious of the strategic advantages provided by the huge walls of the mediaeval shrine as well as its narrow arches.

As soon as the rebellion was proclaimed an armed contingent led by the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of police moved to the place. They were accompanied by some influential landlords

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Mitra, A., OP. Cit., Appendix P. xxii.

46. The pioneer, December 16, 1932.

and business men of Malda like Dwarkadas Behani, Khan Saheb Abul Hayat Khan, Asutosh Chowdhuri and Bijoy Kumar Niyogi, a legal practitioner.<sup>47</sup> In the morning of December 14, 1932 they camped in the nearby Dukbunglow. The four gentlemen mentioned above entered the mosque and requested the Santals to vacate it. The Santals replied that unless their 'Gandhi' ordered them to quit the place they would not. Then they approached Samu Santal of Bansihari, Dinajpur, who styled himself as 'Gandhi' and was garlanded by the Santals. Samu however, refused to give in. Thereafter the District Magistrate himself requested the Santals to vacate the place. At this stage some Santals left the mosque but most of them refused. Then the police entered the mosque and attempted to arrest some of the rebels. A scuffle followed and some Santals armed with swords charged the policemen while some others under orders from Jitu, their commander, started shooting arrows. A few policemen received serious injuries and one of them expired in the next morning. The Superintendent of police narrowly escaped a deadly blow. The police fired 48 rounds. Four Santals died on the spot while several of them were fatally injured. Jitu Santal was among those who were shot dead. Many of the rebels were arrested. A few of the injured Santals died at hospital.<sup>48</sup>

This insurrection of the Santals was primarily directed against the exploitation of the landlords<sup>49</sup> which became crystal clear

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47. Bangabani, December 17, 1932.

48. Ibid, December 17, 18 & 19, 1932.

49. Roy Suprakash, Muktijuddhe Bharatiya Krishak, p. 113 ff. Calcutta, 1980.

through their suspension of payment of rent to the landlords. The landlords and businessmen of Malda were anxious to put down the rebellion and provided the authorities with wholehearted assistance revealing the significant facets of a veritable class conflict.

We should also note that Millenarianism was a principal factor behind this rising to the Santals. Many such movements took place between 1860 and 1920 which aimed at 'revitalisation' and borrowed 'elements from christianity or Hinduism'.<sup>50</sup> The rising of Santals at Gasol, therefore, may be compared with the rising of the Naikda forest tribe of Gujarat in 1868. The object of the Naikdas was 'to establish a Dharma Raj'.<sup>51</sup>

Agrarian unrest was a chronic feature of the early thirties. The world wide economic depression of the period had its effect on the market. Prices of foodgrains and clothes had soared up on an unprecedented scale.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore the devastating famine of 1931 visited almost the whole of Northern Bengal. The severity of the famine had led Subhas Chandra Bose, the President of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (B.P.C.C.), to raise a relief Fund. He earnestly appealed to the people to send relief to Northern Bengal as early as possible.<sup>53</sup> The appeal of the B.P.C.C. President reveals the gravity of the situation. It is no wonder that in a period marked by famines and prolonged political turmoil pertaining to the Civil

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50. Sarkar, Sumit, OP. Cit., p. 45, New Delhi, 1984.

51. Ibid.

52. Bangabani, May 20, 1931.

53. Ibid.

Disobedience movement, agrarian unrest would assume violent character in areas where vast multitude of peasants far outnumbered other classes of people.

In the sub-division of Balurghat also the tribal people were in a mood to come into conflict with the authorities. In February 1932, a Sub-Inspector of excise and his Constables raided the Santal village of Chakram situated three miles away from the sub-divisional town of Balurghat with the object of preventing unlawful brewing of Country liquor.<sup>54</sup> During the evening a clash took place in which a Constable was seriously injured. Some Santals also were wounded. Many arrests were made.<sup>55</sup>

In some areas of the District of Dinajpur big landowners became the target of attack. In a village under the Porsha Police Station the house of Baburah Fakir, a rich and influential landowner of the locality, was invaded by an armed gang in September, 1931. The Jotedar received serious injuries.<sup>56</sup> Earlier, the gun of the Jotedar was seized by the police<sup>57</sup> since it was believed that his brother had connexions with the Civil Disobedience movement which had by then made some headway in the district. We should not fail to note that attack was the only object of the armed gang as the attackers did not plunder the house. Class-conflict intensified in a period of turmoil, it appears, was behind the violent attack.

