

CHAPTER-FIVE

ORGANISED PEASANT AGITATION BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES

During the time of the East India Company's rule a tremendous agrarian unrest engulfed in many parts of eastern India which found expression in a chain of agitation. The province of Bengal was undergoing a period of turmoil especially because of the transfer of power from the Bengal Government to the English East India Company. Especially in North India the disbanded soldiers of the Mughal army and numerous landless peasants formed themselves into various groups and moved from place resorting to plunder and dacoities for their livelihood.¹ Many of them settled in Bengal districts.

For the first time in 1763 peasants revolted against the oppression of the British government. This revolt known as Sannyasi and Fakir revolt. Warren Hastings mentioned this peasant insurrection as Sannyasi revolt.² In the North Bengal the Sannyasi and Fakirs were permanent resident from the Mughal period onwards. These people were in league with some religious sects of northern India, namely *Gosain, Naga, Purbia, Bhojpuri* etc.³ 1770s great famine stricken the livelihood of common people. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the people of Bengal lost their life.⁴ Moreover, increase of revenue, atrocities of the *naib, mahajans*-organized peasants and cultivators. These peasants, cultivators, labours and rural subaltern class peoples were well supported by the Communist Party, Socialist Party and Krishak Praja Party.

North Bengal is a land of mystery. Several class and clans of people lived in this land. *Bengalee, Nepali, Bihari, Adivashis* were divided into two parts-'Immigrants' and 'Inhabitants'. Immigrants do not mean only the peasants of the tea-garden but also the *adivashi* cultivators of Malda and Dinajpur. Apart from these a large section of people were also immigrants and they were now inhabitants of Jalpaiguri, Siliguri and Darjeeling.⁵ In North Bengal first administrative setup was established by the hands of Jalpaiguri district in

the year 1869.⁶ Because previously Jalpaiguri's Darlingkot (Kalimpong) was under the authority of Sikkim. Apart from this, Jalpaiguri, Duars and the Darjeeling districts were treated as non-regulated area.⁷ On the other hand, in Malda and West Dinajpur there were no such limitations. Hence, land types and their related movements were different from each other. The aims, objectives and natures of the political movements were also different.

The organized peasants' movement started from 16th century onwards. The road of agitation started from Kaivarta, Sannyasi, Fakir revolt to Tebhaga and Naxalbari insurrection. In 1921 Chatrisha movement started in Dinajpur though the movement was not totally politically motivated but it was a mass movement.⁸ This movement organized against *zamindars, jottars, mahajans* and British rulers. Main leaders were Pratap Mondal, Fulchand Murmu, Sarveswar Mondal, Gayeswar Barman, Purneswar Barman, Chaitan Barman, Haricharan Barman and Dhiren Barman. In Balurghat Sub-division, Chatrisha movement rapidly spread in Saidpur, Khaspur, Boaldar, Katna, Naltahar, Kashimpur, Dogachi and Rajua. Leaders like Surendra Nath Bagchi and Suresh Chandra Chatterjee dominated the movement. Police atrocities gradually increased to subdue the movement. Jadunath Roy, Paria Pal, Sambhu Hazra, and Badyanath Maji of Tapan police station were arrested due to the participation of Chatrisha movement.⁹ They were imprisoned for seven days. Tribal people by the leadership of Wahabi leader Abdulla Hil, protested against the oppression of *jottar, mahajan, zamindars* and founded Union Board.¹⁰ They also protested against the oppression of landlords and spoke to reduce the chowkidari tax.¹¹ Chatrisha means thirty six indicating the involvements of thirty six traditional castes of Bengal.¹² This movement was supported by the Khilafat and Wahabi leaders of West Dinajpur. Due to British oppression this movement lost its momentum after 1927.

In 1924-25, a new movement started which came to be known as 'Prajar Gach Kata movement.' This movement organized by Kedar Barnerjee. Mainly *Rajbansi* clans

joined this movement.¹³ In the pre-independence time if any body want to cut trees, there should be a need of permission from *zamindar*. Without permission no *raiyat* had the right to cut trees. If anybody opposed it then he was punished brutally. In Dinajpur's Sunderpur village Jal Muhammad protested this system and joined 'Prajar Gach Kata movement'. In Bochaganj and Khansama this movement rapidly spread. In the Thakurgaon Sub-division, regions like Birganj, Kaharol, Bochaganj and Khansama, peoples refused the orders of *zamindars* and the Gach Kata movement got a new momentum.¹⁴

Chowkidari Tax movement spread throughout the Dinajpur district from 1924-32. This movement took a violent shape by the hands of the common people and tribal clans. After Sepoy Mutiny, Chowkidari Tax movement rapidly spread among the people especially poor people and they joined hands against the oppression of the government. In March 1924, a crowd of about two thousand *Santhals* besieged a bevy of eight constables at Gazole hat until one of them fired from the musket and scared away the offenders.¹⁵ This movement became so violent that the Governor General Lord Litton came in Malda and he compelled to arrange a meeting in favour of the common people to reduce the Chowkidari Tax collection.¹⁶ Position of the common people gradually degraded. Subaltern peoples were oppressed and frequently harassed in the case of land forgery and other court cases. Common people were trembled by the hands of *mahajan*, *jotdar* and *zamindars*. In the district of West Dinajpur, regions like Itahar, Birol, Gangarampur and Tapan, Tax movement spread and took the shape of mass movement.¹⁷ In Patiraj, in the Itahar police station; *Santhals* were refused to pay taxes in 1930. There is a clash between police and *Santhals*. Some of them were arrested during this incident. In 1930, by the leadership of *Santhal* leader Paru Hansda, Chowkidari Tax movement became forceful in the Birol police station.¹⁸ The common people of this region fought with bow and arrow against the *zamindar* and British police. In this fight common people besieged the British police stations.¹⁹ Lastly British administrations pray to

the Governor General to take serious steps about this matter. After that Paru Hazda was arrested and many of the leaders were imprisoned. The properties of the *Santhals* who participated in this movement, was confiscated.

The leader of this movement was Kasiswar Chakraborty. He was reputed lawyer of North Bengal especially of Dinajpur region.²⁰ He was known to the *Santhals* as ‘*Sannyasi Baba*’ and ‘*Swadeshi Baba*’. He was a preacher of religion which known a ‘*Satyam Sibam Sundaram*’ and became popular among the tribals. He used to visit the adjacent district of Malda with proselytizing aims.²¹ Opinions also differ as to his real motive in founding the *Satyam Sibam* sect. Official records suggested that the real motive of Kasiswar Chakraborty was financial gain.²² He used to charge three rupees and four annas from each *Santhal* convert.²³ In 1932 in the month of June-July in Akcha (Khusmandi police station), Patan, Sukhdevpur, Narayanpur (Gangarampur police station) people of *Rajbanshi* and tribals started a movement against taxes.²⁴ In this movement many peasants lost their life by the hands of British police. In the month of 1st July in the same year, police arrested some *Santhals* of Akcha village. As a result of which *Santhals* also attacked the police with their bow and arrow. Police also started firing. By the firing of police many people lost their lives and some of them were injured also. Leaders like Debu Murmu, Benga Mardi, Karna Bania, Jaydhar Roy, Khobla Singh, Sridam Sarkar, Situ Roy and Tepu Sarkar lost their life in this incident.²⁵

In Tapan Police station poor peasants were tortured and they were compelled to pay Chowkidari taxes. If anybody was not able to pay taxes, his property was confiscated. In the Manohali village of Tapan police station, Mohan Rajbanshi (80 years old) organized the peasants against these brutal torture and oppression.²⁶ In this time *naib* of *zamindar* named Sailesh Banerjee informed the peasants and cultivators that those who fail to pay Chowkidari taxes, his property like cow, buffaloes and entire land will be auctioned. When Mohan

Rajbanshi got this news he organized the peasants and raised the voices not to pay taxes. For the time being peasants and cultivators denounced to pay Chowkidari taxes. By the initiatives of Mohan, *Rajbanshis* stopped to pay taxes.²⁷

When the condition was out of hand, Sailesh Banerjee motivated some cultivators to pay some taxes. Some cultivators agreed to pay taxes. When this news reached to Mohan Rajbanshi, he strongly protested and said, “We can give blood but not taxes”.²⁸ For the time being collection of taxes were stopped. The movement was well organized by the leadership of Mohan Rajbanshi and Bhola Sarkar. After some few days in Tapan police station, areas such as Jasurapara, Laskarhat, Dorganj etc. were besieged by the police. *Rajbanshi* and tribal people were oppressed and exploited by the hands of the British police, *mahajan* and *zamindars*. In Parilahat, there was a fight between the police and tribal people.²⁹ One police officer was injured in this fight. In the Government Gazetteers during this time these regions were declared as ‘Troubled District’.³⁰

In 1927-28 ‘Chaddo Mauza Praja Revolt’ started in Dinajpur district.³¹ Common people revolted due to oppression of Dinajpur king regarding collection of taxes at a very high rate. At that time the socio-economic condition of the cultivators of Dinajpur were very miserable. Cultivators could not sell the crops produced by them at a high rate. Valuation of crops gradually decreased. For this reason, cultivators were unable to pay the taxes of *zamindars* and the interest of *mahajans* at proper time.

