

# **CHAPTER-I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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The communist movements occupied a unique position in the politics of India and it had a remarkable role in the life of peasantry and working class. These movements started to gain ground in Indian soil in 1920s and 1930s which were guided and inspired by the ideology of Communism. The communist movements of various parts of the world as well as India are inspired directly by the Russian Revolution of 1917 which is a significant event in the history of the world. After this revolution, communist ideas began to influence a section of the nationalist and revolutionaries of India and subsequently various communist groups appeared in India and communist movements started to emerge in the various parts of India. With the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925, such movements acquired a concrete shape. In the province of Assam as well as in Surma-Barak valley, the Surma valley branch of CPI was formed in 1935 and many communist working class and peasant movements took place in Assam as well as Surma valley during colonial period.

#### **Communist movement: a brief idea**

The socio-political movement which is guided by the ideology of Communism is basically known as communist movement. The basic character of the communist movement is to build up a better social order devoid of exploitation of man by man which is substitute of the establishment of Socialism i.e. control of production as well as political system by the proletarians. Marx and Engels state, “The immediate aim of the Communists is the formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy and conquest of political power by the proletariat.”<sup>1</sup> Behind every communist movement, there are three essential pre-conditions. The first is the correct revolutionary theory and ideology, the base political line and the emergence of

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick., *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. National Book Agency (P) Ltd. Kolkata – 2011. P-51.

a genuine revolutionary party of the proletariat with adequate organizational strength to provide leadership<sup>2</sup> to the movement. The movement which fulfills those conditions can be regarded as communist movement.

The main aim of any communist movement is to establish proletarian rule of the state by destroying the existing exploitative social order or system. The idea of Communism is linked with the name of Karl Marx. According to Karl Marx, the governing factor of the social relation is the economic factor. Whenever there is a change in the economic aspect of society, the change in the social relationship is bound to occur. Therefore, the prime aim of the communist party or organization is to control the economic aspect of the society and mould it towards the required line for which the socialization of means of production and distribution is indispensable. The only method of the Communists for achieving control of the economic aspect of the society is to capture the state power through class struggle and accomplish the task of revolution.

Marxism is the only scientific philosophy among all the philosophy existing in the world. It is the system of the views and approach as well as teaching of Marx's doctrine which is based on the idea of dialectical materialism. Communism may be regarded as the highest stage of Marxism and is a global revolutionary mass movement of the proletariats consisted of working class and peasantry whose primary aim was to establish a new society based on the principle of controlling the means of production and distribution by the proletariat by destroying the society of bourgeoisie.

The communists believe that the destruction of Capitalism and establishment of Socialism in its place is inevitable and in accordance with the laws of history. The theory of class struggle of Marx is a new discovery based on his theory of the economic interpretation of the history. Marx observed that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.'<sup>3</sup> Another tenet of Marxist Communism is that the working class, in alliance with the other toiling masses, is alone capable of bringing about Socialist revolution. The main thing in the doctrine of Marx, wrote Lenin, "is that it brings out the historic role of the proletariat as the builder of a Socialist society."<sup>4</sup> Socialism is achieved after the working class gains power and after the working people's state nationalized the Capitalist-owned means

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<sup>2</sup> Mukharjee, Nihar (edited), *Shibdas Ghosh: Selected Works.(Vol. III)* Central Committee, Socialist Unity Centre of India. Kolkata – 2004. P-467.

<sup>3</sup> Ghose, Sankar. *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-395

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

of production and turns them into public socialist property. Though the working class is the most decisive force which brings about the Socialist revolution, it does not act alone. In as much as its interests coincide with those of all working people, the working class, as the leader of the revolution, can enter into alliance with other working people.

A bourgeois-democratic revolution or a national liberation movement of an oppressed nation or an anti-fascist, anti-imperialist struggle of liberation may eventually lead to a proletarian revolution. But it is the central tenet of Marxist Communism that the task of leading the masses to a successful proletarian revolution can only be undertaken by the industrial workers or the proletariat. It is through this dictatorship that the working people, led by the working class, build up Socialism. Lenin wrote “only he is a Communist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound difference between the Marxist and ordinary petty bourgeoisie. This is the touchstone on which the real understanding and recognition of Marxism is to be tested.”<sup>5</sup>

Proletarian dictatorship, according to the Communists, takes the form of Socialist democracy. “This System”, claimed Lenin, “provides the maximum democracy for the workers and peasants, at the same time it marks a break with bourgeois democracy and the rise of a new type of democracy of world historic importance, namely, proletarian democracy, or the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>6</sup> This dictatorship is to be directed against the bourgeoisie for the establishment of Socialism. During the dictatorship of proletariat there is an alliance between the working class and all the working people pledged to the cause of Socialism, but the special feature of such an alliance is that the working class has the guiding role or the leadership. After Socialism has been established through the dictatorship of the proletariat distribution takes place on the principle: “For each according to his ability, to each according to his work.”<sup>7</sup> But, later when productive forces reach a higher level, and surplus product is available in sufficient quantities, distribution will

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<sup>5</sup> Ghose, Sankar. *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. Pp-395-396.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P-396.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

be on the principle: “For each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”<sup>8</sup> It is then the highest stage of Socialism, namely, Communism is reached.

