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## **Communist Party of India in Surma-Barak Valley of Assam: A Short History**

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### **Abstract**

*During colonial period, the Communist Party of India and its allied organizations played a significant role in the freedom movement of India. After the Russian revolution, a large number of Indian revolutionaries and youths were inspired by the ideology of Communism and communist ideology started to gain ground in Indian soil. During 1920's various communist groups emerged in different parts of the country. At the initiative of M.N. Roy, the Communist Party of India was first established in Tashkent in 1920 and ultimately, the party was formed within India in 1925 by uniting different individual communist groups of the country in Kanpur. In the communist movements of India, Surma-Barak valley of Assam did not lag behind. The Communists Party and organisation also developed in Surma-Barak valley of Assam which had raised its head from the district of Sylhet which was the nerve centre of political activities at that time. The organisation of the C.P.I in Sylhet was formed in 1935 and in Cachar in 1938. Like other parts of India, the revolutionary youths and students laid the base of the CPI in Surma-Barak valley. After the formation of the CPI and subsequent joining of the erstwhile revolutionaries into the party, the old trend of militant revolutionary method of Indian freedom struggle was ended and a new trend emerged in the political arena of colonial India which was guided, inspired and controlled by the ideology of Communism.*

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Surma valley was the common name for Sylhet and Cachar districts before 1947. At present Surma-Barak valley geographically consists of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi district of Assam and Sylhet district of the then East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh). Before Independence, the entire region came under Surma valley. But after Independence Sylhet went under East Pakistan but Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet and Cachar district became the part of India in southern part of the province of Assam and came to be known as Barak valley. Surma valley has its history, culture and tradition. During colonial period, it played active role in freedom movement and other national activities. Sylhet district was the nerve centre of national and other political activities of Assam. Communist Party of India and its activities of the valley also raised its head from Sylhet district.

Communist Party of India (CPI) occupied a unique position in the politics of India and it had a remarkable role in India's freedom struggle. The idea of Communism started to gain ground in Indian soil in 1920s and 1930s. The communist movements of various parts of the world as well as India are inspired directly by the Russian Revolution of 1917. After this Revolution, a quite number of Indian revolutionaries went to Russia and attracted towards Communism. The most prominent among them was M. N. Roy. The CPI was formed Tashkent in 1920 with the initiative of M. N. Roy

with the exile Indian revolutionaries and all round assistance of the Communist International. (CI). Afterwards, Roy took active efforts to form a Communist Party within India and accordingly started correspondence with the existing communist groups which had emerged in different parts of India like- Bombay under the leadership of S. A. Dange, Calcutta under the leadership of Muzaffar Ahmed, Madras under the leadership of M. Singaravelu and Lahore under the leadership of Ghulam Hussain.<sup>1</sup>

**Formation of the Communist Party of India:** The idea to have separate and independent Communist party in India getting maturity in the mind of M. N. Roy since the day he set up the Communist Party in Tashkent. In pursuit of giving effect to his idea to establish the legal party, Roy discussed the matter with M. Singaravelu, an early Indian Communist. Thereupon, Satya Bhakta, a committed Communist of Nagpur who had established contact with Dange by February, 1923 became instrumental in setting up a legal Communist Party of India. With the help of prominent Communist leaders of that time, they formed the legal Communist Party on September 1, 1924. The party adopted a constitution of its own with its objectives to establish complete Swaraj and a society based on the principle of common ownership of property and common control of the means and instrument of production and distribution of national wealth in the interest of the whole community.<sup>2</sup> The conference held on September 1, 1924, in which the Communist Party was provisionally formed was not properly represented by the Communist delegates from different corner of the country. In order to unite all the Marxist groups in different parts of India Satyabhakta convened the First Conference of the Communist Party of India in Kanpur in December 1925<sup>3</sup> which ratified the formation of the party on all India level. Hasrat Mohani declaring the aim of the Indian communists, said that the stand “to establish Swaraj and complete independence by all fair means and after establishing Swaraj, to see that it takes the form of Soviet Republic”.<sup>4</sup>

The formation of the CPI on the national level, made it explicitly clear that Communism in India had appeared as a force to stay. Before the constitution of the Communist Party the main current of the communist revolutionaries was towards creating mass insurrection against the British rule in India by applying militant method. But with the formation of the CPI, the old method of the revolutionaries lost its importance and the idea of Communism became very popular among the erstwhile revolutionaries. After the formation of the CPI and subsequent joining of the erstwhile revolutionaries into the party, the old trend of militant revolutionary method of Indian freedom struggle was ended and a new trend emerged in the political arena of colonial India which was guided, inspired and controlled by the ideology of Communism.