During this time Dinajpur king imposed high rent in the region of Masimpur and Cheradangi. Apart from this ‘*Bajna*’ tax was imposed at a very high rate. *Zamindars* also imposed extra taxes with the help of his officials which added to the misery of the cultivators. Common people were exploited by the police. But the poor peasants denounced to pay taxes. Due to this causes, police set fire to the houses of the common people. Many common people were sentenced to imprisonment for protesting against taxes. During this time people of

Chaddo Mauza were united. People of all tribes and castes united against Dinajpur king under the leadership of Mahammed Fazlul Haque.³² He was then the secretary of *Bangio Krishak Praja Party*.³³ The movement rapidly spread throughout the district. Fazlul Haque established a revolutionary organization in Cheradangi village.³⁴

A new dimension was added to the Bengal political scene after the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935. The extension of the suffrage to peasantry made the members of the Legislative Council or Assembly more vocal for the interests of the peasants on 2nd March 1934, in the budget speech, it was declared that the time has come to devise measures for composition and relief of the heavy load of agricultural debt.....The debt problem must be immediately tackled.³⁵

After the formation of Communist Party (1937) in Dinajpur many party workers organized the oppressed downtrodden common people. At that time labour movement was organized throughout India. In 1928 *Nikhil Bharat Krishak Conference* was held in Calcutta.³⁶ In 1936, *All India Kishan Sabha* was formed.³⁷ Their first conference was held in Lucknow.³⁸ In 1937-38 peasant organization was formed in different villages of Dinajpur. Kali Sarkar, Basantalal Chatterjee, Ajit Roy, Janardan Bhattacharya, Gurudas Talukder, Hazi Mahammed Danesh organized the poor peasants. The first secretary of Communist Party in Dinajpur was Sunil Sen. The voices of Communist Party in Dinajpur was ‘Sandhani’ and it’s secretary was Baroda Chakraborty.³⁹ Peasants felt that their oppressed life can be changed by organized movements. Poor peasants raised the slogan- ‘Langal jar zami tar’ (He one who owns the plough, is the owner of the land), ‘Zamindari pratha dansho karo’ (Destroy the zamindari system), ‘Be aini adai bando karo’ (Stop the unlawful collection).⁴⁰ Initially, peasants arranged meetings, conferences to organize themselves.

In rural areas of North Bengal large section of people were *adhiars*. They cultivated the land of the *jotdars*. From the production of crops, *adhiars* got 50% of crops.

But the *adhiars* had to pay *abwab*. Some portions of the produced crops were also enjoyed by the *izaradars*. In Jalpaiguri, *adhiars* had to pay *Golamachani*, *Bajeadai*, *Gandi* taxes.⁴¹ All these taxes were collected from the *adhiars* illegally. In reality *adhiars* were the worst sufferer. In Coochbehar, tax collector was *sajayal*. He collected revenues from *jotdar*. Later *sajayal* system was replaced by *izaradari* system. In Coochbehar two systems were introduced-*Lagani* and *Bhagawari* system. Later tenants became *adhiar*. Besides, small *jotdars* were converted into *adhiars*. In local languages, they were called *Giri*.⁴² The role of *Chukanidar*, *Dar Chukanidar*, *Daradar Chukanidar* played a significant role.⁴³ According to Regulation iii of 1828 Darjeeling regions belongs to “*Crown Land*”.⁴⁴ Lands were under the domination of the government and it was free from Permanent Settlement. During the time of Non-Coperation movement, tea labourers and peasants organized themselves. Later they plundered the Matigara hat. Actually Matigara and its related areas were financially backwarded and they (tribal peasants and labourers) suffered lot of problem due to inflation of the price of the food grains in the 20th century.⁴⁵

A new movement started in 1939 raising the demand of the cultivators and peasants. This movement came to be known as Adhiar movement. Several peasant associations were formed during the period of Adhiar movement. When the land reform commission was working, Second World War broke out in 1939.⁴⁶ Communist Party and Communist League of India expressed their opinions against war.⁴⁷ In 1939 on the month of May, a peasant conference was held in the Lalpur village of Phulbari police station (Dinajpur District).⁴⁸ Eminent Communist leader Mujaffar Ahmed, M.L.A of *Krishak Praja Party*, Bokai Nagori Saheb and Dinesh Lahiri organized the peasants.⁴⁹ Students of *Nikhil Bharat Chatra Federation* organized Adhiar movements. Female leaders like Bina Sen, Sati Rani Sen, Dipti Bagchi, Asalata Chakraborty, Aloka Majumder of Dinajpur district; Rokeya Khatun, Jasodha Rani Sarkar, Aholya Soren, Kausalya Kamrani, Jamuna Das Mohanta of

Balurghat Sub-division; Rahini Barman, Joymani Barman, Shika Barman, Phuleshwari Barman of Thakurgaon Sub-division and Kanthamani Barman of Raiganj Sub-division were important faces of Adhiar and Tolabati movement.⁵⁰ Apart from these, many volunteer organizations were formed to raise the slogan against the *zamindar*, *jotdar*, and British police. As a result of the formation of volunteer organization many land lords, *zamindars*, *jotdars*, and *mahajans* became scared. Gradually, collection of taxes from fair decreased. For this reason police arrested the poor cultivators; many peasants and cultivators were imprisoned in the name of false case.⁵¹

In spite of these, labour and peasant party gradually organized the movement by the guidance of Communist leaders. At that time many labour trade unions and *Krishak Sabha* increased their strength. The main step of this movement was to abolish the *zamindari* system and self rule. Different newspapers and magazines were published on behalf of the Communist Party, among them Mujaffar Ahmed's '*Ganabani*' played a crucial role. In the last quarter of 1939 *zamindars* and *izaradars* collected illegal taxes from *hats* and fairs of North Bengal.⁵² Common people had to pay taxes for the selling of commodities in village *hats* and *bazars*. Peasants strongly protested against the collection of illegal taxes. In the undivided West Dinajpur district there were several *hats* and thousands of people gathered there. Mainly retail sale were going on these *hats*. Firstly, the *zamindars* would give away lands to cultivators on a rent free basis (*birt birtee*), for instance in West Dinajpur, in different *hats* and *bazars* for which purpose agriculture was also considerably stimulated.⁵³ But later this motive was totally changed.

Peasants formed volunteer groups. In village *hat*, fair and market, Tolabati movement spread everywhere. From Jalpaiguri, Tolabati movement spread to Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Maymunsingh, Jessore and other places. By the initiatives of Communist Party, Tolabati movement spread in Kathalbari hat, Ulipur hat, Lalbagh hat, Barobari hat,

Mustafi hat, Salmonir hat, Bhadai hat, Lohakuchi hat, Kuishari hat and Kurigram hat.⁵⁴ All these *hats* belonged to undivided North Bengal.⁵⁵ Rani Dasgupta wrote that Tolabati movement was first organized by the Communist Party and *Krishak Sabha*.⁵⁶ It rapidly spread throughout North Bengal and especially in Dinajpur in the year 1938-39.⁵⁷ Rally of thousands of peasants and cultivators raised the slogan against Tolabati movement. Every volunteer maintained a bamboo stick and they raised the slogan against Tolabati. Condition of *zamindars* became miserable due to the organized movement of peasants and common people. *Jotdar*, *zamindar*, owners of *hat* invited police to suppress the organized peasant movement. On the other hand, peasants became ferocious, frequent violence took place between the two sides. *Zamindar* obstacles the peasants to set up *hats*. But in spite of these, peasants set up new *hats* by the initiatives of *Kisan Sabha*.⁵⁸ In Lahiri hat, Patiraj hat, Harirampur hat and Phulbari hat, peasants raised their voices against the *zamindars*. During this time Communist leader Indrajit Gupta came to Dinajpur and organized the peasants.⁵⁹

In Dinajpur district Tolabati movement took a violent shape. In Harirampur owner of *hat* and the *izaradar* of Bahin *zamindar* was obstructed for two hours by the agitated peasants and cultivators. In Patiraj peasants were assembled against the *zamindar* and lastly the owner of the Patiraj hat accepted the demand of peasants. In Kushmundi police station peasants' protest spread rapidly.⁶⁰ In Sarala hat of Kushmundi, *Tolabati* taxes were reduced. *Zamindar's* income gradually decreased due to Tolabati movement. In the Tolabati movement peasants got success. Next, Tolabati movement swerves into the fairs of North Bengal. The chief place of Tolabati movement was the fair of Demdemi Kali fair at Baliadangi police station in Dinajpur district. Peasant organizations defused to pay excess taxes. In this way the movement started from Demdemi Kali fair.⁶¹ Police besieged the fair and implemented 144 Rule. But peasants strongly protested against this measure. This fair later came to be known as '*peasant organization hat*'. This type of *hat* is also found at Sarul

village in Kaliaganj police station. In Thakurgaon, Tolabati movement rapidly spread. Clash between peasant and *zamindar* frequently took place. *Hats* were set up in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar district also. Some important *hats* were Gagir hat, Bhaner hat, Akra hat, Fakra hat, Bakshir hat etc. Many *hats* were named by the name of *jotdars*. *Hats* were the centres where local rural people gathered and communist leaders discussed about peasant movement and their aims. In Patiram, Thakur fair of Balurghat police station, Tolabati movement took a violent shape. The owner of the fair was Raghunandan Thakur.⁶² He informed police to take necessary actions for the volunteers.