The dictatorship of proletariat may, however, assume different forms. In the Soviet Union it assumed the form of Soviet power. There power was concentrated mainly in the hands of two classes, namely, the workers and the peasants. In China, the dictatorship of the proletariat took the form of what has been called a People’s Democracy. Under the People’s Democracy of China, unlike as in the Soviet Union, a multi-party system was retained. The People’s Democratic Front included the working class, all strata of peasantry, the middle strata of urban population, a section of the intellectuals, and a part of the middle bourgeoisie.<sup>9</sup>

The communist movement has been an international movement. The Communists believe in proletarian internationalism. Does this mean that the Communist Parties all over the world should pursue the same tactics or identical forms of revolution? Lenin had founded the Communist International (CI) which, at one time, used to guide the international communist movement and to indicate to different Communist Parties of the world the path they should follow. The Communist International was dissolved in 1943, and at the time of its dissolution it was asserted that proletarian internationalism did not demand an international organization and that the international communist movement could be developed on the basis of bilateral and multilateral contacts and through world conferences.

### **Emergence of modern Communism at global level:**

The rapid growth of Industrial Revolution in Europe and other parts of the world created a big gap in the socio-economic world. History witnessed the sharp competition among the national imperial forces for colonization in the continents of America, Asia and Africa and competition among the individuals for mastering over the world economy. The former competition resulted in slavery of the economically poor and politically backward countries of the world while the latter gave birth to the rise of capitalism and monopolism. Capitalism divided the society into two hostile camps – the bourgeoisie, a parasitic force, and the proletariat, the victim of the bourgeoisie. The former though in minority, possessed the means of production and control over distribution while the latter possessed nothing more than their manual

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<sup>8</sup> Ghose, Sankar. *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-396.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. P-397.

and skilled labour. Luxuries, comforts and privileges went to the lot of the owners of the property and miseries, sufferings and sorrows surrounded the wage workers.

It was the Industrial revolution of the modern period which not only gave birth to Capitalism but also altered the entire pattern of the feudal social culture. It brought total change in the productive forces and productive relationships. The history witnessed first time a new civilization mainly based on material occupation which ultimately culminated in capitalism, monopolism and colonialism. The gigantic growth of the industrial system supported with the scientific inventions rapidly urbanized the feudal town and commercial centres by attracting the vast majority of wage-workers from the rural side and yielding huge quantity of products. Moreover, it enabled a handful of persons who were quite active and efficient in competition for accumulating wealth, to establish the ownership over means of production, distribution, financing etc. Even their influence and intervention in political affairs became quite apparent. On the other hand, the pitiable and miserable social and economic conditions of the vast majority of the wage-workers began to deteriorate day by day while the members of the affluent class sank into luxuries and comforts. Thus, modern Capitalism enlarged the gap between two antagonistic classes – bourgeoisie and proletariat.

In the opinion of Marx those who possess means of production and live on profits are bourgeoisie while proletarians are those whose only means of livelihood is their labour. The former class is parasitic, growth of which is based on exploitation of the latter. Hence the antagonism between the two classes is inherent. Marx maintained that the private ownership is the root of classes and exploitation of the poor by the rich is the root of class-struggle.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the industrial development on the basis of capitalistic mode is responsible for the miserable condition of the working class and side by side, the gap between the capitalists and proletariat started to increase with the development of the industrialization which reached to the unbridgeable point by the mid of the nineteenth century in Europe. Class consciousness of the wage earners moved towards class-antagonism. However, it remained under-current until the mighty wave of Marxism appeared and gave it a forceful push to strike against the rock of Capitalism. No doubt the utopian Socialist thinkers, finding the monopolistic growth of industrialization as

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<sup>10</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)*. Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-4.

the main root of the exploitation of the workers and responsible for their deteriorating economic conditions, they criticized the existing capitalistic system. They pleaded for establishment of a society based on equality and freedom. They wanted a society free from economic inequalities and injustices. But they badly failed to suggest any viable means to bring changes in the basic pattern of the society.<sup>11</sup>

Though the utopian Socialist thinkers could not formulate any viable doctrine, their efforts to bring about social evils to light, their severe attack on the practice of negative individualism and their dream of forming a society without privileges and distinctions fanned the flame of growing feeling of class consciousness and class-antagonism among the workers. They became the forerunners of the propounders of scientific Communism. The passage which they constructed to reach Socialism helped their successors to reach the goal.<sup>12</sup>

It was Karl Marx, who for the first time propounded the philosophy of scientific Socialism and modern Communism and made it the current of the proletarians. Karl Marx, along with Fredrick Engels made Communism a working class movement by giving it a scientific base. Marxism is based on the Marx's principle of dialectical materialism became the foundation of modern Communism i.e. the socio-economic and political thought and spread all over the world. So, the Socialism founded by the utopian socialist thinkers like St. Simon, Charles, Forerier, Robert Owen and Cabet got a check in the hands of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels who revolutionized the idea of Socialism and gave it a scientific base.<sup>13</sup>

So, from the above discussion, it is clear that the philosophy of Marxism and Communism propounded by Marx, Engels and Lenin gave a new turn to the world of socio-political and economic thoughts. It caused a revolution firstly in the world of ideas. Thereupon, it soon became a viable means in the hands of the proletariat and the poor to fight against the exploiters by organizing themselves under the banner of the communist movement. The '*Das Capital*' and the '*Manifesto of the Communist party*', being the infallible Communist creeds, served the proletariat as the weapon to be used against the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the working class of the world soon started to unite themselves with the result that the First International Association of the Workingmen came into being in 1848 with the efforts of the trade unionist leaders

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<sup>11</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)*. Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Pp-3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P-20.