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54. Bangabani, February 27, 1932.

55. Ibid.

56. The Advance, September 18, 1931.

57. Ibid.

We have already referred to the conflict between Santals and excise Officials engaged in preventing unlawful brewing of country liquor at Chakram in Dinajpur. Curiously enough in the same district some Santals had picketed liquor shops during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In 1932 as many as five Santal Volunteers were arrested while picketing before a liquor shop at Dinajpur. All of them were sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment.<sup>58</sup> This took place a little more than a month before the Chakram incident.

Dinajpur, however, provides us with many more cases of conflict between the law enforcing authorities and peasants as well as tribal people. Even in the interior villages of the district the movement for suspension of payment of rent gained momentum. Many arrests were made in 1930 to check its progress.<sup>59</sup> This was a part of the "No-Tax Campaign" of the Congress which reached a very critical point in June-July, 1932 when the Santals repeatedly came into conflict with the police over the issue of suspension of payment of rent as well as Chowkidari Tax.<sup>60</sup> The worst happened at Gangarampore on July 11, 1932.<sup>61</sup> The police fired a few rounds on the angry mob. Some prominent leaders of the Santals and many of the workers who participated in the movement were arrested. The authorities were anxious over the militant mood of the Santals. The District Magist

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58. Bangabani, February 1, 1932.

59. Ibid, October 20, 1930.

60. Chakraborty, K., 'Swadhinata Sangrame Balurghat' (Article in) Madhuparni, Aswin 1372 B.S., p. 18.

61. Bangabani, July 19, 1932.

of Dinajpur and Sub-divisional officer of Balurghat wanted action to 'regulate the possession of bows and arrows' by the Santals. The proposal however, did not find favour with the Divisional Commissioner of Rajshahi. The Government of Bengal were 'inclined to the view that the proposed measure would occasion difficulties in its enforcement', and the unpopularity which would accrue to Government by the measure proposed would 'far outweigh any practical advantages to be derived from the control of these weapons'.<sup>62</sup> With the infiltration of Congressmen into the ranks of the agitating peasants the movements were becoming less spontaneous and more well-directed. Other organisations like the "Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti" of which Abdur Rahim was the President, also tried to win over the peasants. A large number of Muslim peasants had joined this organisation. It succeeded in building up a strong base in the Balurghat Sub-division. Majitulla Mandal and Amiruddin Pundit two local leaders of Balurghat wing of the "Praja Samiti" organised a conference of the Ryots in March 1933.<sup>63</sup> When about ten thousand peasants were moving to Kamarpara, the venue of the conference, the Sub-divisional Officer of Balurghat arrived at Kamarpara with a contingent and declared the conference unlawful. Both Majitulla and Amiruddin were arrested. Moulvi Aftabuddin Chowdhury, a prominent leader of the Praja Samiti was to address the Conference. But the police served him with a notice under Section 144 prohibiting his

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62. Police Dept. Confidential File No. 669/32, Govt. of Bengal, 1932.

63. Ibid, March 18, 1933.

participation in the conference. The Moulvi protested against this and pleaded that the Samiti had no other object except assisting the distressed peasantry of Bengal.<sup>64</sup>

As a matter of fact the peasants often resorted to violence when there was absence of middle class leadership usually provided by the Congress. To strengthen this hypothesis we may refer to two incidents. The first one was the attack on a Loan Recovery Officer stationed at Balurghat. The scene of this violent outburst was a weekly market or Hat. In this connexion the police arrested a number of persons. 15 of them were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from 6 months to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  years. Some of the convicts were fined.<sup>65</sup>