**The Communist Party of India in Surma valley:** In the communist, nationalist, cultural and other allied activities of India, the Surma valley of Assam was not lagging behind. Surma valley is the continuation of Bengal plain. During colonial period, Bengal was the epicenter of revolutionary, communist, nationalist, cultural and other modern activities. So, the echo of any activity of Bengal was felt in the Surma valley of Assam during colonial period. During that period, Sylhet was the

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<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi -2005. P-248.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-56-57.

<sup>3</sup> Adhikari, G. (edited) *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India (Vol.-II, 1923-1925)*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi - 1974. P-591.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Pp-640-641.

epicenter of all the nationalist and other activity of Assam. The communist movement of Surma valley in particular and Assam in general also raised its head from the district of Sylhet.

In Surma valley, communistic ideas entered through the efforts of some young men who were indoctrinated in Calcutta. Actually these young men of the valley went to Calcutta for higher studies, and came in contact with Communism. Phanindra Nath Dutta who became a Communist in the early thirties took initiative to recruit some workers for organizing Communist party in the Surma valley. In December, 1935, he picked up six of them and the District organizing Committee of Communist Party for Sylhet was formed with six members.<sup>5</sup> They were – Lala Sharodindhu Dey, Chittaranjan Das, Digendranath Dasgupta, Chanchal Kumar Sarma, Dinesh Choudhury and Amarendra Kumar Paul.<sup>6</sup> The first meeting for the formation of the District Organising Committee of the CPI for Sylhet district was held in a mess of the Communist workers at Potuatola Lane of Calcutta. Phanindra Nath Dutta, Dr. Raman Sen, Nripen Chakraborty and Mohammad Ismail were present in this secret meeting on behalf of the Bengal Provincial Organising Committee of CPI.<sup>7</sup> The prominent Communist leaders who gave a concrete shape to the Communist Party in Sylhet district were Chittaranjan Das, Chanchal Kumar Sarma, Jyotirmoy Nandi, Prabodananda Kar, Rohini Das, Karunasindhu Roy, Biresh Mishra, Dwijen Sengupta, Hemanga Biswas, Suroth Paul Choudhury etc.<sup>8</sup> Behind the formation of the Sylhet District Organising Committee of CPI, the initiative was mainly taken by Chittaranjan Das, Lala Sharodindhu Dey and Digen Dasgupta. The six members of the newly formed Sylhet District Organising Committee of the CPI were belong to revolutionary organisation ‘*Tarun Sanga*’.<sup>9</sup> Later on the Surma Valley District Committee of CPI under Bengal Provincial Committee was formed in a conference at Thakurbari Dhigirpar under Gopalganj P.S. on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1942. Biswanath Mukharjee, a communist leader of Bengal, presided over the deliberations of the conference.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1935. File No. A-2(8)35, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities; Ahmed, Sharif Uddin (Edited). *Sylhet: History and Heritage.* Bangladesh Itihas Samiti Dhaka-1999. Pp. 257-258.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; Ahmed, Sharif Uddin (Edited). *Sylhet: History and Heritage.* Bangladesh Itihas Samiti (Bangladesh History Association). Dhaka-1999. Pp. 257-258.; Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Sreehatte Biplabbad O Communist Andolon Smritikatha.* Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta 1984. P-157.

<sup>7</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1935. File No. A-2(8)35, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities; Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha.* (Vol.I), Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986.P-76.

<sup>8</sup> Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon.* C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-10.