of radical group and political refuses from other continental countries. It became a political forum of the working men of the world which attracted the leading socialist leaders and thinkers of the world.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, towards the end of the last quarter of the eighteenth century many strong socialist parties based on the Marxist principles appeared in the European countries. Thereupon, the socialist parties formed the Second International Association of the Workingmen in 1889 with a permanent administrative office at Brussels in 1900 which was called the International Socialist Bureau. In fact, it was confederation of the socialist parties where each party had free option to pursue freely the course of action suited to its aim and needs which ultimately paved the way for ideological conflicts among the members. However, the Second International Comintern remains in action until the revolutionary Socialist leaders of the USSR succeeded in overthrowing the Czarist regime and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, with the successful Russian Bolshevik Revolution, Communism landed on the earth as a force to stay and reckon with at the cost of huge bloodshed.<sup>15</sup>

It was during the life time of Karl Marx that Communism had become a living philosophy in Europe. During seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century many strong socialist parties appeared in the many countries of Europe, America and Africa with the result that Marxism got impetus on the international level. The successful Bolshevik Revolution of USSR and the formation of the Third Communist International under the leadership of V. I. Lenin with its headquarters at Moscow not only made Communism a permanent identity but also created the favourable circumstances for the speedy growth of Communism on the global level.<sup>16</sup>

The first communist revolution took place in Russia in 1917. In the early years, the Communists of different countries attracted towards Russia for guidance. Later, communist revolution took place in various other countries of the world and the tactics followed by the revolutionaries in these different countries were necessarily different. The Russians relied on the general strike of industrial workers followed by country-wide insurrection. The Chinese, under the leadership of Mao-Tse-Tung, relied on partisan war of the peasantry as the main weapon of the revolution. The revolution in Cuba was different from the revolution either in Russia or China. Many

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<sup>14</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)*. Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. P-38.



of the Communist Parties of western Europe, such as in Italy and France, actively participated in elections. The Communist Party of Portugal works underground and the Communist Party of South Africa believes in armed violence. During the period from 1948 to 1950 the Indian Communists sought to follow armed insurrectionary methods in Telengana on the Chinese pattern. The Indian Communists have followed different modes of struggle; they have participated in elections, organized strikes, demonstrations, Satyagraha movements, *bandhs* and other diverse forms of mass movements.<sup>17</sup>

### **Emergence of Communism in India:**

The history of the communist movement in India is rooted in the history of militant liberation movement of the country. The communist movement is not the product of Indian soil. When Communism was a recognized force in other parts of the world especially in the European continent, the people of India knew a little about it. It was the fiery Indian revolutionaries who took the real pains and applied hard efforts to carry the seeds of communist movements from abroad to their native place despite tough resistance and thorny obstacles. Their enthusiasm was so great, their courage was so vast that they over-powered the resistance and opposition and succeeded in transplanting the communist movement in India. Due to the efforts of fiery Indian revolutionaries and Khilafat enthusiasts – two trends Secularism and Communism infiltrated into Indian politics and influenced Indian political culture to a great extent. Britain being regarded common enemy not only of Indian revolutionaries and Pan-Islamic Muslims but also of the Soviet Union. Thereafter, the collaboration of these three agencies – Russian Communist leaders, Indian revolutionaries and Pan-Islamic Muslims became instrumental in spreading communist movement in India.<sup>18</sup>

The emergence and growth of Communism in India was governed by a combination of historical circumstances of two internal and one international event or contributing factors. These are: (I) The contradiction between Gandhian ideology and politics on the one hand and the revolutionary sweep of class struggle and national liberation movement on the other, (II) The stage in Indian working class movement both in quantitative and qualitative terms; and (III) The international appeal of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ghose, Sankar. *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. Pp-397-398.

<sup>18</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-IX-X.

October Revolution. Of these three, the first was the most fundamental. It was during the Non-cooperation- Khilafat Movement and thereafter that the said contradiction manifested itself most sharply.<sup>19</sup> Socialist ideas now began to spread rapidly especially because many young persons who had participated actively in the Non-cooperation Movement were unhappy with its outcome and were dissatisfied with Gandhian policies and ideas as well as the alternative Swarajist programme. So, these are the three sources or inspiring factor and it is definitely wrong to ignore any of these contributing factors behind the communist movement in India.

Since the 1920s Socialist and Communist ideas began to spread among the young intelligentsia of India. The young welcomed these ideas. Everywhere there was a new spirit of inquiry and growing discontent with the older ideologies.<sup>20</sup> It is an undisputed fact that the genesis of Indian Communism is rooted in the militant Indian forces who, being dissatisfied with and irritated of the liberal attitude of the moderate Congress leaders, appeared as a viable force to liberate the country from British Imperial rule. It were the extremist Indian who first came into direct contact with the international Communist leaders in the first decades of the twentieth century when they happened to meet them abroad during the course of their exile.<sup>21</sup>

The close contact of the Indian revolutionary leaders with the leading Communist leaders of the world caused basic change in the attitude and behaviour of the Indian revolutionaries. The trend of Communism infiltrated into the political behaviour of the Indian revolutionaries living abroad, basically in Soviet Union. There is no denying the fact that the revolutionary leaders of India established their contact with the Communist leaders of the world with an intention to get their sympathy and supports to continue their struggle against the British rule. But the spell of Marxism was so intensive and attractive that they could not protect themselves from falling line with the Communists despite the fact that all most all of them belonged to middle class society. Thus, Communism appeared as a new factor in the Indian politics which was imported from abroad. The revolutionaries served as the communicating agency to root this new idea in the Indian political behaviour. No ground for the growth of Socialism had been prepared in India through poverty,

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<sup>19</sup> Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-53.

<sup>20</sup> Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-15.