Lastly, there was a negotiation between the *zamindar* and *Krishak Samiti*. Decisions were taken to not to collect excess taxes from cattles and crops. Gangarampur hat was well known for malasses ('*gur*'). Actually large section of malasses exported from this *hat*. *Zamindars* and his forces collected heavy taxes from this *hat*. *Zamindar* collected one ana for every pot of malasses.⁶³ Peasants strongly defused to pay taxes. When condition degraded and situations were out of hand, *zamindar* Haragopal Nandi Chowdhury met with Khemesh Chatterjee of Narayanpur and the decision was taken that for every pot one paisa instead of one ana taxes would be collected.⁶⁴ In Seol hat of Kushmundi police station thousands of volunteers gathered with a stick. Police forces also came to face the problem. Lastly collections of excess taxes were stopped.⁶⁵

In the Bochaganj fair of Lahiri Estates there was a clash between the volunteer and police. But the volunteer became more aggressive. *Krishak Samiti* took some violent steps to subdue the oppression of the *naib* and *zamindars*. Due to the determination of the volunteers, collection of taxes against cattle and crops were totally stopped in this region. Tolabati taxes decreased gradually. In the Nawabganj police station of Burashib fair, violence took place between the volunteers and police.⁶⁶ Police arrested seven members of *Krishak Samiti* and obstructed the police. This incident spread to the local villages. Many volunteers

came from different villages with bow, arrow, stick and raised the slogan ‘*Inquilab*’. Police force arrested seven members of the *Krishak Samiti* from the office of the Union Board of Abtabganj. There was a scattered fight between police and volunteers group. Police suppressed the volunteers and they flew away. Violent measures have been taken by the police. Peasants were oppressed and exploited by the hands of British. *Zamindars*, *jotdars* and *mahajans* dominated over the peasants and cultivators. Many peasants were arrested and some were killed by the police firing.⁶⁷

After the success of Tolabati movement, peasants and cultivators showed their respect upon the Communist Party. Party leaders became happy to see that the peasants were well organized. Now party decided that they would start strong movement against big *zamindars*, *mahajans* and *jotdars*. All *adhiars* joined hand against the oppression and torture of *zamindars* and *jotdars*.⁶⁸ *Zamindars* collected *abwabs* from the *raiayats* and later collection of *abwabs* became the right of *zamindars*.⁶⁹ Communist Party raised the slogan that nobody could collect excess taxes, *abwab* etc. Party also raised the slogan that no peasant should be evicted from his land. *Adhiars* and peasants raised the slogan against *zamindar* and *jotdar*. Frequently general meetings took place between party and peasants. Communist Party also claimed that Muslim League and Congress had to raise their voices in favour of the peasants. Intellectual classes supported the peasant demand but Muslim league remained silent. In the harvest time *jotdars* collected extra taxes on the loans given by them earlier to the cultivators. In the production of crops peasants and *adhiars* demanded decrease of taxes. Following tables show in which way *raiayati* lands were transferred-

Table No: 1.9 (Transfer of Raiyati Land, 1928-1940)

District	Searching of Land (acre)	Transfer of Measurement of lands (Twelve Years)		Agriculture in Transferred Land			
		Land (acre)	%	Family of Byer	Bargadar	Labour	
Malda	1107.93	77.02	6.9	48.51	17.95	—	10.56
Dinajpur	6512.22	250.84	3.8	147.31	87.23	16.13	0.17
Rajshahi	5617.84	196.78	3.5	68.62	37.85	—	99.31
Jalpaiguri	4645.06	439					
Rangpur	7964.30	380.60	4.7	80.60	144.92	10.73	144.35

Source: *Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Vol-ii, B.G. Press, Alipore, 1940, pp.120-*

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In 1940-41 *adhiars* started their movement for the decrease of taxes. They became organized for their demand. *Jotdars* became afraid that they could not collect crops according to their demands. Clash between peasants and *jotdars* frequently took place. Peasants became ferocious. This movement turned into insurrection. Due to the organized nature of the peasants, government was not able to take major steps. A paper of amendment passed not to collect *abwab* from the peasants and to stop torture and exploitations towards the peasants.

Many peasants were released from imprisonment. Adhiar movement rapidly spread in the northern districts of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur.⁷⁰

In 1939 a Peasant Conference took place in Phulbari police station of Dinajpur. Mujaffar Ahmed, leader of Praja Party, MLA Abdul Wahed, Dinesh Lahiri and some other prominent members joined the Conference.⁷¹ In this Conference proposals were taken to stop excess taxes, torture and oppression. In 1940 in the month of 8th and 9th June, a general conference took place in Jessore which was known as '*Bangio Provincial Krishak Sabha*'.⁷² From the report of the conference it was known that Tolabati and Adhiar movement created a new momentum among the *adihars*. Now *Krishak Samiti* turned into a revolutionary institution.⁷³ They raised the slogan as '*Inquilab Jindabad*'.⁷⁴

From the Report of Francis Floud (1938) and Land Revenue Commission (1940) it was known that Permanent Settlement and evacuation of *zamindari* system were granted. It can be said that Floud Commission mainly works in favour of the *zamindars*. *Pradeshik Krishak Sabha* demanded that this system should not be granted. They raised the slogan against the *zamindar* and British government and decided to organize a mass movement against this system. To review the Report of the Floud Commission, government entrusted the task of review to Mr. Garner. The recommendation of Mr. Garner was submitted to Legislative Assembly on 28th July, 1941. Generally the members accepted the recommendation with the amendments of eviction of *zamindari* system and introduction of *Rayatwari System*.⁷⁵

Due to the increase of essential goods, people of Narayanpur of Gangarampur police station claimed to build up a *Dharmagola* (rice stack) in 1942, 8th January.⁷⁶ Every peasants and cultivators started to collect rices. They saved rice from the hands of greedy *zamindars* and *mahajans*. Peasants build *Dharmagola* (rice stack) for the period of crisis. Peasants and cultivators were organized themselves. For the building of rice store centre, a lot

of bamboo was necessary. It was decided that bambooes would be cut from the stack of Rashik Deshi.⁷⁷ But news came that for a long time Rashik Deshi had not given taxes. For this reason *zamindar* occupied the bamboo stack of Rashik Deshi.⁷⁸ In the F.I.R it was written that in Narayanpur, anti-British and anti-*zamindar* movement got momentum.⁷⁹ To control the situation police officer Modan Mondal immediately reached the spot and he called a general meeting among the common people.

In the meantime situations became more complex. Decision was taken not to return the bamboo. In this movement female volunteers in the leadership of Medhabini played a vital role. Apart from these Nona Master, Rashik Deshi, Sanjulal Deshi, Jaren Deshi, Swarnakamal Mitra, Indra Pathak and Anil Ghosh also joined this movement.⁸⁰ Due to the popularity of this movement, police became aggressive to suppress this movement. Leaders like Puato Deshi, Indranath and Pelku Deshi were arrested. Atrocities of the British police continuously increased.⁸¹ Sanjulal died in imprisonment. *Dharmagola* movement created a new enthusiasm among the common people of Dinajpur.

