

## **CHAPTER-VI**

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The communist movements played a unique role in the politics of India during the colonial period. The idea of Communism infiltrated into the political behaviour of India through the Indian revolutionaries living abroad, basically in Soviet Union. During 1920's the left emerged as a dominant socio-political group in India and mobilized various section of the society, especially workers and peasants and took up radical socio-economic issues designed to articulate their specific grievances. They also organized various movements of the working class and peasantry against landlordism, capitalism which were responsible for the bad condition of the toiling masses. Initially the Communist party of India was formed in 1920 in Tashkent at the initiative of Manabendra Nath Roy with the exile Indians revolutionaries along with some *Muhajirs*. Formally the Communist Party of India was formed in India in 1925 by uniting the different communist groups that had emerged in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and other parts of India at the first Communist Conference in Kanpur.

With the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925 such movements acquired a concrete shape. In every corner of the country, Communists played an important role in galvanizing peoples' struggles against British Colonial rule and its native agents like landlords, capitalists, traders and money-lenders. In the province of Assam as well as in Surma-Barak valley, there also existed various communist working class and peasant movements.

The communist movement of Surma valley in particular and Assam in general raised its head from the district of Sylhet. Like other parts of the country, the base for Communism and communist movements in Surma-Barak valley was laid down by the students and youths of the urban middle class families who were associated with various revolutionary organisation. It was in December 1935, the District Organizing Committee of Communist Party for Sylhet was formed in Calcutta with six members at the initiative of Phanindra Nath Dutta. The prominent Communist leaders who formed the Communist Party in Sylhet district were Chittaranjan Das, Chanchal

Kumar Sarma, Jyotirmoy Nandi, Prabodananda Kar, Rohini Das, Karunasindhu Roy, Biresh Chandra Mishra, Dwijendralal Sengupta, Hemanga Biswas, Suroth Paul Choudhury etc. Later on the Surma Valley District Committee of CPI under Bengal Provincial Committee of the party was formed in a conference at Thakurbari Dhigirpar under Gopalganj P.S. on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1942.

In Cachar district the foundation of the Communist Party of India was laid down by four student leaders of All India Students' Federation. They were - Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Phoni Bhattacharjee and Mohitosh Purkayastha. The first unit of CPI in Cachar was formed in 1938. Tarapoda Bhattacharjee was the convenor of this unit of the party. In Karimganj, the foundation of the party organisation was laid by Swadesh Paul Choudhury, Yogeshar Das and Surath Paul Choudhury. The key role in the formation of the party in Cachar district was mainly played by Digen Dasgupta and Barin Dutta. In Cachar Achinta Bhattacharjee, Gopen Roy, Mohitosh Purkayastha, Shudangshu Ghosh, Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Motilal Jaygirdar, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Dwijendralal Sengupta were the important founder leaders of the Communist Party of India. The Cachar District Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India was formed in 1943 with Surath Paul Choudhury as Secretary.

The students leaders took an active role along with other democratic forces, in setting up the "All India Students' Federation" (AISF) in August 1936 in a conference in Lucknow. In some provinces it was under Communist influence. Gradually the entire organisation came under increasing communist influence. In 1936, the Surma valley Students' Federation was formed in Habiganj of Sylhet district. It was through the Students' Federation that a quite number of student cadres joined the CPI and it was they who virtually organized the communist party throughout the province.

The Communists in Surma valley formed various trade union organization during late 1930s and movements were organized under the banner of those organisations. The important trade union organizations of the valley were *Sylhet Cachar Cha Bagan Mazdur Union*, *Surma valley Dock-Mazdoor Union*, Cachar Press Workers' Association and *Silchar Dhangar Union*. It was only after the emergence of the Communists in the Surma valley, the cause of the labourers of the valley effectively taken by the Communists. The strike of the labourers of Chatak Cement Factory; the labour strike of Arunabandh Tea Estate of Cachar; the Strike of the Surma Valley *Dak Mazdoor Union* in 1946; movement of the Bengal and Assam

Railroad Workers Union in November 1945 and the strike of the postal employees in February 1946 was the most significant communist working class movement of the valley.