<sup>21</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-29-30.

sufferings and economic distress existed in the country to a large extent, the feeling of class consciousness and class-antagonism, the indispensable factor for the growth of Socialism.<sup>22</sup>

The period 1920s and 1930s was the formative period of the emergence and development of communist idea and communist movement in India. During 1920's the left emerged as a dominant socio-political group in India. With its Marxist ideology, it mobilized various section of the society, especially workers and peasants and took up radical socio-economic issues designed to articulate their specific grievances. It also worked to create unity among the working class and peasantry against landlordism, Capitalism which were responsible for the bad condition of the toiling masses. The youths, under the influence of Marxist and Socialist ideas, joined various revolutionary organizations. The youth movement was an active component of the emerging left bloc in the country and was considered by the government as a new and dangerous phenomenon in the Indian politics.<sup>23</sup>

After the First World War, the erstwhile revolutionaries in India gave up their old revolutionary method of national liberation movement and they accepted Marxism in their lives and believed that it is only on the basis of the idea of Communism that the real emancipation of the Indian masses is possible. For example, the revolutionary organization led by Bhagat Singh and Chandra Sekher Azad turned towards Marxism which is evident from the rename of their organization as Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA) from Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in 1928.<sup>24</sup> The young revolutionaries also established contact with the small communist groups which were sprouting up all over the country. Gradually, the revolutionary groups and individuals began to emerge out of the mood of frustration and stagnation. The first major commitment of the revolutionaries was to liberate India from foreign rule and to transform Indian society through a revolution. This commitment found a capsule expression in the slogan 'Long Live revolution' or '*Inquilab Zindabad*'.<sup>25</sup> So, the Indian revolutionaries were the base of the emergence of Communism and the formation of the Communist Party of India.

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-39.

<sup>23</sup> Singh, Madhulika. *The Emergence and Development of Communism in India*, Itihaas Darpan, Vol.3. Number 1 C 2 Jan-Dec. 2008. Pp-43-44.

<sup>24</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. Orient Longman, New Delhi-2006. Pp-231-233.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Pp-230-234.

After the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia and abrupt termination of the Non-Co-operation movement, several communist groups sprang up in different parts of India. The leaders of those groups were Sripad Amrit Dange in Bombay; who published a pamphlet *Gandhi Vs Lenin* and started his first Socialist weekly, the *Socialist*. In Bengal Mujaffar Ahmed brought out *Navyug* and later founded the *Langal* in co-operation with poet Qazi Nazrul Islam. In Punjab Ghulam Hussain and others published *Inquilab* and in Madras, M. Singaravelu founded the *People's Party* or *Worker's and Peasant Party*.<sup>26</sup> Those early prominent Communist leaders within India also formed many organizations. The first such organization was the *Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan* formed by Singaravelu of Madras in 1923. In November 1925, in Calcutta, the *Labour Swaraj Party* of Indian National Congress was organised by Mujaffar Ahmed, Qazi Nazrul Islam and Hemant Kumar Sarkar. Later in late 1926, a Congress Labour party was formed in Bombay and Kirti Kisan party in Punjab.<sup>27</sup>

The emergence, formation and the spread of the Communist Party of India and other communist organisations in India was a gradual process and event which had its root in abroad, mainly in Soviet Union. Initially the Communist party of India was formed in 1920 in Tashkent at the initiative of Manabendra Nath Roy (Popularly known as M. N. Roy) with the exile Indians who left India during the First World War in order to organise themselves in abroad for the national liberation movement of India. In Russia, inspired by the ideology of Communism, M. N. Roy and his associates - Abani Mukharjee and some *Muhajirs*<sup>□</sup> like- Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Shafiq decided to organize a Communist Party of India. Regarding Communist Party and communist movement in India, M. N. Roy played a significant role from the platform of Communist International (CI) who along with Lenin, helped evolved the Communist International's policy towards the colonial countries. Seven such exile Indian revolutionaries and Khilafat enthusiasts (*Muhajirs*), headed by M.

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<sup>26</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. Orient Longman, New Delhi-2006. P-38.

<sup>27</sup> Singh, Madhulika. *The Emergence and Development of Communism in India*, Itihaas Darpan, Vol.3. Number 1 C 2 Jan-Dec. 2008. P-39.

<sup>□</sup> The term Muhajir or Mohajir is an Arabic word meaning immigrant. Those *muhajirs* were the Khilafat enthusiasts who had reached into Soviet Union through Afghanistan in 1920 in order to receive military training to launch an armed struggle against the British to restore Khilafat in Turkey.

N. Roy, met 17 October, 1920 at Tashkent and set up a Communist Party of India<sup>28</sup> and later on Communist Party of India was formed in India in 1925.

Behind the spread of Communism in India, the Comintern was the main inspiration before the early Communist leaders of India. The founding fathers of Indian Communism borrowed the organizational and strategic skill from the leaders of the Third Communist International (CI). Since the Third Comintern was actively engaged in creating favourable circumstances for speedy growth of the communist movement on the global level, Indian leaders easily obtained all the possible help from the Comintern to achieve the mission.<sup>29</sup>

The Communist party of India formed in Tashkent as well as the Communist International adopted various strategy and methods to spread the idea of Communism in Indian soil. Both the Communist International and Communist Party of India set up in Russia provided institutional support to the Socialist convictions of the Indian revolutionaries living outside. The CPI at Tashkent was virtually a wing of the Communist International. To serve the purpose it adopted the methods like promotion of class-antagonism, organisations of peasants' and workers' of youth leagues and unions, the creation of communist cells in the existing trade unions and nationalist organisations, the encouragement of strikes and other anti-government movements and propagation of the view favourable to the Russian Revolution.<sup>30</sup> Though, the Communist Party of India was formed abroad in Tashkent at the initiative of M. N. Roy in 1920, formally the Communist Party of India was formed in India in 1925. In this year, the individual communist groups that had emerged in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and other parts of India united together into a Communist Party of India at the first Communist Conference at Kanpur.<sup>31</sup>

### **Statement of the problem:**

Like other parts of India, communist movements also developed in Surma-Barak valley of Assam. Surma valley is the common name for Sylhet and Cachar districts

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<sup>28</sup> *Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 1920 at Tashkent.* Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-290. The minutes of the meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> October in which the Communist Party of India was formed at Tashkent is given in Annexure-I.