In 1943 (B.S.1350) a great famine took place in Bengal.⁸² Actually in 1943-44 Bengal suffered a serious food crisis by the hands of black marketeers, *jotdars*, *mahajans*, *faria*, and stockists due to illegal stocks of food grains and other commodities. North Bengal was also affected. Dinajpur, Malda, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri districts were deeply affected by the famine. At least thirty five lacks people lost their life by the famine of 1943-44.⁸³ In the name of war- *jotdars*, *mahajans*, stockists collected food grains, salt, oil etc. Moreover due to black marketing a synthetic crisis created throughout Bengal. Share-croppers, poor peasants and cultivators' conditions were gradually degraded due to black marketing and food crisis.⁸⁴ Member of Legislative Council also protested against food crisis and the death of common people. Narendra Dasgupta and Abdul Wahab participated in the Legislative Assembly debate. Abdul Wahab mentioned that common people died as an insect by the food crisis.⁸⁵

Communist Party took the initiative to help the common people. For the favour of cultivators and peasants, Communist Party observed peasant day. In 28th August, 1942 a Conference was arranged by the presidentship of *zamindar* Bhupal Roy Chowdhury.⁸⁶ In this conference Gurudas Talukdar, Basanta Chatterjee and Jiban Dey delivered their speech and ‘*Jana Raksha Committee*’ was formed.⁸⁷ Communist Party organized the peasants in Patiram and Kumarganj. A tremendous food crisis scattered throughout Bengal. Starvation of the poor people was a common factor.⁸⁸

Female participants also took part in the food movement. Amiyo Bala Debi, Asha Chakraborty and some Muslim females participated the food movement.⁸⁹ In 22nd January, 1943 a food conference was arranged in Dinajpur and in this conference Muslim League, *Hindu Mahasabha*, Communist Party, *Krishak Sabha*, *Mahila Samiti*, *Zamindar Sabha*, Teachers Association, *Chatra Federation*, *Chatri Sangha*, Lawyer Association and others participated in this conference.⁹⁰ A decision was taken to form a volunteer committee. Cultivators demanded land for their cultivation. Communist leaders organized peasants and cultivators to face the food crisis. ‘*Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*’ also worked together. All party food committee was formed. They took some relief measures for the starving people. *Marwari Relief Society* done a good job for the starving people.⁹¹

In the mass movement, Jyotirmoyi Debi and Rameshwar Chatterjee died as martyr.⁹² This mass movement spread throughout Bengal. Sunil Sen, Suchindu Chakraborty, Rupnarayan Roy played an important role. After the victory of Rupnarayan Roy in election, he inspired and organized the peasants and cultivators to do something during food crisis.⁹³ Communist Party raised the slogan that excess foods should be distributed. Price of food grains increased illegally. *Adhiars* organized against black marketing and *jotdars*.

Food crisis created an alarming situation in Malda also. *Jotdar* and blackmerketeers has made the situation very severe. Communist Party and *Krishak Sabha*

organized the peasants and cultivators in the rural areas. In 1943, 7th February, Upen Sarkar, Naren Chakraborty and Amal Sanyal were arrested.⁹⁴ Communist Party created a pressure upon the government for relief work. Due to food crisis, famine scattered in some rural areas of Malda. Hindu and Muslim cultivators were organized and they protested against the activities of the government.⁹⁵

Female volunteers of Malda formed ‘*Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*’. Saroshibala Sarkar, Beauty Rani Sarkar, Ava Lahiri, Puspa Lahiri, Bhabani Basak organized the female volunteers. In Malda’s Kaligram and Kachra area, female supporters organized movement against food crisis. Their slogan was ‘face the food crisis unitedly.’⁹⁶ Food Committee was formed in Malda and Kaligram.⁹⁷ *Bangio Pradeshik Chatra Federation* (BPCF) worked for the favour of the common people.

According to the Government Report, there was no food crisis in Malda. Excess one lakh *mon* paddy was produced in famine time but the traders and merchants purchased paddy in excess rates from markets and stored it for black marketing.⁹⁸ Communist Party’s slogan was ‘save Malda and *Aman* paddy’.⁹⁹ Actually Malaria spoiled rural areas of Malda. Mihir Das reported on 5th January, 1944 that due to black marketing and false shortage of Quinine, 60% people of Malda suffered in Malaria.¹⁰⁰

Actually 50’s famine ruined Bengal. Essential commodities, silk industry, medicine, salt, paddy, ration system etc. everything was affected by the famine. Lastly food crisis created fuel for fire in this famine. At that time Communist Party worked hard for the favour of downtrodden and exploited people especially for the peasants, labourers and cultivators. But the sad plight was that in 1945 in the month of January, All India Congress Committee (AICC) ruled out communist leaders from the party.¹⁰¹ Later Leftist leaders, *Kishan Sabha* worked independently for the favour of common people.

The man of wealth and pride.

Takes up a space that many poor supplied.

The robe that wraps his limbs

In silken cloth

Has robbed the neigb'ring

Field of half their growth

GOLD SMITH

(*The Peasantry of Bengal*: R.C. Dutt, Preface of Chapter- ii)

In 1946-47 a mass movement started in entire North Bengal. This movement came to be known as Tebhaga movement. Tebhaga means $\frac{2}{3}$. This was a movement which was organized against British government, police, *jotdars* and *zamindars*. Tebhaga movement spread in different parts of North Bengal, especially in Malda and Dinajpur. After 1857 this movement was the only movement that rapidly spread among tenants, peasants and cultivators.¹⁰² Share-cropping was commonly understood as production in which the land holder and his tenant share the crop raised by the later on the farmer's land on a half and half basis. The seed of Tebhaga movement lies in the share-cropping between the land holder and tenant.

In 1940 the question of the proposal of Tebhaga was taken in Jessore in the 4th Conference of the of *Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha*.¹⁰³ But in 1940-41, Tebhaga movement was not able to spread rapidly. In 1946, Tebhaga movement took a violent shape. Peasants and cultivators claimed the demand of $\frac{2}{3}$ of the production of crops. This movement

spread in the United Provinces of twenty-six districts and it look a shape of mass movement in north east south Bengal's thirteen districts.¹⁰⁴

Malda is the entrance of South Bengal. It is one of the oldest districts and it has a background of peasant movement.¹⁰⁵ On the basis of geographical division it divided into four parts¹⁰⁶ i) *Barind*, ii) *Tal*, iii) *Middle land* and iv) *Diara*. After the failure of the Santhal insurrection of 1855, a large section of *Santhals* took shelter in the land of *Barind* and they converted the forests of *Barind* into cultivated land. But in the last quarter of the 20th century, *zamindars* of this region rapidly increased the collection of revenues from the cultivators. For this reason *Santhal* cultivators were offended. As a result of which Nachol, *Barind* region became a centre of violence. Peasant agitation spread in the *Barind* region. From some sources it was known that in 1924 an anti-*jotdar* movement spread in Malda and many *Santhal* cultivators joined hand in this movement. In 1930's Malda and Dinajpur dominated by the leadership of *Santhal adhiars* of Jitu and Samu.¹⁰⁷ Apart from this Hattola and *abwab* encouraged the Tebhaga movement.

Before the discussion of the Tebhaga movement it should be said that pre-independence Communist Party and *Krishak Sabha* worked together in the police station of Old Malda, Englishbazar, Gazole and Kharra. Leading role was played by Niren Chakraborty (chief framer of party leader), Manik Jha, Khitish Das, Rambhramba Lahiri, and others.¹⁰⁸ But Tebhaga movement spread rapidly in the *Barind* region and the movement got quick popularity. In the *Barind* area tribal people like *Santhals* became active who previously started movement against *zamindar*, *jotdar* and *mahajans*. In the last quarter of 1946 and in the February of 1947, Tebhaga movement got a new momentum in the *Barind* region of Malda.¹⁰⁹ *Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha* took the final decision. Volunteers were organized and they raised the slogan 'Adhi noi Tebhaga chai' (We want $\frac{2}{3}$, not $\frac{1}{2}$ of the crop). Actually peasants and cultivators were united about the issues of Tebhaga. From the

Report of ‘*Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*’ (1920) it was known that in which way *mahajans* collected taxes from the poor peasants.¹¹⁰

Leaders of the Tebhaga movement arranged meetings and they published pamphlets, magazines and raised their voices against *abwabs* and taxes. Communist leaders Naren Das, Manik Jha, Himanshu Banerjee organized the tenants and cultivators in the fair and the *hats* of villages like Ramkeli fair, Bhola hat, Kashimbazar hat Nawabganj hat etc.¹¹¹ Communist Party got the support of the peasants and cultivators. Communist memorandum and their pamphlets spread among the peasants and it created a new enthusiasm among them. Writing’s of Bhabani Sen’s ‘*Langol Jar Zami Tar*’ and Somnath Lahiri’s ‘*Peasants Struggle in Russian Revolution*’ became popular at that time.¹¹²

Tebhaga movement gradually spread in the police stations of Bhavani, Kotha, Kanor, Chandpur, Humadighi, Parul, Kakarch, Napara, Beguntari etc. Soon *adhiar* aggression spread and they collected crops from *zamindar* and *jotdar*’s land. Santi Das, Ramkrishna Roy, Pratima Roy, Himanshu Banerjee, Chuni Sen and others played significant role for the spread of Tebhaga movement in the rural areas. Local people strongly supported the Tebhaga leaders. Due to *Santhal* communities’ support, British police failed to capture Parul Desai, Chayan Desai, Raghu Desai and others.¹¹³ When police came, *Santhals* used their mother tongue as ‘*Tarup ko hech akna*’ (Tiger came) or ‘*Ora ko ghirao kada*’ (House besieged) to make the communist leader conscious.¹¹⁴ Female participation in the Tebhaga movement was very interesting. According to Peter Custers- “During the Tebhaga movement paddy was stacked at their own threshing floor, women bowed with folded hands in front of their paddy. This emotional upsurge regarding rice is not understood by urban man. Many women never saw unthrcshed rice before in their lives. They thought that this (the stacking of rice) was a revolution”.¹¹⁵