The second case was that of the Banskata fair at Jalpaiguri. There a procession was taken out by the Congress violating the prohibitory orders of the authorities. It was participated by the people of the interior villages. Although the procession was peaceful the police fired on it to prevent its progress killing one man and injuring some more. Nine Congress volunteers were arrested to the spot.<sup>66</sup>

The first case indicates the spontaneity of the behaviour of the mob. It was an abrupt outburst, while the second case was an instance of organised violation of prohibitory orders issued by

64. Ibid.

65. The Amritabasar Patrika, April 12, 1932.

66. Bangabani, March 27, 1933.

the authorities. During the thirties a section of the Congress Workers paid increased attention to mass organisation. They sympathised with the peasants. Sarat Chandra Bose, the President of the B.P.C.C. Session held at Jalpaiguri in 1939, said in his presidential speech that the lower strata of the society was subjected to exploitation by landlords and money-lenders and if there was a class struggle the Congress would side with the oppressed.<sup>67</sup> Charuchandra Sanyal, the chairman of the reception committee for the B.P.C.C. session of 1939 had gone to the extent of declaring that he believed that land belonged to the tiller.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, when a large number of peasants willing to attend the B.P.C.C. session were refused entry to the conference pandal. Subhas Chandra Bose, the President elect of the Congress, who was attending the session, requested the organisers to let them in.<sup>69</sup>

As a natural corollary to this mood of the upper echelon of the leadership agrarian unrest provided a solid ground to the Congress whereupon the edifice of mass organisation was to be built.

Meanwhile the leftist political workers made their presence felt in Bengal. In 1936 the first session of the All India Peasants' Congress was held at Lucknow.<sup>70</sup> In the next year it was renamed as All India peasants' conference.<sup>71</sup> In 1937 the first session of the

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67. The Amritabazar Patrika, February 5, 1939.

68. Ibid.

69. Sanyal, M., 'Swadhinata Andolane Jalpaiguri' (Article in) Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir, p. 330.

70. Rasul Abdullah, Krishaksabhar Itihas, p. 67, Calcutta, 1982.

71. Ibid.

Bengal provincial peasants' conference was held at Patrasayer, Bankura.<sup>72</sup> Since the beginning left leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, Bhupendranath Dutta, Bankim Mukherjee etc. headed the organisation.

The Krishak Sabha leaders were amazingly successful in spreading their ideas to backward and interior regions. Fairly attended meetings in the district of Dinajpur indicated the sabha's popularity with peasant cultivators and landless peasants of Northern Bengal. On March 19, 1938 one such meeting was held at Buridanga in the Sadar sub-division of Dinajpur which was attended by no less than 3000 men. The gathering was addressed by Sujat Ali Masumdar, Ananta Mukherjee, Ganendranath Sarkar, Gurudas Talukdar and Bibhuti Bhusan Guha all of whom rose to prominence in subsequent years. Sujat Ali, an eloquent speaker urged the peasants to fight against the oppression and illegal realisation of the Zemindars and criticised the Government policy of supporting the zemindars. The peasants were also told that in their struggle they would be backed by the middle class gentry, the unemployed youth and the students. On the following day another meeting was held at Joykrishnapur in Balurghat sub-division. Here the gathering was more impressive, Moulvi Abdul Halim Shah presiding. Ananta Mukherjee, hoisted a red flag and told the peasants that the zemindars of sundarbans in 24 parganas were very oppressive but establishment of Krishak Samitis in those areas strengthened the morale of the peasants to a considerable extent.<sup>73</sup>

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72. Ibid, p. 69.