<sup>29</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-IX-X.

<sup>30</sup> Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-47.

<sup>31</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi -2005. P-249.

before independence. Prior to independence and partition of the country, the geographical area of those two districts was known as Surma valley. Historically, the district of Sylhet was an integral part of Bengal and even geographically, the Barak valley is an extension and continuation of the Bengal plain. At present, Surma valley is geographically consists of Sylhet district of modern Bangladesh. Barak valley is composed of three districts – Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. But, Karimganj was never a part of Cachar district and was already under British rule as a sub-division of Sylhet district. It was only after independence and partition of India that three and half *thanas* of Sylhet district was integrated with Cachar district. Cachar plains consisted of Silchar and Hailakandi sub-division during colonial period and the region was known as South Cachar. Sylhet and Cachar districts (Surma valley) were the districts under the Dacca division of Bengal till the region was transferred to the newly created Chief Commissioner's province of Assam in 1874.

Sylhet was never a part of Assam prior to 1874. But when the Chief Commissionership of Assam was created in 1874, Sylhet was incorporated in this new province. Sylhet passed into the hands of the British in 1765, together with the rest of Bengal. The inconvenience of governing Assam as an appendage of the unwieldy province of Bengal had long been recognized. It was remote and difficult to access, and few Lieutenant Governors ever visited it. The proposals for its severance were always vigorously opposed until Sir George Campbell became the Lieutenant Governor. This strenuous ruler, though he took a greater personal interest in this out-of-the-way tract than any of his predecessors had done, speedily became convinced of the impossibility of carrying on the administration of Bengal on the system which then prevailed. He was strongly of opinion that the position of the Bengal Government should either be raised, by amalgamating the Board of Revenue with it, or lowered by lopping off some of its more remote territories. The Government of India preferred the latter alternative, to which Sir George Campbell assented; and, on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1874, the district which now forms the province of Assam, with the exception of Sylhet and of tracts subsequently acquired were separated from the Government of Bengal and formed into a Chief Commissionership. On the 12<sup>th</sup> September of the same year Sylhet was incorporated in the new province. Lieutenant

Colonel R. H. Keatinge, was appointed the first Chief Commissioner<sup>32</sup> of this newly created province.

Cachar was annexed by the Dimasa king of Maibong during the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Govinda Chandra, the last king of Cachar who had good terms with the British was assassinated in 1830. Later in 1832, in the absence of any legal heir and successor of Govinda Chandra, the Cachar plain was annexed by the British Government in 1832. After the annexation of this district, the British Government posted Thomas Fisher, the Superintendent of Survey in Sylhet as the in-charge of Cachar district. Like Assam, Cachar was declared to be a non-regulated province under regulation X of 1822.<sup>33</sup>

In respect of language, culture and tradition Cachar has a little similarity with Assam proper. This fact was long been noticed by the colonial administrators. R. B. Pemberton while writing a report on the eastern frontier of British India observed that from Sylhet to Jirighat, the border of Manipur, the geographical feature, the appearance of the people, language, culture and tradition are alike.<sup>34</sup> So, it is clear from this statement of Pemberton that the Cachar district has no similarity with Assam proper. Socially, linguistically and geographically Cachar was a part of Bengal. After the annexation of Cachar, the attention of the British Government was drawn by this fact. Considering this historical fact, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India decided that Cachar be placed under the control of the Dacca Commissionership and managed by the same regulations as existed for the neighbouring districts of Sylhet. Accordingly in 1836, Cachar was included in Dacca division and the Superintendent's headquarter was shifted from Dudhpatil to Silchar. In the meantime, in 1833 Thomas Fisher was appointed as the first Superintendent of Cachar. Since then the area within the districts of Sylhet and Cachar was known as Surma valley<sup>35</sup> and this area was known by this name till independence and partition of the country.

The colonial rulers were more concerned with their administrative convenience and financial interest rather than the socio-cultural interest of the people of India. The inconvenience of governing the Assam districts as a division of the unwieldy Bengal

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<sup>32</sup> Gait, Sir Edward., *A History of Assam*. Surjeet Publications. Delhi – 2004. Pp-387-388.

<sup>33</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-19

<sup>34</sup> Pemberton, R.B. *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta – 1835. P-206.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. Pp-19-20.

Presidency had long been recognized. Quite different local conditions and the unique position thereof its European planters warranted the creation of a new province to enable administrative efficiency. Accordingly, Assam proper, together with Cachar, Goalpara, Garo hills and other hill districts was formed into a Chief Commissioner's province on 6 February, 1874. Although vast in area, this new province with its small population of 2,443 thousands had a meager revenue potential. To make it financially viable, the authorities decided in September to incorporate into it the populous Bengali speaking district of Sylhet.<sup>36</sup> Neglecting the socio-cultural affinity and emotional bond of the people of Sylhet and Cachar districts, the colonial government detached Sylhet and Cachar districts from the Dacca division of the Bengal in 1874 and transferred them into the newly created Chief Commissioner's province of Assam.