<sup>9</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1935. File No. A-2(8)35, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities; Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam,* Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-169.

<sup>10</sup> *Reports on the Proceedings of the First Party Conference of the Surma valley District Committee, the Communist Party of India.* Memo No. 12260-61/5-42, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1942. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.; Misra,

The Communist Party of Surma valley took birth and developed as a political force in the condition of its being declared illegal by the British Government. Like other parts of the country, the revolutionary students' and youths of Surma valley laid down the base of the communist movement and Communist Party of India in this valley. After the formation of the organisation of the Communist Party of India in Sylhet, the erstwhile revolutionary youth of the valley abandoned their old method of terrorism and whole-heartedly joined the CPI.<sup>11</sup> All most all the Revolutionaries of *Tarun Sanga* joined the CPI, the prominent among them were– Shibendra Dam, Keshab Chandra Das, Angira Kumar Sharma, Narendra Mahapatra, Dewan Mehbubur Choudhury, Yogeshwar Das, Monish Bhattacharjee, Anadi Deb, Manik Choudhury, Swadesh Ranjan Paul Choudhury, Suroshi Bhattacharjee, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Sukumar Nandi, Kumudananda Bhattacharjee, Binoy Ganguly, Achinta Bhattacharjee, Mohitosh Purkayastha, Tarapoda Bhattacharjee and others. Apart from *Tarun Sanga*, the revolutionary youths from other organisation like *Jugantar*, *Srisanga* and Welfare Association also joined the Communist Party of India. Important among them are – Hemanta Kumar Das, Satyabrata Dutta, Ranu Dutta, Ramakanta Das and Ashu Sen from *Anushilan Samiti*. From *Srisanga* and Welfare Association – Binoy Mazumder, Shashi Chandra and others joined the communist party in Sylhet.<sup>12</sup> It is to be remembered here that, though the district of Sylhet was under Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam, the organisation of the Communist Party in Sylhet was a District Committee under Bengal Provincial Committee of the party. The reason behind this event was that, when the party organisation was formed in Sylhet, there was no organisation of the party in the provincial level as well as in Assam valley districts.

When the British Government declared the Communist Party of India as an unlawful organization in 1934, the Indian Communists entered into the Indian National Congress and Congress Socialist Party. After the ban of CPI, most of its workers in this valley continued their activity for national liberation movement from the platform of the Sylhet District Congress Committee. Prominent among them were– Probodhanda Kar, Rohini Kumar Das, Nibaran Dutta, Hemanga Biswas, Dibendra Dutta, Ramnath Bhattacharjee, Bhupati Chakraborty, Nirodh Das, Dalgavinda Deb, Shashiprova Deb, Bilongamayee Kar, Matangini Das, Ranadhir Shyam, Gopesh Biswas and others.<sup>13</sup> During the banned condition of the CPI, most of the high portfolio in the District Congress was occupied by the Communists in Sylhet district. Communist leader Biresh Mishra was the Secretary of Sylhet District Congress Committee. After the arrest of Biresh Mishra, Communist leader Probodhanda Kar remained as the District Congress Secretary for many times. Lala Saharodhindu Dey was the Secretary of Sunamganj sub-divisional Congress Committee. In the Karimganj sub-divisional Congress Committee Swadesh Paul Choudhury and Yogeshwar Das

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Profulla. *The Communist Party of India in Assam: A Brief History*, North East Quarterly. Vol.-2, July 1984. P- 22.

<sup>11</sup> Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-60.

<sup>12</sup> Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. Pp-60-61.