In the beginning of the period under review wage-earning population in this province comprised primarily the immigrant labourers who worked mainly in the tea gardens under inhuman capitalist exploitation. The organised phase of the tea garden labour movement in Surma valley was started in 1930's under the communist leadership. In the year 1938, there were three tea garden strikes in Sylhet, each of one day duration. During 1938-39, five tea gardens of Cachar districts confronted with labour strike. These were- Lalachera, Mainagarh, Allenpur, Borakhai and Arunabandh. The most significant among them was the strike in the Arunabandh T. E that commenced in early April 1939 and continued forty days. The prominent trade union and communist leader of Cachar like Barin Dutta, Digen Dasgupta and Gopen Roy were actively associated with this labour strike. They formed a strike committee in the garden with Shudangshu Ghosh as in-charge. The workers who took leading part in the strike were – Mandhadari, Chamtu Bhumij, Lalu Bhumij and others. Another notable strike took place in the Allenpur T. E of Cachar. Apart from the tea garden workers, other marginal workers of the Surma valley also organised various resistance movements under Communist influence for their legitimate demands. The programmes of these movements did not go beyond organizing meetings and processions but these programmes also helped creating political awareness among the workers.

At the initiative of the Communists, the All India Kisan Sabha was formed in the year 1936. Since inception, it was dominated by Socialists and Communists. Few Congress leaders were associated with it. In the two districts of Surma valley namely Sylhet and Cachar, the All India Kisan Sabha was under the full control of the Communists. In Sylhet district, Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 with Lala Sharodindhu Dey as Secretary. In 1937, the branch of All India Kisan Sabha also took its birth in Cachar district with Dwijendralal Sengupta as Secretary and Pores Choudhury as President. With the formation of the branch of All India Kisan Sabha in Surma valley, the Communists and Kisan Sabha activists started to consolidate the peasantry and organize them under the red banner to fight for their legitimate demands and actively participated in various movements. In this way the Kisan Sabha in Surma valley became a popular organisation.

Against the zamindari oppression, the Surma valley for the first time witnessed the organised peasant movement at Bhanubil. In 1931, the Manipuri peasants of Bhanubil rose to more organised form of revolt against the zamindar under the leadership of Manipuri *Purahita* (priest) Baikunta Sharma. After the formation of Kisan Sabha in Sylhet district in 1936, the Communists established their control over the Bhanubil movement and they strongly intensified on the movement to organise it on the communist line. The peasants attacked the zamindars with revenue boycott. Ultimately, the Government of Assam had to amend the Sylhet Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1943, which granted tenancy rights to the peasants of Bhanubil. With the emergence and interference of the Communists, the peasant movement of Sylhet district became more and more militant and acquired class character. After the peasant movement of Bhanubil, the peasants of Bhatipara and Bongshikunda of Sylhet organised a powerful movement under the leadership of the Communists.

The most organized and militant communist peasant movement of Sylhet district was the Nankar Rebellion which was divided into four phases and completely based on the Hindu-Muslim unity. The storm centre of the movement was Lauta-Bahadurpur, where a prolonged class war was carried on between the zamindars and Nankars, involving clashes and casualties on both sides. The rebellion also spread to different areas of Sylhet district. Led by the Kisan Sabhas, the Nankars refused to serve their masters any longer and defended their lands against the landlords' private armies. Thus, In Sylhet, the CPI was able to build up a united platform of Hindu and Muslim peasants in certain pockets of their influence against all provocations. It was only after the formation of the branch of the All India Kisan Sabha in Sylhet in 1936, the voice for the abolition of Nankar system was first raised by the Kisan Sabha in its first district conference held at Beheli in 1936. The Kisan Sabha started to organize the Nankars under its banner to give it a Communist character.

The Indian peasantry and working class who were the victims of inhuman colonial exploitation for long past, rose to the highest peak of struggle after the end of the Second World War and a period of mass upsurge opened in India. After the war, the Communists were very active and dominant among the peasantry of the valley. The Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area of Karimganj sub-division for the first time rose in organised form of revolt during the post war period. Subsequently, the revolt spread to different pockets of the district. Everywhere the Nankars refused to render obligatory services to the zamindar family. In the revolt affected areas, the

government mobilized armed police to suppress the revolt. The Kisan Sabha gave a call for the social boycott of the zamindars. Accordingly, the common masses from every walk of life along with the Nankars started social boycott of the zamindars.