73. Home (Political) Dept., Confidential File 264/38, Govt. of Bengal, 1938.

The third session of the 'Krishak Sabha'(B.P.P.C) was held at Nagharia situated in the district of Malda. This conference was summoned in May 1939.<sup>74</sup> By then no less than fifty thousand members were recruited by the Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha. Earlier in January 1939 Nagharia was chosen as the venue for the district political conference which was presided over by Kiran Sankar Roy, one of the eminent leaders of the Congress. The district political conference was attended by Subhas Chandra Bose who was accorded a jubilant reception by the people of Nagharia.<sup>75</sup> Subhas Chandra Bose came here on his way to Jalpaiguri where he had, as we have discussed in the relevant chapter, greatly sympathised with peasants.<sup>76</sup> However, the political consciousness of the people of the area in general and a movement of the peasants against the Zemindar of Chanchal who owned vast landed property in the district provided some advantage to the peasant organisation. The Zemindar was anxious to collect the arrear of land rent and resorted to oppression. The peasants wanted exemption from payment of rent. The Krishak Sabha had sent Shujat Ali one of the earliest leaders of the organisation, to give the grievances of the peasants a definite shape. Ali succeeded in bringing to his fold a large number of peasants, organised a huge procession which marched through the small town of Englishbazar, the headquarters of the district, which rarely experienced such huge demonstration. Ali's manoeuver caused quite

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74. Rasul, Abdullah, OP. Cit., p. 89.

75. The Amritabazar Patrika, February 1, 1939.

76. Sanyal M., OP. Cit., p. 330.

a sensation and the district administration was put under pressure. The Raja of Chanchal realising the gravity of the situation announced exemption from payment of land rent for a certain period.<sup>77</sup> This happened just before the session of the Krishak Sabha was held at Nagharia. The whole affair served as a morale booster and contributed to the success of the Nagharia conference.<sup>78</sup> The conference resolved to intensify peasants' struggle, train up volunteers and to build up a strong following among the poorer peasants.<sup>79</sup> The sabha attained a quick success in the district. Virtually the whole of Northern Bengal turned into a prolific field of activity for the sabha in the decade that followed.

While discussing agrarian unrest in Northern Bengal mention may also be made of the Balurghat upsurge of 1942 which we have discussed at length in the relevant chapter. The incidents at Balurghat may be bracketed with other cases of agrarian unrest although the movement started in the sub-division in pursuance of the call given by Gandhi and was supposed to be non-violent in nature. The sub-division of Balurghat was a predominantly agricultural area where all demonstrations had to be joined by the masses of peasants as well as people connected with agriculture. As a matter of fact, the mob which raided the post office, the Civil court, the sub-registry office, the central co-operative bank, the Excise sub-inspector's office, the Excise shops, the Jute offices

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77. Rasul, A., OP. Cit., p. 89.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid, p. 90.

and the railway out agency office in September 1942 came from outside the town.<sup>80</sup> The mob also looted a Government godown and distributed paddy among the poor people. Within a couple of days hundreds of villagers interrupted the export of paddy from the district at Telighat. The police intervened and opened fire on the mob and arrested some villagers.<sup>81</sup> The chain of events described above leads us to hold that the appalling crisis of food during the war years was one of the reasons behind the agrarian unrest that the sub-division experienced in 1942. The rural people were severely penalised for their participation in the upsurge. A collective fine of Rs. 75,000/- was imposed on the inhabitants of Balurghat, Dakshin Chakhabani, Khadimpur and Dakra.<sup>82</sup> The people of Muradanga village alone were assessed to a collective fine of Rs. 500/-.<sup>83</sup>

The following year famine gripped the whole of Bengal causing immense misery of the people. The advancement of the Japanese forces and their occupation of Burma prevented the import of rice from that country. Furthermore the Government failed to make sound arrangements of transport of foodgrains from the surplus areas to the deficit ones. Apprehending an invasion by the Japanese forces the Government had ordered the boats that plied in riverine Eastern Bengal to be destroyed. This had deepened the problem of transport of foodgrains. Profiteering and hoarding of food articles by the

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80. The Amritabasar Patrika, September 17, 1942.

81. Chakraborty Kamalendu, OP. Cit., p. 19-20; De Sarkar, B., 'The Peoples' Revolution', Balurghat, 1942 (Article in) Challenge : A Saga of Indias Struggle for freedom, p. 458 ff. (Ed.) Roy, N.R. *et al.*, New Delhi, 1984.