<sup>13</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 256, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 24 September, 1935.; Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-71.

worked as Secretary.<sup>14</sup> Chanchal Kumar Sarma who was actively associated with revolutionary organization *Tarun Sanga*<sup>15</sup> was the Secretary of Habiganj and South Sylhet sub-divisional Congress Committee. In the Cachar district also, Communist leader Achinta Bhattacharjee was elected as the Secretary of the Cachar District Congress Committee in 1941<sup>16</sup> and Moni Roy was the Secretary of Silchar Town Congress Committee. Dwijen Sengupta, Jibon Banerjee, Monindra Barman were the important leaders of Cachar District Congress.<sup>17</sup>

During the ban condition of the Communist Party of India, the Communists of Surma valley were very active in spreading the communist ideology and organization. By using the Congress platform, they tactfully did their communistic activity which even the police administration failed to check. Admitting the fact, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India on 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1942b that “The Assam Government realize the difficulty of maintaining the ban against the Communist Party of India in present circumstances, and have no objections to its withdrawal so far as this province is concerned.”<sup>18</sup> As a result of the activity of the Communists within the Congress during the banned period, the popularity of the Congress started to increase in Surma valley.

**CPI in Cachar district:** In Cachar district, a unit of the party was functioning with few student activists under the guidance of the communists of Sylhet. Four student leaders of AISF laid the foundation of the CPI in Cachar district. They were - Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Phoni Bhattacharjee and Mohitosh Purkayastha.<sup>19</sup> The base of the party in Cachar district became strong when Achinta Bhattacharjee, Motilal Jaygirdar, Moni Roy, Dwijen Sengupta, Gopen Roy, Pritiranjan Das and Haridas Bhattacharjee joined the party. The main responsibility to form the Communist Party in Cachar was on Digen Dasgupta, one of the founder members of Sylhet communist organisation and Barin Dutta.<sup>20</sup> The first unit of CPI in Cachar was formed in 1938. Tarapoda Bhattacharjee was the convenor of this unit of the party. The Communists in Cachar, in order to spread the idea of Communism used to circulate various party literature and news papers. Important among those were ‘*Ganashakti*’ published from Calcutta, weekly ‘*Aga Cholo*’ published from Calcutta, ‘*Naya Duniya*’ published from Sylhet and ‘*National Front*’ published from

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<sup>14</sup> Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-63.

<sup>15</sup> Copy of Memo No. 8439-40/4-34-11, dated the 12<sup>th</sup>. September 1942, from the Superintendent of Police, Sylhet to the Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet. File No. A-3(6) 42, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

<sup>16</sup> *Short Notes on the Political Activities of Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee* S/O Ambica of Silchar, Cachar District and of Raigarh, P.S Gopalganj, Sylhet by Superintendent of Police(D.I.B), Sylhet. D.O. No. 11029 LB of 18.09.42. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

<sup>17</sup> Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-63.

<sup>18</sup> *Policy towards Communism*. From the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India. No.C.54/42. File No. A-3(6)42, Part II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

<sup>19</sup> Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-176.

<sup>20</sup> Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-118.

Bombay.<sup>21</sup> In Karimganj, the foundation of the party organisation was laid by Swadesh Paul Choudhury, Yogeshar Das and Surath Paul Choudhury.<sup>22</sup> The key role in the formation of the party in this district was mainly played by Digen Dasgupta and Barin Dutta.<sup>23</sup>

It was only after the withdrawal of the government ban from the CPI, the first open Congress of the party was held in Bombay in 1943. Accordingly, the first open district conference of the party in Sylhet was held in the same year. It was decided in the conference that, a separate branch should be formed in Cachar.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, Cachar District Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India was formed in 1943 with Surath Paul Choudhury as Secretary.<sup>25</sup> He was the Secretary for a short duration. After him, Moni Roy and then Motilal Jaygirdar worked as the Secretary of the Cachar district communist organisation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 654, Cachar. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 25th July, 1938.

<sup>22</sup> Souvenir, C.P.I (M) Cachar-Hailakandi 18<sup>th</sup> District Conference, Silchar – 2005. Pp-17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Souvenir, C.P.I (M) Cachar-Hailakandi 18<sup>th</sup> District Conference, Silchar – 2005. Pp-17-18.

<sup>24</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-73.

<sup>25</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Deputy Inspector General of Police(C.I.D) Assam*, Shillong, From Superintend of Police (D.I.B) Cachar. Memo. No. 22436/C/A-3(5) (41)/44, dated the 31<sup>st</sup>. Oct. 1943. File No. SBI/37/43 of part. II, 1943. Sub: Communism: Cachar.

<sup>26</sup> Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-180.

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