After independence, the Communists were declared illegal in East Pakistan and many of them badly treated by the Muslim League leaders. By the activity of the league workers and leaders, the nature of the Nankar Rebellion took a new dimension. Most of the Communist leaders went underground to continue the movement and many of them were tortured in imprisonment. Under the situation, a section of influential Nankar leaders left the Kisan Sabha and joined the Muslim League. Though these leaders joined the League remained supporter of the rebellion. By taking the advantage of the absence of the Communists, those League workers ultimately snatched the leadership of the Nankar Rebellion from the hands of the Communists. So, the erstwhile class character of the Nankar Rebellion faced an ideological crisis due to the interference of the Leaguers.

After independence, the communist leaders failed to make realize the Nankars about the political condition which was replaced by the colonial government. The Communists failed to motivate the peasantry about the basic political fact i.e. the League Government was the sole representatives of landlords and capitalist class. The communists attempted to carry on the rebellion only to bring some economic reform for the peasantry. So, the political side of the rebellion was ignored by the leadership and the Nankar Rebellion became only an economic reform movement instead of becoming a movement against landlordism, capitalism and also British Imperialism. Gradually the Nankar rebellion had lost its political significance in East Pakistan after independence. The oppressed Nankars resorted to revolt in order to get rid of the zamindary exploitation and they were not concerned about the leadership and character the movement.

The last phase of the Nankar Rebellion was very militant in nature and existed from 1949 to 1950. During the second half of 1948, the peasant activists had formed various Kisan Samities in Saneshwar area. They also raised volunteers groups and armed training was provided to them to face police *jhulum*. A group of armed force of East Pakistan Rifle arrived at Saneshwar on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1949. At night, the armed force made an attack on the mass people of the area and an open clash took place between the armed force and the Nankars. The armed force opened fire and as a result five people died on the spot many got injury.

In spite of the repeated suppressive measures, the Nankars did not bow down before the administration and they stood firm on their demand i.e. the abolition of the Nankar system. When the militant movement of the Nankars had reached its zenith, it was not possible for the government to suppress the revolt without abolishing the Nankar system. The East Pakistan Government passed 'The State Acquisition and Tenancy act, 1950 (XXVIII of 1951)' by which zamindari system was abolished in East Pakistan and along with this the Nankar system was also officially abolished by the government.

Tebhaga was one of the militant peasant movements of Indian history. The period of Tebhaga Movement was 1946 to 1950. Basically, the Tebhaga Movement was started from Bengal and then the same was organised by the Communists in Cachar district. The movement started from harvest time in November 1946 with the slogan of *Nij Khamare Dhan Tolo*: (share-croppers taking paddy into their own threshing floor and not to the *Jotedars* house) to enforce Tebhaga. The Second District Conference of the *Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha* adopted the demand of Tebhaga in this district.

Atarotillah, Udharbond and Borkhola area was the most powerful centre of the Tebhaga Movement. The Movement was also wide spread in some villages of Lakhipur area, such as Joypur, Harinagar, Sibstan and Kamranga. It also spread to Bajarichara, Patherkandi and Ratabari area of Karimganj sub-division. In the beginning of 1947, the movement reached its peak in various pockets of Cachar. In many places, the *bhagchasis* with the help of the Communist volunteers forcefully started to cultivate the lands of the mirasdars without their consent. In various places, cultivators also boycotted the payment of revenue to the mirasdars.

The *Tebhaga* in Cachar broke out in two phases – one with the *tebhaga* of North Bengal in 1946 and the other in December, 1949. The first was a whirlwind movement where the mood of the peasants was militant. Along with Bengal, the *Tebhaga* movement in Cachar too came to an end after the harvest season was over in 1946. Though the movement was on low ebb after the initial enthusiasm, the mood for continuation of the movement was prevalent among the peasants of Cachar. Sensing this mood, the Communist leaders continued their campaign for conducting the *Tebhaga* Movement. As a result of this campaign, the Government of Assam, on the one hand, armed itself with repressive laws (Assam Maintenance of Public Order Bill,

1947) and, on the other, enacted a law in favour of the *bhagchasi* or *adhiars* called Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act, 1948.