The districts of Sylhet had to bear the burnt of partition when India was partitioned in 1947 on the basis of two nation theory. By a referendum, Sylhet was added to East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) after partition. But three and half *thanas* of Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet viz. Karimganj, Ratabari, Patharkandi and Badarpur were retained in India as they were considered as Hindu majority area and became Karimganj sub-division of Cachar district of Assam. Cachar, after independence, reconstituted with four sub-divisions viz. Karimganj, Silchar, Hailakandi and Haflong.

After independence, Cachar district was reorganized from time to time by the government largely due to political expediency and partly for administrative convenience. Haflong sub-division was attached to Diphu in 1951 to form the United North Cachar and Mikir Hills district. This district was bifurcated into Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills district in 1970.<sup>37</sup> Karimganj sub-division of Cachar was declared a separate district in 1983. Hailakandi sub-division became a separate district in 1989. The erstwhile Silchar sub-division of Cachar at present is known as Cachar district. The present Cachar and Hailakandi consisted as Cachar district and present Karimganj district was the sub-division of Sylhet district during colonial period. The present Barak valley constituted of three districts – Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Sylhet is a district now in Bangladesh. Before independence, the region

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<sup>36</sup> Guha, Amalendu. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. Indian Council of Historical Research. New Delhi - 1977. P-27.

<sup>37</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-21.



under Sylhet and Cachar districts was known as Surma valley and after partition the erstwhile Cachar district came to be known as Barak valley and this area is the main concern of the present study. It is to be mentioned here that the communist activity and movements of Sylhet after 1950 did not included in the present study and it focused mainly on the study of Barak valley.

The main aim of colonial rulers behind administering India was maximization of profit by exploiting different sector of Indian economy which is the inherent character of Capitalism and Colonialism. The colonial administrative and economic policy was mainly responsible for the stagnation and decline in agricultural production and bad condition of the working class and peasantry. The Indian economic sector which was largely affected by the colonial economic policy was agriculture. It is because of the fact that from the Permanent Settlement to Ryotwari and Mahalwari system, the main aim of the colonial government was continue the system of exploitation.

Colonialism brought about momentous social and economic transformation during which centuries-old social and economic relationships and institutions were dissolved and replaced by new relationships and institutions. In the real of agriculture too, new agrarian relations and class structure came into being. New classes, absentee landlords and money-lenders at the top and tenants-at-will, share-croppers and agricultural labourers at the bottom, came into existence. A new agrarian structure was born that was neither traditional or feudal nor capitalist. There occurred the growth of tenancy and a hierarchy of intermediaries between the state and the actual cultivators on a scale unprecedented in Indian history. Broadly speaking these changes came as a result of the introduction of new land systems, the heavy land revenue demand, legal and political changes, the destruction of indigenous industries, the disintegration of the age old union between agriculture and industry, the integration with the world capitalist economy in a subordinate position. More specifically, Indian agriculture was commercialised without any change occurring in its technical base or organisation of production. One major consequence of the colonisation of Indian economy and agriculture was stagnation in agricultural output,

decline in productivity, and fall in the per capita income, availability of food, and in general the increasing impoverishment of the cultivator.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the new land tenure and land revenue policy, the rate of exploitation of the peasantry became very high. In order to resist all sorts of exploitation, the peasantry in different parts of India rose in outburst against landlords, money-lenders and other intermediaries which were nothing but sporadic outbursts and expression of anger of the peasantry. Those outbursts, due to lack of proper ideology, leadership and organization was easily suppressed by the colonial rulers and their agents.

When the Communists emerged in the Indian political scene and national liberation movement, they intensified their struggle to unite the peasantry and working class and organized movements in different parts of India including Assam against landlordism, Capitalism and Colonialism which were responsible for the bad condition of the peasantry and working class. With the formation of the Communist Party of India and its allied organizations during 1920s and 1930s, the existing peasant and working class movements got a new direction and the Communists started to organize those movements on the basis Communist ideology.

In Assam, though, at provincial level, the CPI organization was formed in 1943<sup>39</sup>, but the organization of the party was formed in the Sylhet district of this province in 1935. In this year, the Sylhet District Organizing Committee of the party was formed at Calcutta.<sup>40</sup> The committee was formed with Chittaranjan Das as Secretary which was consisted of six members.<sup>41</sup> There was a unit of CPI in Cachar district which was formed in 1938 under Sylhet District Committee of the party. Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Mohitosh Purkayastha, Tarapoda Bhattacharjee and Phoni Bhattacharjee – the four student leaders of All India Students' Federation (AISF) laid the foundation of party unit in Cachar.<sup>42</sup> The Cachar District Organising Committee

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<sup>38</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. Orient Longman, New Delhi-2006. Pp-335-336.

<sup>39</sup> *Communist Survey, September 1943*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated September the 25<sup>th</sup> of 1943, 284/92 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(7) 43, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

<sup>40</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.

<sup>41</sup> Ahmed, Sharif Uddin (Edited). *Sylhet: History and Heritage*. Bangladesh Itihas Samiti (Bangladesh History Association). Dhaka-1999. Pp. 257-258.

<sup>42</sup> Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-176.

of CPI was formed in 1943.<sup>43</sup> During the colonial period, the district of Sylhet was the nerve centre of communist and other allied activities of the province of Assam. The idea of Communism and communist movements of Surma-Barak valley also had raised its head from the district of Sylhet. The Communist Party of India in Surma valley took its birth, nourished and developed in the condition of its being declared illegal by the British Government.