To suppress the Tebhaga movement, Malda district administration took some serious steps. At that time popular *Gambhira* song of Malda was prohibited and famous poet and singer Fazlul Haque was arrested for his anti-British attitude.¹¹⁶ To cancel the meeting and conference of the Communist leaders, government implemented 144 Rule.¹¹⁷ But the share-croppers of Gazole ignore 144 Rule.¹¹⁸ Small *zamindars* made settlement with the organizer for the Tebhaga movement and they (peasants, cultivators and tenants) agreed to maintain the government norms of proper rate of crops and their revenue receipts. But on the other hand, *zamindar* and *jotdars* appointed *lathial* to suppress the movement.¹¹⁹ These servants of *zamindar* and *jotdars* frequently attacked the houses of cultivators and set fire. In this way they demolished the Tebhaga movement.

The District Magistrate of Malda arranged a meeting with the Tebhaga leaders and their followers but due to the fear of imprisonment, they avoided the meeting with District Magistrate.¹²⁰ In many cases cultivators were harassed by the hands of police, *zamindar* and *jotdars*. In some cases *zamindar* and *jotdars* joined hands with the police and made conspiracy against tenants and in this way cultivated lands were transferred by the name of *jotdars*. Due to the fear of British police, many cultivators flew away from their villages. Atrocities of the police increased, they set fire to the houses of peasants, tortured with the women and plundered their properties.¹²¹ Counter attacks also continued; in many cases *zamindar's lathials* were attacked by the villagers. Arms of the police were plundered. The district administration took alarm and some criminal cases were instituted and orders under Section 144 were issued to stop meetings of communists to incite aborigines particularly.¹²² In the last quarter of 1947, police started firing the peasants in Englishbazar and Basudevpur.¹²³ Many peasants died in this firing.

Actually the chief centre of Tebhaga movement was North Bengal.¹²⁴ Due to the initiatives of *Provincial Krishak Sabha* this movement scattered at least in nineteenth districts

of West Bengal. In West Dinajpur, Tebhaga movement took a violent shape. *Rajbanshi*, *Santhals*, *Orawn*, *Munda* and Muslims took part in this agitation.¹²⁵ Female volunteers also took part in this movement. Jasodha Rani Sarkar, Kausalya Kamarini, Rani Mitra and Bina Guha played a significant role in the Tebhaga Movement.¹²⁶ Before we discuss the Tebhaga movement the background of this movement in West Dinajpur should be noticed. After 1757 Peasants were oppressed and when British government got *Dewani* in 1765, the common people especially the peasants were the most exploited section. On the other hand, 1770's Bengal Famine made the condition more terrible. In the mean time British government started experiment in the field of land revenue system. *Ekshala*, *Panchshala*, *Dossahala* (Permanent Settlement) were introduced. Later people joined hand in the revolt of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It was the first war of Indian independence.¹²⁷

When the condition of the peasant and cultivators remained same at that time Bengal Tenancy Act (1885) was introduced.¹²⁸ But this Act could not fulfil the demands of the common people. So the peasant movement started in Bengal in the year 1920-26.¹²⁹ To solve the peasant crisis Fazlul Haque appointed an Enquiry Commission on 5th November, 1938.¹³⁰ This Enquiry Commission wanted to solve the problem of land revenue issue. This Commission came to be known as Floud Commission. Floud Commission's recommendation was to introduce Tebhaga among the *bargadars*.¹³¹ In 1940 Floud Commission presented its Report but nothing was done in favour of the peasant and cultivator. Moreover, torture of the *zamindars* and *jotdars* gradually increased.

So the conditions of the *bargadars*, *adhiars*, peasants, cultivators and tenants gradually degraded. In 1946 united peasants organized and they raised the slogan of Tebhaga in West Dinajpur. Actually, Tebhaga movement spread throughout the Dinajpur District and it was divided into six regions. These regions were as follows¹³²

<u>Name of the Regions</u>	<u>Name of Responsible Leaders</u>
1. Thakurgaon (East)	Bhibuti Ghosh and Ajit Ghosh
2. Thakurgaon (West)	Gurudas Talukder
3. Setabganj	Janardan Bhattacharya
4. Chirir Bandar	Sudhir Samajpati and Suchindu Chakraborty
5. Itahar	Basanta Chatterjee
6. Phulbari and Patiram	Kali Sarkar and Rupnarayan Roy

In that year Tebhaga movement took a violent shape. Charu Majumder, Jyoti Basu, Rupnarayan Roy, Ratanlal Brahman organized the peasants.¹³³ In the month of December, peasants collected paddy from their land. At that time Sohorabardi Ministry was in power and dominated by the Muslim League. Sohorabardi expressed his view about Tebhaga movement.¹³⁴ At that time Peasant Council never disliked Sohorabardi Ministry. League thought that police and bureaucracy was the main culprit. Due to the unity of the peasants and cultivators, *zamindars* and *jotdars* were in terror. But the *zamindars* and *jotdars* torture gradually increased and they exploited the poor cultivators and *adhiars*. Excess taxes were also collected by the *zamindars* from the *raiayats*.¹³⁵ On the other hand; *Krishak Sabha* and the Communist Party organized the peasants. Tebhaga movement got its strength with their help. Volunteers raised their slogan¹³⁶

“*Nal baran janda*

Ragni baran kaida

A bharat karte sadhin

Sabai mile aga

Paroi arni baim adhi hal

Sara bachar hal chas kore

Kichui pawa jaina ore krishak bhai”

(March forward all to liberate India with a Red Flag and a flaming scythe in hand. Share-cropping is a trouble now as we get nothing cultivating the whole year)

One of the important folk song of West Dinajpur is *khon*. Eminent folklore writer Khusi Sarkar expressed the exploited words of the peasants of Tebhaga movement in his play ¹³⁷

“*Ki sunibo Bhaju bhaya*

Mor dukher katha

Micha michi hisab kori

Handia mahajun

Jamikhan mile thakiaya”

(Listen to my sad story: the money lender with false calculation took away my land.)

In 1947, Kholan Bhanga movement started in Patiram and in 12th February on the year, Thakur Estate of Patiram and the rice stag of Lakshmi Chakraborty were attacked by the peasants.¹³⁸ On that situation police came but they were besieged by the volunteers. In Patiram there was big gathering. Many leaders took part in this gathering such as Khoka Barman, Shibcharan Barman, Gulu Kabiraj, Niamuddin Mondal, Paben Barman, Gostha Bihari Sarkar, Gurucharan Barman, and Mongla Murmu. Actually, Kholan Bhanga movement was one of the extended parts of Tebhaga movement.¹³⁹

Due to the unity of the poor *bargadars*, and *adhiars*, torture of the police, *jotdars* and *zamindars* gradually increased. Police set fire to the houses of the peasants. Many of them were arrested but the police were unable to suppress the Tebhaga movement. Volunteers raised the Red Flag and also raised the slogan ‘*Inquilab Jindabad*’.¹⁴⁰ Major areas of Tebhaga movement were *Uttarbanga*-Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Terai-Duars, Malda and 24 Paragona. Captain Turner went to Tibet through Coochbehar. He explain the condition of the *raiayats* in his book ‘*An Account of an Embassey to this Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet-1783*’ as “If a Reiat or peasant woes a sum of money, and has not the ability to satisfy his creditor, he is compelled to give up his wife as a pudge, and possession of her is kept until the debt is discharged.....during the residence and connection with the creditor,a family should have been the consequences,half of it is considered as the property of the person with whom she lived and half that of her real husband.”¹⁴¹

Tista river divided the Jalpaiguri district into two parts. In west side of Tista bank, there was situated Jalpaiguri town and associated rural areas. On the other hand, eastern bank of Tista related with Duars. In Duars tea-garden regions were also village areas.¹⁴² Inhabitants were mostly *Orawns*, *Munda*, *Gharia*, *Beshi* and *Nepali* labours. It should be mentioned that in 1939 Jalpaiguri District Communist Party opened its originising committee. Major members were Birendra Nath Dutta, Gurudas Roy and Sachindra Nath Dasgupta.¹⁴³ In the mean time peasants were organized against *jotdars*, *zamindars* and moneylenders. Several peasants of Jalpaiguri and Duars dedicated their life in the Tebhaga struggle. Many peasants such as Hopna Maji, Sarbaru Mohammad, Ramu Munda, Lachman Singh, Budhuni Orawani, Betchpa Kheria and others died as martyr.