In 1949 the centre stage of the agitation was shifted from Attarotillah and Udharbond to Borkhola police station area. The village Bhitorgangapur and Panjigram were the main centres of peasant activities. There the peasants snatched away the paddy from the *mirasdar*'s land forcefully. The use of force and barricade were the highlights of this phase of Tebhaga in Cachar. The violent turn of the movement was countered by the state with equal forecity resulting in the death of five peasant activists and injuring two Manipuri women in police firing. The movement took place in the month of December 1949. After the incident, the landowners recognized the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> share of the produce for bhagchasi and Rs. 8/- per day and Rs.80/- per month for the khetmazdoor.

After the death of five peasants activists in 1949 no further movement developed anywhere in the district of Cachar. Records indicate that the campaign was carried out for some more time, but the death in the police firing and large scale arrest of leaders marked the virtual end of the second phase of the movement. But the political situation compelled the Government of Assam to eventually amend the Adhiar Protection and Regulation Act, 1948 in 1952 which removed the anomaly marking the victory of the peasants. But what was striking that no peasant uprising took place till date in the area after the completion of Tebhaga.

The main feature of the Tebhaga Movement in Cachar was the unprecedented unity among the heterogeneous ethnic groups like the Meithais and the Bishnupriya linguistic groups, the Muslim cultivators and the ex-tea garden workers in a somewhat class like entity. Even though Cachar is predominantly a Bengali area, the Bengali peasants involved in the movement was insignificant. In fact the target of the movement were the *mirasdars* who were mostly Bengali Hindu and Muslim and to a lesser extent Hindustani. The second phase of the movement also saw unprecedented support from the students and women. In fact, the Muslim League and Jamiat Ulema Hind lent a support to the struggle.

During the post colonial period, the Communists were involved with the peasantry and working class to organise various democratic movement on various issues and demands related to the life of the common masses. But those movements did not develop as substitute of anti-capitalist movement. The main programmes of those movements were limited to organizing mass meetings rallies, demonstrations,

processions and deputation etc. Apart from organizing some democratic movement, the Communists of Cachar also adopted various means to spread the influence of the party ideology among different section of the people like students, cultural activists etc. and gathered popular support around the party.

The Communist Party of India, right from its inception faced various intra party conflict and contradiction on the issue of base political line of policy of the party under different political condition. This trend of the party became acute after independence. After independence, the CPI at first welcomed it but later its views about the Nehru Government became critical. In December 1947, the Communist Party of India characterized the Nehru Government as a whole as a government of the Indian big bourgeoisie and landlords. On this issue the Indian communists were divided into two groups -. moderate under the leadership of P. C. Joshi and the militant or radical under the leadership of B.T Ranadive and G. Adhikari.

In the Second Congress of the CPI held in Calcutta on February 28, 1948. In this Congress, both the groups of the party expressed their viewpoints but the faction led by B. T. Ranadive remained victorious and it was decided to wage revolution in India in both the agrarian and the industrial sectors. As per its programmes of strikes in factories, railways, unrest in rural areas, revolt in the police and army and the methods of guerrilla warfare on the line of Mao, the party came ahead and began mass insurrection.

As a result, the government declared the CPI as an illegal party and started to arrest the leaders of the party in large scale. By 1950, the government was to control the unlawful and violent activities of the Communists. The understanding of the situation by the communists for uprising and people were ready to accept Communism was based on false ground. There is no denying the fact that the feeling of class consciousness and class antagonism had taken place in the political behaviour of the people with the appearance of proletariat class comprising workers and peasants of India. But what they lacked was their political culture and political socialization. It appears that the leaders of the CPI launched their programmes without preparing the proper ground work. They did not pay much heed to the existing incomplete political culture and socialization of the general mass. Indian Communists had everything, political ideologies, political values and symbol. What they lacked was their efforts for orientation of the general mass towards the values of Communism.

After the failure of the in their attempt of revolution, the communists soon drifted from the path of armed revolution against the Nehru Government within a short period of time. Gradually they decided to enter into the policy of constitutional and peaceful method of accomplishing the task of revolution. In this way, the Communist Party of India completely engaged in the parliamentary politics and was busy in mobilising popular support for their political gain i.e. capturing seats in the state legislature as well as in centre.