Later on, the Assam Valley District Organizing Committee of the party was formed in Brahmaputra valley in 1942-43. The First meeting for the formation of the CPI organization in Assam valley was held from 31<sup>st</sup> December 1942 to 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1943.<sup>44</sup> In this meeting, the Assam Valley District Organizing Committee of the CPI was formed with Jadhunath Saikia as Secretary and other nine members. This committee was functioning under the Bengal Provincial Organizing Committee of the party. The formation of the Assam Provincial Organizing Committee of the CPI was decided by the First Congress of the party held in Bombay in May, 1943. After the party Congress, the Assam Provincial Organizing Committee of the Communist Party of India was formed with Biresh Chandra Mishra as Secretary.

In Surma valley, almost all the Communist leaders and workers emerged from the revolutionary organizations such as *Yugantar*, *Anushilan Samiti* and *Tarun Sanga* etc. Behind it, both national and international situation worked as contributing factor. The October Socialist Revolution of Russia in 1917 was the most important international contributing factor. Apart from this, the effort of various individuals from abroad to spread the idea of Communism in India played a vital role. The most prominent among was M. N. Roy, who worked as a member of Communist International (CI) to spread the idea of Communism in India.

The impact of Gandhian policies also largely worked upon the youths of Assam as well as Surma valley. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5, 1931 disillusioned a large number of youths and students of Surma valley as well as Assam. And seething with discontent against police excesses and thirsting for revenge, these young men, particularly those from the urban areas of Surma valley formed revolutionary groups.

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

<sup>44</sup> *Communist Survey, September 1943*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated September the 25<sup>th</sup> of 1943, 284/92 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(7) 43, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

Most of these groups merged into *Tarun Sanga*.<sup>45</sup> All most all the early Communist leaders of Surma valley emerged from the revolutionary organization *Tarun Sanga*.

After the First World War, the working class in India emerged as an organized force which had reflected in the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920. The main aim of working class behind the formation of their own organization was bringing the working class under one central body to defend their legitimate rights and demands. The problems connected with the working condition of labourers, such as those existed in tea plantation of Assam were generally overlooked by the Congress leaders. Labour leaders and organizers all over India naturally felt the necessity of organizing a central body to effectively guide the labour movement. In 1920, they formed the All India Trade Union Congress and since then the latter began to represent workers' interest. All trade unions that existed in India by then soon got themselves affiliated to AITUC. So, the later 1920s and early 1930s witnessed various strikes all over the country by the working class.

During the period under study, indeed various communist peasant and working class movements existed in this valley. Among them, the Nankar Rebellion, the peasant movement of Bhanubil of Sylhet district, the Tebhaga Movement of Cachar district, movement of the railway employees' in 1945<sup>46</sup>, Strike of the labourers of Chatak Cement Factory, the labour strike of Arunabandh Tea Estate of Cachar and the Strike of the Surma Valley *Dak Mazdoor* Union in 1946 are most significant. Those movements played important role in freedom struggle and politics of the valley in particular and India in general as well as shaping the Indian nation.

In Surma valley, in almost all the peasant movements, the leadership was provided by the Communists. Even before the formation of the trade unions like AITUC, the working class in Surma-Barak valley organized various movements which were related to the cause of their survival. During the colonial period, in Surma valley, the Communist leaders in the early years in their public address often raised the problems of the garden labourers, but they could not launch any intensive trade union activity in the garden areas possibly because of difficulties of undertaking

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<sup>45</sup> Misra, Profulla. *The Communist Party of India in Assam : A Brief History*, North East Quarterly,(A Journal of Social Science Research) Vol.-2, July 1984. Pp-229-230.

<sup>46</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1945*, Cachar district, From S.P.(D.I.B) Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.67-90/C, dt. 28/11/45, Silchar. File No. WCR – 1945.

organizational works in the European owned gardens.<sup>47</sup> In spite of the fact, attempts were made by the Communist workers to unionise tea garden workers.

Wage earning labourers in Assam comprised primarily the immigrant labourers who worked mainly in the European owned tea gardens. The latter already were fettered with problems, both financial and otherwise even since the beginning of the tea industry in Assam. Under the circumstances, the volume of dissatisfaction grew among the garden labourers. The price rise at this period affected other wage earners as well. The Non Co-operation Movement for the first time gave scope to the Surma valley tea labourers to organize themselves in their protests and legitimate demands. During and after the Non-cooperation Movement, like other parts of India, the working class of Assam as well as Surma valley also rose in various revolts.

In regard to the labour uprisings, the Surma valley plantation labourers also did not lag behind. In Surma valley, one of the earliest uprisings of the working class took place in the Chargola valley of Karimganj sub-division when the tea garden labourers in this area decided to leave their gardens. Here the tea labourers struck on and from 2 May, 1921 demanding an increase in the rate of their wages. By about the middle of the month, between six to seven thousand *coolies* had left the garden. Two gardens in the Chargola valley had lost practically their labour force.<sup>48</sup> This outburst of the labourers is known as 'Chargola Exodus'. Undoubtedly, the Chargola Exodus made the labourers more conscious about their rights as well as strength against the exploitation by European planters.

In the year 1938, there were three tea garden strikes in Sylhet. In that year, five tea gardens of Cachar were also on strike. The *Sylhet-Cachar Cha Mazdoor Sangathak Committee* was formed in 1938, at the initiative of Barin Dutta, Probodhananda Kar and others. Renamed as *Sylhet-Cachar cha Bagan Mazdoor Union*, it was registered under the Trade Union Act on 27 April, 1939.<sup>49</sup> The formation of this organization of the tea garden labourers gave an impetus to the growth of tea garden labourers' movements. At that time, a wave of strikes broke out in the valley. The most significant of them was the strike in the Arunabandh Tea Estate that started in early April, 1939 and continued for forty days which was able to

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<sup>47</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*. No. 969, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 5 May, 1945.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, 1921-22, Government of Assam, 1922. P-35.