The chief centre of the Tebhaga movement was Khapur (present Dakshin Dinajpur). Basically, Khapur was a *zamindar* dominated village. Others were able *jotdars*, small *jotdars*, peasants, *adhiars* and others. When Tebhaga movement started, Khapur was

one of the important centres. In 1947, 20th February, it was a day of terror in Khapur village.¹⁴⁴ In this village the *zamindars* under the leadership of Asit Mohan Singh created resistance to the movement. The police arrested the local leaders on February, 20. Thousands of peasants gathered and threw barricade on the way and demanded the release of their leaders.¹⁴⁵ In the mean time police started firing, as a result of which fifteen peasants including one woman were killed on the spot and several peasants were injured; very soon the death toll increases to twenty-two.¹⁴⁶ The first martyr of Tebhaga movement was Samiruddin and Sibram.¹⁴⁷ Peasants raised the slogan-‘*Jan debo tabu dhan debo na*’ (We will give life instead of paddy).¹⁴⁸ Some police persons were also injured in this peasant-police violence. At that time District Magistrate of Balurghat Sub-division was Panaullah and *Daroga* of the Balurghat police station was Phani Pathak.¹⁴⁹ British police got the support of administration and apart from this *jotdar* and *zamindar* joined hand in this venture.

Inspite of these, Patiram, Khapur, Nazirpur, Balurghat all these regions were dominated by the Tebhaga leaders. The most popular slogan of the peasant masses was ‘*Nij kholane dhan tolo*’ (Take paddy to your own threshing floor). Keeping pace with the progress of the movement police oppression increased. In numerous places agitating peasants came into conflict with the police who intervened to protect the interest of the *jotdars* and the *zamindars*. According to Government Records in 1947, 20th February, Police firing continued to 121 round and in this police-peasant violence twenty-two peasants lost their life.¹⁵⁰ Twenty-two martyrs were¹⁵¹ 1) Chiar Shai Shek, 2) Jasodharani Sarkar, 3) Kaushalya Kamrani, 4) Hopan Mardi, 5) Gurucharan Mardi, 6) Maji Soren, 7) Dukhna Kolkamar, 8) Purna Kolkamar, 9) Fagua Kolkamar, 10) Bholanath Kolkamar, 11) Kailash Bhuimali, 12) Khoto Barman, 13) Bhadu Barman, 14) Alu Barman, 15) Mongal Barman, 16) Gyan Barman, 17) Narayan Murmu, 18) Bhuban Barman, 19) Guhanara Mahato, 20) Shama Charan Barman, 21) Nagen Barman and 22) Bhani Barman.

The late forties thus witnessed agrarian unrest of various types. The *Krishak Sabha* could not always properly lead the movements. In some areas there were spontaneous rising of the peasants. In certain cases the militant peasants were in favour of an armed rising what the *Sabha* did not really want. Furthermore there was a problem of alienation. The Tebhaga movement could not secure the support of the middle and poor peasants for a long time. No wonder that the *Bhadralok* class of northern Bengal towns who led national movements had little sympathy for the Tebhaga movement.¹⁵² The main reason was that many of them owned land cultivated by the share-croppers. Despite the fact that a number of the leaders of Tebhaga movement belonged to *Bhadralok* class, the middle class 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 Miah, held within a week of the Khapur massacre.¹⁵³ This meeting resolved that the Communist Party was responsible for the tragedy and demanded the trial of the offenders.

However, the Tebhaga movement continued for a vast period and did not come to an end with the partition of India in 1947. This movement started to restore the demand of the peasants and cultivators. However, one question rose about this movement: Did Tebhaga fulfill the demand of the peasants? Actually, after independence ‘land crisis’ was a vital issue. Land of peasants, tenants, cultivators became at stake. Government issued a constitutional safeguard to save the lands of downtrodden classes’ people. The chief aim was to protect the land from the hands of land aggressor.¹⁵⁴ In the case of North Bengal it is very important. Because historically these lands were dominated by the hands of *Rajbansi* clans (both Hindu and Muslims) and they belonged to constitute land related society. Over and again, land reforms of north-eastern India especially Malda and West Dinajpur owed much to the peasant movements like the Tebhaga.

In the post-independence period North Bengal witnessed several movements. Especially in West Dinajpur a disturbance broke out in the name of ‘Anti-Banga-Bihar-Merger movement’ (1950). Raiganj Sub-division, of the district observed a movement which took a serious place in the name of ‘Refugee movement’.¹⁵⁵ The most significant movement of the district was the Food movement of 1959. In the mid 1950s the several state wide food crises scattered throughout the North Bengal especially in West Dinajpur. The commodities for everyday need became rare and price rose to high. The movement highly affected Balurghat Sub-division. The district of West Dinajpur was severally dominated by the native *zamindars*. They were much aggressive towards the refugees and peasants. Their dominance in society and also the political influence were deep rooted and henceforth their exploitation was unrestrained.¹⁵⁶ According to Census Report of India 1951, total number of dependants on agrarian sector were 1,40,00,000 of which the number of agricultural labour were 30,41,000 as well as share-croppers numbering 29,50,000. It is noticed that 30% of the total number of peasants lost their agricultural land. From the Floud Commission the percentage of the total peasant class i.e. agricultural labour and share-croppers was below 35% and the Report estimated in 1940 that there were five million share-croppers in the individual Bengal province.¹⁵⁷ After partition, roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the landmass came to West Bengal. A rough guess would put number of share-croppers in West Bengal to be 1.6 million.¹⁵⁸ It is clear that a huge number of people turned into the agricultural labourers and share-croppers within the decade. Moreover, it was an alarming to agrarian sector. The unlimited dominance of the feudatory-*zamidari* system over peasant claim directly and indirectly was responsible for the absolute deterioration of the peasant class.

Actually North Bengal was highly depended on agrarian activities. The contemporary peasant leaders made a vivid description about their unrestrained exploitation upon the peasants. In 1950’s peasants were organized by the leadership of Pijush Das, Asit

Ghosh, Santi Das at Raiganj; Nani Gopal Roy at Kaliaganj; Kesto Barman at Hemtabad.¹⁵⁹ It is to be noted in this connection that the peasant movement organizations were mainly organized in Balurghat and Raiganj Sub-division immediate after the independence. It is to be mentioned that the peasant organization got its new shape through the new circumstance provided by the refugee movement. The refugees joined with peasant organization.

It is relevant to point out that basic issue behind the refugee movement was the land-issue. Later refugee movement merged with the peasant organization. According to the record, the government imposed a high rate of levy upon the rice. The peasant class protested against the imposition of levy upon the paddy in 1952.¹⁶⁰ Leftist political leaders of Balurghat organized the movement.¹⁶¹ A severe movement was organized in protest of police oppression of villages like Kaligram, Gopalbati, Motherganj, Nazirpur of Balurghat Sub-division. A movement had spread through announcing in village market, meeting and mass signature movement had been built up against the oppression of levy-collection programme by government in a few areas of West Dinajpur i.e., Balurghat, Katabari, Vhikahar, Patiram, Marnai, Itahar, Malan, Madhuban etc. in 1952-54.¹⁶² The cultivators and share-croppers organized a movement against the eviction of land. As a result Lands Reformation in 1954 which rapidly spread over the different part of the district, especially in Banshihari and Itahar police station.¹⁶³ In 1954 the *Krishak Samiti* of Banshihari and Itahar organized an anti-eviction movement.