82. The Amritabasar Patrika, October 24, 1942.

83. The Statesman, October 10, 1942.

traders worsened the situation.<sup>84</sup> Even towards the end of December, 1942 the imminent catastrophe could be smelt. In a conference of various chambers of commerce held in Calcutta in December, 1942 serious concern was expressed over the unprecedented rise in the prices of commodities.<sup>85</sup> But the inevitable disaster could not be averted. It took a heavy toll of human and cattle lives and continued for a long time.

The crisis severely hit the Northern Bengal districts. In 1945 the food and cloth scarcity was still growing acute. In March 1945 it was 'almost impossible to get a piece of mill-made cloth (Dhuti or Sari) from the local market' of Malda.<sup>86</sup> An all-party meeting which was participated by the Congress, the Muslim league and the Communist party strongly criticised the cloth policy of the Government and demanded that the unrepresentative Advisory Board working at that time should be replaced by a Board which would consist of 'true representatives of the people'. The all-party meeting also demanded that "Malda should get cloth at the rate of 18 yds. per head and 300 bales of yarn per month for the weavers numbering about 4500".<sup>87</sup>

The crisis did not subside even in 1946. In June 1946 there was virtually no supply of rice in the local 'Hat' of Siliguri. Scarcity of cloth, Sugar, Mustard oil and Wheat products continued as before.<sup>88</sup> In some places at Siliguri rice sold at Rs. 20/- per

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84. Mazumdar, R.C., History of Modern Bengal, Part-two, p. 362.

85. The Amritabazar Patrika, December 21, 1942.

86. The Hindusthan Standard, March 14, 1945.

87. Ibid.

88. The Amritabazar Patrika, June 6, 1946.

maund. In the same month owing to the callousness of the authorities a good quantity of rice considered not fit for human consumption was thrown into the river.<sup>89</sup> The situation remained unchanged during the closing months of 1946. The following table\* shows the market price of rice in some areas of Northern Bengal about the middle of October, 1946.

Table I

AREA	RATE PER MAUND
MAIDA	Rs. 20/-
BALURGHAT	Rs. 12/- to 14/-
JALPAIGURI	Rs. 32/- to 40/-

Table II shows prices of some other food articles at Malda.\*\*

Table II

MUSTARD OIL	Rs. 2.5/- PER SEER
MILK	8 ANNAS PER SEER
POTATO	Rs. 1/- PER SEER

The Government of Bengal failed to control the situation. Hoarding and profiteering continued inspite of efforts of the

89. Ibid, June 8, 1946.

\* Vide, The Amritabasar Patrika, October 13-14, 1946.

\*\* Vide, The Amritabasar Patrika, October 14, 1946. (Data for other districts are not available).

authorities to prevent it. Some Marwari merchants of Jalpaiguri were arrested, imprisoned and fined. It may be of interest to note that one Nanda Kishore Agarwala was arrested for having sold three camphor tablets at annas four each instead of the control rate of one anna each. Another Marwari of Jalpaiguri was sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 500/- in default rigorous imprisonment for three months 'for removing quantities of mustard seeds and cake out of the district of Rangpur'.<sup>90</sup>

The policy of the Government met with severe criticisms from many quarters. One G.L. Mundra, President of North Bengal Rice Mills' Association made an important statement<sup>91</sup> during the period :

"The present system of the rice control is only making the matter complex without giving any relief to those who really need it very badly. Too much restriction on movement and suppression of normal trade naturally corrupts the administration. What is really wanted now is that the present irresponsible, inefficient, corrupt and short-sighted supply department with huge staff and unnecessary establishments should be immediately replaced by a responsible and representative body which will function through normal trade channel with control over stocks and prices .

'In 1944 the Government of Bengal procured half a crore of maunds of rice from Dinajpur district at Rs. 13/8/- to Rs. 11/8/- per maund and sold the same rice in deficit and rationed areas at

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90. The Amritabasar Patrika, July 29, 1946.