The Communist Party of India has, undoubtedly, improved its position in the legislature. This improvement of position in the parliamentary and state legislative assemblies should not be regarded as an evidence of the party's correct political stand and growing organizational strength. Such a conclusion cannot be drawn from the election results. The increasing popular support in the elections for the Communist party of India does not prove that the people of India at that time were becoming more and more communist-minded or that the revolutionary preparedness was advancing. All it means is that the common people of India, at that time were increasingly becoming anti-Congress and finding that the Communist party of India was the most organized and strongest of all anti-congress parties, they bank their hope of defeating the Congress at the polls on this party. This anti-congress feeling does not necessarily mean socialist consciousness.

During post colonial period, groupism became dominant within the CPI on the question of the line of policy and different Communist leaders were advocating different policy to be adopted by the party for its survival. But none of them were able to fix a genuine formulation of Marxist policy to be adopted in the Indian situation. They did so merely by imitating blindly the Russian and Chinese Communist leaders. But in a real communist party, there cannot exist different group. When the communists avoid the long and complex struggle to develop oneness in approach, uniformity of thinking, singleness of purpose and concrete conception of collective leadership essential for building up a genuine communist party, then only groupism emerge in communist organization or party.<sup>577</sup>

The radical group, discarding its faith in the constitutional and parliamentary politics pleaded for militant activities to liberate the masses from the economic

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<sup>577</sup> Mukharjee, Nihar(edited), *Shibdas Ghosh: Selected Works.( Vol. II)*. Central Committee, Socialist Unity Centre of India. Kolkata – 2004. P-212.

exploitation by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat at any cost. On the other hand, the moderate groups argued that neither the soil nor the circumstance was favourable to launch violent revolution to achieve the goal. Hence the moderate communist leaders expressed their faith in the parliamentary politics and collaboration with the left political parties of the country with a view to bringing change in the existing pattern of the society. In India the radical Communists preferred the Chinese way while the moderate Communists were inclined towards the Russian new line of policy.

The episode of past long intra-party conflict and confusion ultimately led to the split of the Communist Party of India into CPI and CPI (M) in 1964. As a result of the split of the party in all India level, the organisation of the party in every parts of the country was divided on the same line. The Communists of Cachar district (Barak valley) were also divided in to two groups. In the District of Cachar, all most all the important members of the party were belongs to the left wing and the District Committee of the party was under their control. Achinta Bhattacharjee, Gopen Roy, Moni Roy Dwijendralal Sengupta, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Yogeshar Das of Karimganj and others were the important leaders of CPI (M) in Cachar district. But in 1970's Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta left the CPI (M) and joined the CPI. Among the prominent leaders of the Cachar District Committee of the party, only Motilal Jaygirdar was a rightist who remained as the absolute leader of the CPI in Cachar district with a few number of workers at different level. In Karimganj, Communist leader Sadan Das remained actively with the CPI. After the split of the party, the CPI(M) remained active in this district and the members of the CPI were very limited.

Though the communists at the national level were aware and at times expressed concern for the plight of the working class and peasants, none thought of politicizing these classes to serve the causes of the toiling masses. In spite of the fact, the peasant movements of the valley under the Communist leadership provided a hard blow to the colonial rulers and their agents- the zamindars and landlords and indirectly played a significant role in the colonial politics of the valley though they were not politicized by the leadership.

The Communists inherit a contribution in the anti-colonial, anti-feudal and anti-capitalist struggle in India. Among all the political parties of India it was the Communist Party of India which introduced for the first time in Indian political system the mobilisation of the peasantry on a class basis. The Communist Party in

Surma-Barak valley had its contribution in this regard. The credit for bringing the peasantry and working class against the colonial rulers and their native agents certainly goes to the Communists. The Communists initiated the integration of the peasantry and working class in this regard but failed to develop political culture among this section of the Indian People.

In Surma-Barak valley, the communists were more active in leading the peasant than the working class movement. This is because of the fact that there did not take place any development of modern industries in this region under the British rule except the tea industry. The peasantry of the valley first mobilized in large scale by the Communists when they emerged in Surma-Barak valley as an organized political force and was also able to bring some changes in the life of the toiling peasantry which remains the sole contribution of the communists in Surma-Barak valley.