The food crisis was not just an incident of 1959. Its background was started in the precedent years. In 1954, when Dr. B.C. Roy was the Chief Minister, a massive food crisis over took the state. There was a near famine condition in Bengal. An anti-famine committee was then set up, and it organized state wide movements.¹⁶⁴ The crisis started severely since 1956. The price of the paddy started to increase from 1956 a vast procession was organized for the demand of eradication of food criseses the principal demand of the

'Atma rakshar andolan chalao' (Drive movement for self defence) the state wide slogan of the Communist Parties were drive companion against hoarders, build up common granary in villages after villages, make Co-operative Society and encourage the farmers to sell their paddy to food committees, drive movement for rationing in every village.¹⁶⁵ In North Bengal and outside the movement was locally organized. The people participated in these locally organized movements spontaneously.¹⁶⁶

The food crisis became severe and people were highly miserable during a decade in the last of the decade of 1950's, the food crisis turned into food movement. As the protest of the killing of 31st August of 1959 in Calcutta, the peasants and share-croppers of Gangarampur directly organized a tremendous movement.¹⁶⁷ Hundreds of peasants from Kaliaganj were imprisoned to Raiganj and Berhampur jail. A shockful incident took place not only in the city but that practiced to the district town also; the authority had *lathi* charged upon the peaceful mass movement at Burdwan, Berhampur and Gangarampur of West Dinajpur.¹⁶⁸

The incident of Batasan village proved how the food crisis made the people devil-may-care. A bullock-cart of test-relief was snatched by the women of Batasan village in the way of Kaliaganj to Mudafat village in 1958. The relief-force besieged the village and made firing which took one person. A vast conference was held in Mahendraganj of Kaliaganj to protest the killing.¹⁶⁹ The Price Increased and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) was formed in late 1958 by the Communist Party of India in West Bengal, and other left groups in response to the ongoing food crisis. The PIFRC led one of the most massive and militant political campaigns in the history of West Bengal.¹⁷⁰ The PIFRC demanded total price controls, immediate redistribution of state lands and confiscations without compensation of excessive private lands owned by land lords. The tactics of PIFRC included accounting for hidden rice storages and forced sales of confiscated rice.¹⁷¹ In the opinion of

Famine Resistance Committee, the volunteers of the food movement had been imprisoned due to their active participation in demonstration and staging *Satyagraha* in the various *Muffosil* courts and Block Development Officer. So many *Satyagrahees* were imprisoned in the 7th September of 1959. West Dinajpur especially in Balurghat total number of imprisonment was forty-eight in the district.¹⁷²

Table No: 1.10 (Imprisoned People of the Food Movement of 1959)

Places/Towns	Total Number of Imprisonment
Balurghat	31
Gangarampur	17
Kalimpong	22
Kumargaon	10
Asansol	19
Berhampur	16
Kandi	10

Source: Partha Dutta, 'Food Movement of 1959: A Study of West Dinajpur' in *The Journal of Historical and Cultural Review*, Vol-I & II, Historical Society of North Bengal, Darjeeling, West Bengal, 2010, p.47

Sunartala, Amritpur of Kumarganj and Mulia Deshi, a pregnant women of Madhupur of Kaliaganj always preached the movement with a mike on the other hand Krishna Mohan Barman, a cycle-messenger and in the same time it is significantly to be

stated that he was an old man of Hemtabad and who regularly had a communication between Hemtabad and Balurghat by a cycle. Sudhin Pandit of Gangarampur, Khoka Roy of Balurghat and Dhairy Barman of Kumarganj strongly participated in the movement. The provincial leader in the district, Md. Abdullah Rasul, an all India peasant leader went to various villages of Tapan, Mirjapur, Bhaiur, and Gopalganj and took an active part to spread the movement.¹⁷³

Actually, the food crisis was purely man-made. *Jotdar-zamindar* conspiracy was much powerful in this West Dinajpur district. Though a slow urbanization was happening, but the majority of people were dependent on agrarian activities. The three-tier conspiracies are between the *jotdar-zamindar* and moneylender.¹⁷⁴ The *jotdar-zamindar* and moneylender was so inhumanic that it cannot be expressed in words. From 1954-56 a number of several summer, and flood gave the opportunity to the dishonest merchants for black marketing.¹⁷⁵ Besides that the land owners took the advantages of the helpless peasants and share-croppers. The *jotdars* collected the *diera-duna* (one and half times) from them for their helplessness. It is to be mentioned that the peasants and share-croppers organized a mass movement against them.

In this connection the role of the Haque Ministry must be mentioned. The Haque Ministry fixed up the price of rice at Rs.11 and Rs.4 per mound in March of 1943.¹⁷⁶ Haque Ministry surrendered to the hoarders' made conspiracy-government retracted the price-control of rice; the price of rice, then, rose to Rs. 20/Maund.¹⁷⁷ After two months that rose to Rs. 30-32/Mound. In the month of August, government restricted the price of rice. But in many districts it turned into a horror-situation, price of rice became Rs. 70-80. Hence, it is clear that government failed to stop black marketing.¹⁷⁸ At that time, administrative corruption adds to the miseries of the people. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* mentioned

no paddy or rice in many places of Bengal, a vast number of families had spent their days without a little bit of food.¹⁷⁹

At that time food crisis of such a magnitude has developed in a year in which there has been a record production of food grains as claimed by the Government of India, is the sharpest condemnation of the politics persuaded by the state and central government in this respect. Following table in the district of West Dinajpur bears a distinct feature. Not only the rice production increased but also the production of Mustard and Barley also increased. Following table give us clear picture.

Table No: 1.11 Production of Some Principal Crops in 1000 Mounds (in 1000 Quintals)

Crops	Production in 1958-59	Production during 1949-50 to 1958-59
Aman	8,223.2(068.9)	5,107.9(1,906.27)
Aus	1,265.7(472.36)	778.2(290.42)
Boro	8.0(2.99)	1.6(0.60)
Total Rice	9,496.9(3,544.24)	5,887.5(2,197.21)
Mustard	330.2(123.23)	213.2(79.57)
Barley	136(50.96)	67.2(25.08)
Gram	202.4(75.54)	74.8(27.91)
Source: J.C. Sengupta, <i>West Bengal District Gazetteers, West Dinajpur</i> , Government Press, Calcutta, 1965, p.107		

Actually Food movement which started in West Dinajpur from 1959 scattered several parts of Bengal. In regional level common people joined hands and participated in Food movement. In reality, North Bengal became the hot seat of Food movement. Several strikes took place in favour of this movement. In 1966 many students took part in the Food movement. In 4th March by the initiatives of ‘*Chatra Sangram Committee*’ a general strike took place in West Bengal.¹⁸⁰ Police started firing. Lastly, in the first week of April, Food movement faded its colour and denounced it.

“*Terai kande go*

Jalche amar hiya

Nakshalbari math jale

Saptakalyer lagiya”

(My heart bursts as Terai cries; the field of Naxalbari is on fire for an unending time)

(Ajit Pande, ‘Terai Kande Go,’ 1967, 11th November)

Naxalbari is a police station of 206.7 square Kilometers in area under the Siliguri Sub-division of Darjeeling district which lies in the northern part of West Bengal as North Bengal.¹⁸¹ Naxalbari is situated in the slender ‘neck’ which is India’s only vital land corridor that connects Bhutan, Sikkim and the countries north-east zone with the rest of the country. It has two international borders- in the west is Nepal at a distance of 4 miles and in the east is Bangladesh at a distance of 15 miles.¹⁸² On one side, beyond Naxalbari, is the river Mechi, across which is Nepal. On the other, across the Mahananda river from Phansidewa is Bangladesh. China’s Tibet is only 60 miles away on the northern side. Actually Siliguri, Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa these four police stations constitute the Siliguri Sub-division.¹⁸³ The peasants and cultivators of this locality mainly comprised tribals (*Santhals*

and *Orawns*) and *Rajbanshis*, exploited by the *jotdars* under the ‘*adhiar*’ system. The physical and demographic character of Naxalbari raised the voices of the peasants.¹⁸⁴

Both in its Theory of State and Revolution and in its revolutionary practice, Indian Maoism marked a significant departure from traditional Left politics. It is Maoism which, in one variety or another, informed the debates and actions of the radical communists, popularly known as the Naxalites, most of whom centred on the CPI (M-L). Indian Maoism emerged within the Indian Communist movement like the CPI and the CPI (M), functioned as a critique of that movement and its leadership, culminated in the Naxalbari peasant uprising in May, 1967 and subsequently gave birth to a new Party, the CPI (M-L).¹⁸⁵ The present study seeks to trace the ideological development of this Maoist alternative in West Bengal especially in North Bengal during the period 1953-67.

Naxalbari was one of the important centres of Naxalbari movement. North Bengal became well known by the hands of Naxalbari movement. Mainly the *Bhatia* classes were related to the Naxalbari movement. It was a small movement of the peasants but latter it spread and took an important turn in the history of leftist politics. The ideological platform of the Communist Party became divided by the hands of Naxalbari movement. Though the ideological platform of the movement was inspired from the book of ‘Mao Zedong’.¹⁸⁶ Mao’s book ‘*Quotation from Chairman*’ became popular among the communist followers and later it became a Bible of the Marxist leader. This Red Book provided huge inspiration and enthusiasm towards the leaders and followers of the Naxalbari movement.

A political movement such as the Naxalbari movement can be studied from three different but inter-related aspects¹⁸⁷- First, the socio-economic structures and processes providing its background what in traditional historiography would have been called a study of its ‘causes’; Second, the power structures and political relationships which comprised its immediate political context; and Third, the ideological theoretical component of the

movement. The three aspects together would provide an understanding of how the Naxalbari uprising, an otherwise small and local peasant movement assumed such an extraordinary significance.