91. Ibid, March 1, 1946.

16/- per maund. The Government thus made a net profit of more than one crore of rupees from the procurement of one district alone. With the reduction of rates of rice in rationed area it became the policy of the Government to impose heavy discount or 'Batha' upto Rs. 2/- per maund on rice supplied by the rice mills. The Government procured 36 lac maunds of rice in 1945 from the district of Dinajpur alone at the rate of Rs. 9/8/- to 10/- per maund and sold the same at Rs. 14/- to 15/- per maund. It may also be noted that the rice on which the Government was deducting 'Batha' upto Rs. 2/- per maund was also being sold at the same rate of Rs. 14/- to 15/- per maund. Thus the Government made a profit of not less than 15 million rupees. Discount of 'Batha' on the rice is being imposed on various flimsy and vague grounds, viz., under-milling, off colour, under polishing, over boiled, under boiled and many more new categories are being invented every week by the ardent and aspiring high officials who get quick promotion by helping the Government to profiteer at the expense of the consumers ...'

'... In 1945, the rice mills were compelled to separate 'Broken's' (Khudi) from rice which were being used as part and parcel of rice upto 1944. Huge stocks of broken rice have accumulated and inspite of repeated reminders and representations no arrangement has been made for their disposal. This loss of lacs of maunds is entirely due to the monopolistic conditions and suppression of all normal trade channels.

'There are innumerable instances where the Government neither

purchased rice offered by rice mills at any rate on the ground that the rice is bad, nor granted export permit with the result that the stock has been wasted or used as cattle fodder.

'If the millers would have been allowed to export the refused rice even within the province it would have compared far superior to the notoriously deteriorated rice supplied from the Government stores. Thus Government is practically depriving many people from getting minimum quantity of meal which they badly require in these hard days of scarcity.

'Rice millers have been compelled to supply cent per cent polished rice, and if any grain of rice is found to be of red tinge the rice is declared under polished and heavy 'Batha' is imposed. In polishing rice beyond normal practice there is wastage of one seer per maund and it yields more 'brokens' besides reducing the vitamin contents of rice. Thus the Government is wasting lacs of maunds of rice which can be easily saved'.

Under such circumstances the famine stricken people of Northern Bengal became restive. Protests and demonstrations became the order of the day. In 1946 about 1000 peasants of Jalpaiguri district organised a hunger march, entered the court and wanted to meet the S.D.O. Although refused the peasants returned peacefully.<sup>92</sup> But the situation was ripe for a militant peasant movement to be launched. The Leftist organisations like the Kisan Sabha had by this time

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92. The Amritabasar Patrika, August 13, 1946.

built up a strong following among peasants. As early as 1939 the Krishak Sabha convened a district conference at Maidandighi village in the district of Jalpaiguri. A movement had started in the district against collection of 'Tola' (toll) by the Zemindars whose officials often forcibly collected it from the poor peasants and village marchants who came to the market place or 'Hat' for selling cattle, green vegetables, clothes or any other item.<sup>93</sup> Very soon the movement spread to Malda, Dinajpur and other areas. Successful campaign was launched at interior villages of Dinajpur district like Harirampur, Patiraj, Itahar, Durgapur, Kunor, Dhankail, Kalikamora, Sarala etc.<sup>94</sup> The fairs of Aloakhoa and Jinpir were among the places where Krishak Sabha volunteers camped for some time to lead the movement against collection of 'Tola'. The Raiganj office of the Zemindar of Bahin, the owner of Harirampur 'Hat' was surrounded by peasants. Eventually, the owners of Patiraj and Harirampur Hats agreed to accept the demands of the peasants. The peasants also objected to the collection of Tola from people who used the bridge on the river Srimati within the police station of Kushmandi. This movement too was crowned with success.<sup>95</sup> It is worthwhile to mention that in 1938 the Government had appointed the Flood Commission which enquired into the land revenue settlement and submitted its report in March 1940.<sup>96</sup> The commission recommended that two-thirds of the crop should go to the share cropper and

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93. Rasul, Abdullah, OP. Cit., p. 98.

94. Chatterjee, Basantalal, 'Dinajpur Jelar Krishak Andolaner Ek Adhvay' (Article in) Uttarbanger Adhlar Vidroha O Krishak Andolan, p. 102.