In 1967, 25th May, Naxalbari movement became organized. Tensions spread throughout the North Bengal. Meanwhile police inspector Sonam Wangdi lost his life by the hands of the peasants.¹⁸⁸ Actual grievance was that in Naxalbari area, there were no land reform and land distribution so far. Peasants and cultivators organized and decided that they could not tolerate the oppression of the *jotdars*. An organized movement started from Naxalbari. At that time United Front Government was in power in West Bengal. Ajay Mukherjee was the Chief Minister. The *Rajbanshis* constituted majority of the population in the Naxalbari region, on the other hand tribal people like *Santhals*, *Orawns* and *Mundas* formed a large proportions of the rural population.¹⁸⁹ In the peasant conference of 1967, cultivators declared armed protest in Rambolajot in 18th March. It was decided in 7th May the land and cultivated area would be distributed among the peasants and it was also decided that police force should be obstructed and the deeds of *jotdars* would be spoiled and destroyed.¹⁹⁰

Peasants and cultivators organised meetings and conferences. Peasants build up *Dharmagola* (common granary) in villages for store of paddy. Charu Majumder, Kanu Sanyal, Souren Basu, Khokan Majumder, Jangal Santhal organized the movement and they emerged as one of prominent and active leader of the Naxalbari movement.¹⁹¹ CPI comments that it was ‘National Democratic Revolution’. CPI (M) comments it as ‘Mass Democratic Movement’. RSP indicates it as’ Socialist Movement’. Others political leftist parties mentioned Naxalbari movement as ‘Socialist Revolution’. Female peasants and cultivators were organized by the local leaders. They gathered in Prasadu Joth on 25th May, 1967.¹⁹² Meanwhile, police force came in Batchai Joth. Female protesters raised their voices against the police. In the meantime, police started firing upon the common people. Dhaneswari Debi,

Phulmati Debi, Gaidan Saibani, Nayanswari Mallick, Samaswari Mallick and Sonamati Singh were shot dead.¹⁹³

Naxalbari movement got a new momentum in 11th November, 1967 when Charu Majumder, Saroj Dutta, Sushital Ray Chowdhury, Saibal Mitra, Nimai Ghosh gathered in Monumental field and they supported the movement.¹⁹⁴ Naxalbari movement raised the slogan of ‘Agricultural Revolution’. Scholars think Naxalbari movement change the nature of the Agricultural Revolution'.¹⁹⁵ In 1968 Pratul Bandhyapadhyā sung a song in favour of the Naxalbari movement¹⁹⁶

“*Ai tapta diba sakti*

Ai shoker agun jalak digun

Chirosatrur pare ghriner agun

Jaluk jaluk dabanal

Dike digante charea paruk

Biplaber dabanal”

(May the fire of grief be doubled against the direst enemies and scatter in all corners)

When the Naxalbari movement spread in different places, several reactions came from outside India. There was a clash among the Communist Party of India about the ideology of Marxism and Maoism.¹⁹⁷ Different CPM leaders criticized this measure. Veteran CPM leader Harekrishna Konar criticized the policy of Naxal ideology.¹⁹⁸ A new communist line was formed by the hands of Charu Majumder. Though his ideology and thoughts were highly criticized but without him Naxalbari movement cannot be complete.

Now 25th May observed as a Martyr Day of Naxalbari movement. This movement was different from Tebhaga movement. Naxalbari movement was not the movement of resistance. On the other hand, it was the movement of protest and attack. It was an aggressive and violent movement. The first aim of the peasant's gun was police. In the mean time lot of lives were lost in the incident of peasant-police agitation. By the issue of Naxalbari incident party was divided into two sections.¹⁹⁹ The inner-party struggle within the CPI and the CPI (M) by tracing the intellectual evolution of Maoism as a critique of revisionism from within the Indian Communist movement. Many leaders came out from the party and they formed a new party in 1969 which came to be known as CPI (M-L).²⁰⁰

By exploring the particular character of the two major trends which emerged in the inner-party debates and which were both analytically and historically separable in the documents that constitute the bulk of the material for this study, it helps us in understanding the charter of the Naxalbari uprising, a small and local peasant movement which assumed an extra-ordinary significance and left a powerful impact on the Indian Communist movement.

The documents of the inner-party debates show that the line of thinking characteristic of the so-called Naxalites was not an abrupt intervention in the Indian Communist movement. On the other hand, it emerged gradually from within the Indian Communist movement as a 'critique of revisionism' was increasingly identified with a search for a revolutionary alternative, and finally collapsed into what was known as Indian Maoism.²⁰¹ From May, 1967 it culminated in the Naxalbari uprising followed by what has generally been termed as the Naxalbari movement. According to Henirik Donner, "one has to acknowledge that the Naxal movement focused wider process of democratization. The implications of the movement for contemporary politics cannot solely be interpreted in terms of its political success, but also the public negotiation of personal involvement in specific

political practices, including forms of organization, speech, authority and local involvement".²⁰²

Now the question rises how the Naxalbari movement affected in Malda and West Dinajpur. The rural people of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, and Coochbehar were deeply affected by the Naxalbari movement. But Malda and West Dinajpur were partly affected by the Naxal turmoil. The successors of the leaders who participated in Tebhaga and Naxalbari movement, took part in the separatist ethnic and radical movement of GNLF, Uttarkhand, UTJAS, Kamtapur, KLO, GCPA, GCDP movement.²⁰³ This was a peculiar situation. Most probably separatist movements of north eastern provinces influenced the people of northern part of North Bengal.

Malda and West Dinajpur were not affected so much but some scattered incident took place. Naxal movement spread in some parts of Islampur, Raiganj, Habibpur, Itahar and Balurghat also. In Islampur Swadesh Sen was the leader of Naxal movement.²⁰⁴ In Malda's Habibpur and Bamongola region, Naxal leader Narayan Sarkar organized the peasants.²⁰⁵ Itahar was one of the important centre of Naxal activities. Santi Roy was murdered in Itahar hat. At that time Rama Krishnan was the Police Super of West Dinajpur and he took the initiative about the murder case. Pabitra Pani Saha was a reputed Naxal leader of North Bengal University. He organized the movement in Raiganj but later he was murdered in Kaliaganj.²⁰⁶ Several incidents took place in Balurghat. During the time of Naxal activities, Chitta Ghosh was murdered on 4th August in 1970. Left Front (especially, RSP) observed 4th August as martyrs' day in every year. During this time, a police constable of Balurghat and a member of Laha family of Badamail village was murdered.²⁰⁷ Naxal activists also set fire to B.M. High School at Raghunathpur, threw bombs to the Harekrishna High School at Khaspur (Present Dakshin Dinajpur) and to the house of Braja Das at Balurghat. This type of activities created fierce among the common people.²⁰⁸

At that time students were attracted by the Naxal ideology. Some prominent Naxal leaders were Kamal Das, Subir Talukdar, Pabitra Pani Saha, Bhabataran Bhuimali, Amal Ray and others. In Boaldar two rifles were seized from the house of Dulu Ray and Gangadhar Ray. Rifles were found from the *Harang* (cow-house).²⁰⁹ From the house of Bhabataran Bhuimali some Naxal leaflets (Red Book) was found. In the Naxal period a popular slogan was ‘*Chiner chairman amader chairman*’ (The Chairman of China is our Chairman) ‘*Mao-Se-Tung er chinta dhara dike dike charea dite habe*’ (Spread the thought of Mao-Se-Tung in all corners) etc.²¹⁰ In Malda and West Dinajpur there were many leaflets and booklets but due to police raids many of the records were burnt by the leaders.

Thus as a result of this study, the relationship of the Naxalbari uprising in particular and the Naxalite movement in general to the Indian Communist movement can be established with greater clarity. If there was anything which could be called ‘Naxalism’, it was not an imposition on the Indian Communist movement from without but a development from within, born out of the inherent logic of its existence. Over and again, Naxalbari included as a movement to save the peasants and established their demands. This movement was not only the movement of protecting the land of cultivators but also protected the demand of the *raiayats*, increase of the wages of the day labourers.²¹¹

In conclusion it can be said that regarding the immediate tasks among the peasantry, the radicals gave stress on organizing militant movements for the ownership of land. They particularly showed concern for the task of organizing the rural labourers like *Khetmajur* and *Dinmajur* into their own unions which would act as the backbone of the *Krishak Sabha*; the latter was to be formed with the expanded masses of exploited peasantry.²¹² This union would conduct continuous propaganda campaigns, launch struggles and carry out investigation of the rural political and economic conditions. The rural semi-workers would unite with the urban workers through movements against black marketeers,

hoarders and profiteers and finally for possession of land and to preserve that possession. Political parties considering the perspective of the people's Democratic Revolution in India, laid great emphasis on building up peasant struggle for land.

Centrally organized movements must be conducted by co-ordinating the demands of various section of the people, such as the workers, peasants, the middle class and the middle bourgeoisie. Party leaders should try to anticipate the relevant questions regarding a movement before it was actually launched. Through movements the party should try to give political leadership in the national movements, earn the faith of the people, and strengthen the mass contact of both the leaders and the members of the party.²¹³

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