95. Ibid, p. 103-04.

96. Rasul, Abdullah, OP. Cit., p. 112-13.

Zemindari system should be replaced by Ryotwari system and the Zemindars should be adequately compensated for their loss of ownership of land.<sup>97</sup>

In 1940 the Panjia conference of the Bengal provincial Krishak Sabha gave a call to the peasants to launch a movement demanding 'Tebhaga' which meant two thirds of the crop should go to the tiller. But the conference objected to the recommendation for payment of compensation to Zemindars.<sup>98</sup> The Moubhog conference held in May 1946 reiterated the demand for abolition of Zemindari system but did not give any call to the peasants to launch a movement. But the Krishak Sabha till then could not realise that a militant peasant movement was in the offing.<sup>99</sup> However, in September 1946 the Sabha gave an open call to launch a movement for the purpose of implementing the recommendation of the Floud commission.<sup>100</sup>

The movement for Tebhaga spread to almost every district of Northern Bengal. In Balurghat sub-division of Dinajpur district Rupnarayan Roy, the Communist MLA held numerous meetings at Fulbari, Mumarganja and other villages.<sup>101</sup> In the district other leaders of the movement namely Gurudas Talukdar, Sachindu Chakraborty, Barada Chakraborty, Sunil Sen, Sushil Sen, Haji Mohammad Danesh, Basantalal Chattopadhyay, Bibhuti Guha, Janardan Bhattacharyya, Anil Chakraborty, Postoram Sing, Joymoni Sing, Krishnadas Mohanta, Bhupen Palit, Durga Sen etc. continued the campaign with great ardour.<sup>102</sup>

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97. Ibid,

98. Ibid, p. 115-17.

99. Ibid, p. 161.

100. Sarkar, Sumit, OP. Cit, p. 439, New Delhi, 1984.

101. The Amritabasar Patrika, January 6, 1947.

102. The Amritabasar Patrika, August 17, 1947.

In the harvest season of November - January, 1946-47, the movement intensified. The sharecroppers then started 'taking paddy to their own threshing floor' instead of the house of the landlords. The most popular slogan of the peasant masses was 'Nij Kholane Dhan Tolo' (take paddy to your own threshing floor).<sup>103</sup> Keeping pace with the progress of the movement police oppression increased. No less than 35 police camps were established in the district of Dinajpur itself.<sup>104</sup> In numerous places agitating peasants came into conflict with the police who intervened to protect the interest of the jotedars and semindars. One such conflict took place at the Bajitpur village within the police station of Chirir Bandar in Dinajpur. On January 4, a police party raided the house of Samiruddin, a sharecropper, and arrested him. As the peasants protested a clash followed in which Samiruddin, a tribal peasant named Sibaram and a police constable were killed.<sup>105</sup>

Another clash, perhaps the fiercest one, took place at Khanpur in the Balurghat sub-division where a police party appeared in the morning of February 20, 1947. In this village the jotedars under the leadership of Asitmohun Singh, offered stiff resistance to the movement.<sup>106</sup> The police arrested six local leaders on February 20. But the peasants threw barricade on the way and demanded the release of their leaders.<sup>107</sup> Thousands of peasants collected at the spot.

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103. Sarkar Sumit, Modern India, 1885-1947, p. 440.

104. Rasul, A., OP. Cit., p. 170.

105. The Amritabasar Patrika, January 21, 1947; Rasul, A., p. 170.

106. Rasul, A., OP. Cit., p. 171.

107. Ibid.

Eventually the police opened fire as a result of which 15 peasants including 1 woman were killed on the spot. Several people were injured, very soon the death toll rose upto 22. Some police men were also injured as the peasants fought back with 'bows and arrows and brickbats'.<sup>108</sup>

Soon after the incident the sub-divisional officer of Balurghat issued prohibitory orders which restricted the entry of some leaders into Khanpur area. These leaders were Abdullah Rasul, the joint secretary of All India Kisan Sabha, Bijoy Kumar Basu, the doctor who organised the peoples relief committee and had visited China as a member of an Indian Medical Mission that was sent to that country during the second world war, Chunilal Chakraborty and a newspaper reporter named Ramendranath Banerjee. All of them were ordered to leave the Balurghat sub-division within 24 hours of the issue of the order.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the massacre at Khanpur, clashes between Jotedars and peasants over the distribution of paddy continued in the district.<sup>110</sup> In fact many more clashes were reported from other districts of Northern Bengal. In Jalpaiguri the movement was led by Sachin Dasgupta, Biren Niyogi, Monoranjan Dasgupta, Naresh Chakraborty, Punyeswari Debya, Madhav Dutta etc. Here also the police arrested many leaders including Madhav Dutta and Monoranjan Dasgupta.<sup>111</sup>

108. The Amritabazar Patrika, Feb 21, 1947; Desh, Falgun 17, 1353 B.S.; Rasul, A., p. 171.

109. The Amritabazar Patrika, February 27, 1947; Rasul, A., OP. Cit., p. 171.

110. The Amritabazar Patrika, February 27, 1947.

111. Dasgupta, Sachin, Krishak Andolane Jader Dekhechi (Article in) Janamat, Magh 29, 1385 B.S.

On April 4, the police opened fire on a peasant mob at Mangalbari Hat of Chalsa Matelli police station. The firing was ordered by the Sub-divisional officer himself. Nine people were killed and many others were injured. The peasants of Chalsa had organised a procession carrying red flags and persuaded the sharecroppers of a Jotedar to join them. They thrashed a portion of paddy and divided that among the sharecroppers. The basis of distribution was 'Tebhaga'. The proliferation of the movement in the area panicked the Jotedars and eventually the police intervened and the massacre followed.<sup>112</sup> Earlier in the month of March 5, peasants including 1 woman were killed in police firing at Neoramjhiali within the Mal police station. Here also the peasants demanded Two-thirds of the produce.<sup>113</sup> As the situation grew tense the authorities issued orders under section 144 in the Jalpaiguri (sadar), Pachagarh, Boda, Debiganj, Rajganj, Titalia, Moinaguri, Patgram, Mal, Metelli and Nagrakata police stations.<sup>114</sup> Thus the whole of the Jalpaiguri district became a storm-centre.

In the same period clashes between tribal people and police took place in some areas of Northern Bengal. The militant mood of the peasants had influenced the tribal fishermen of Malda. Towards the end of March 1947 about 3000 Santals assembled at the waterside of Charail Beel, a lake situated near Bangalbari within Gomastapur police station. They wanted to catch fish and 'claimed it to be

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112. The Amritabasar Patrika, April 6, 1947.

113. Ibid, March 3, 1947.

114. Ibid.

their ancient right'. The 'Izaradar' or fishery licence of the lake sought the help of police to prevent the Santals from catching fish. The police appeared and asked the Santals to disperse. As they refused the police opened fire in which 3 Santals were killed and many of them received injuries. ~~Some~~ tribals were arrested.<sup>115</sup>

The late forties thus witnessed agrarian unrest of various types. The Krishak Sabha could not always properly lead the movements.<sup>116</sup> In some areas there were spontaneous risings of the peasants. At a certain stage the militant peasants wanted an armed rising what the Sabha did not really want.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore there was the problem of alienation. The 'Tebhaga' movement could not secure even the support of the middle and poor peasants for a long time.<sup>118</sup> Neither the 'Bhadralok' class of Northern Bengal towns who led national movements had sympathy for the Tebhaga movement. The obvious reason was that many of them had land cultivated by share croppers.<sup>119</sup> Despite the fact that a number of leaders of the movement were originally of the 'Bhadralok' class, the middle classes often vociferously denounced the activities of the communists. To justify our conjecture we may refer to the meeting of the students of Balurghat under the presidency of Ramjan Ali Mian. Held within a week of the Khanpur massacre this meeting resolved that the communist party was responsible for the tragedy and demanded the trial of the offenders.<sup>120</sup>

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115. The Amritabasar Patrika, April 5, 1947.

116. Rasul, A., OP. Cit., p. 173-74.

117. Sarkar, S., OP. Cit., p. 440-41.

118. Ibid, p. 441.

119. Ibid.

120. The Amritabasar Patrika, February 28, 1947.