<sup>49</sup> *Annual Report on the Working of Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act (Act XXII of 1932) for the Year Ending 30 September 1938*. ; *Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 12 September, 1938. (A. K. Das to A.K. Chanda.)

mobilize popular support from all most every walk of life. Another notable strike took place in the Allenpur Tea Estate of Cachar.<sup>50</sup> So, the Communists of Surma-Barak valley played an active role in the labour uprisings of the valley.

Apart from the tea labourers, Communists in this province were also able to organize the working class from other sector. In 1940, the Surma Valley *Dak Mazdoor* Union was active in organizing the *Khalasis* at Chhatak and Fanchuganj steamer stations in Sylhet. Some of the Sylhet Communists were also working in the Bengal and Assam Railroad Workers Union.<sup>51</sup> During the colonial period, railway workers also formed an important component of the working class in Assam. Early in 1940, the leftist workers also tried to unite and organize the railway workers of the province to a single union. To achieve this, leaders from Bengal, prominent among whom were Birendranath Dasgupta, General Secretary of Assam-Bengal Railroad Workers Union and S. Gurupada Swami, General Secretary of All India Railway Federation, came to Badarpur. They opened negotiations with the two rival unions then existing in Assam i.e. Railway Employees' Union and the Assam-Bengal Railroad Workers Union and succeeded in amalgamating these two into one in the name of Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union.<sup>52</sup>

From January 1945, railway workers in Assam started to demand an increase in their basic pay and dearness allowance and supply of rations. In November 1945, under the Communist initiative railway men at Badarpur, Lumding and Mariani observed anti-retrenchment day. As many as five meetings were held at Badarpur and Gouhati during the same month demanding pay increase and other things. The railway men gave a treat of general strike if their demands were not fulfilled. At the same time, the postal employees also expressed their anger by holding public meetings. They had demands for increased pay and dearness allowances from February 1946 and organize a strike.<sup>53</sup> So, the Communists played significant role in the working class movement of the province during the colonial period.

Like the organization of the Communist Party of India, the organization of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) emerged in Surma valley district of Assam and later on

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<sup>50</sup> *Report of the Political Situation in Assam* dated 26 August, 1940 by J. C. Dutt, Deputy Central Intelligence Officer, Shillong. File No. A-8(8A)/40, Police Department, Special Branch, Govt. of Assam.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-150.

<sup>53</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 78, Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 12 January, 1946.

Kisan Sabha was formed at provincial level. At national level, the All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936. In the same year, its branch was also formed in Surma valley with Lala Shoradindhu Dey as Secretary. At the initiative of Surma Valley Kisan Sabha, the First Peasant Conference of the valley was held at Beheli of Sunamganj sub-division of Sylhet district. This peasant conference of Beheli had great impact which had created awareness among the peasant community of Sunamganj as well as Sylhet.<sup>54</sup> By their initiative and activity, the Communists in Surma valley established their complete hold over the peasantry of the valley.

The number of Kisan Sabhas went on increasing in Sylhet district during the years 1937-40. By 1938 tenants succeeded in winning their immediate demand for the suspension of zamindary rent collection in one case and remission in another. Meanwhile, an organized Kisan movement raised its head in the Sunamganj, Sadar and Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet. In 1938-39, there was a considerable tension between landlords and tenants in Karimganj sub-division.<sup>55</sup> In the early months of 1939, the landlord-tenant conflict rose to such a high in Gouripur, Bhatipara and Selbores estates of Sunamganj that the government had to rush a party of armed police there to maintain peace.<sup>56</sup>

The branch of Kisan Sabha also formed in Cachar district in 1937.<sup>57</sup> Like Sylhet district, a mass awareness took place among the peasant community of Cachar during 1938-39. During this period, branches of Kisan Sabha was formed in various villages of Cachar district like – Boaljur, Ramnagar, Udharbond, Chatla, Joypur, Lakhirpur, Sonai etc.

In Surma-Barak valley, efforts were made by the leftists to organize the students under a federation. Since 1938, it may be mentioned, regular Communist groups also clandestinely operated in two districts of Surma valley. In the North Sylhet sub-division, in Karimganj, in Habiganj, in Moulvibazar and in some places of Cachar, the party's ideology was made popular by a band of dedicated communist workers. They even published a party's organ *Naya Duniya* which was edited by Jyotirmoy Nandi and through it theoretical education was imparted to the cadres of

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<sup>54</sup> Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-8.

<sup>55</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 969, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 7 June, 1939.

<sup>56</sup> *Notes on the Political Activities of Sureshchandra Deb*, File No. C-319/1942, Confidential B, 1942.

<sup>57</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 584, Cachar. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 17 December, 1937.

the party. This attracted a section of the youths in the Surma valley who formed a Students' Federation in 1939 under the Secretaryship of Mohitosh Purkayastha.<sup>58</sup> The Cachar district was also an important centre of students' activity. In the winter of 1939, a conference of the Surma Valley Students' Federation was held at Silchar.<sup>59</sup>

During colonial period, Surma valley was not lagging behind in freedom struggle and other anti-British activities. The peasants of this valley, like other parts of India equally rose in revolt to safeguard their interests against exploitation by landlords in particular and Colonialism in general. All the peasants' uprisings which took place in different parts of India were easily suppressed by the government as these uprisings lacked any political ideology and organization. Assam was no exception in this field. But the peasant uprisings that took place during the third and fourth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were long lasting, militant in nature and successful in many respects. The reason behind this fact was the emergence of the Communists in Indian politics and their initiative to mobilize the peasantry against feudal exploitation as well as alien rulers.

During colonial period and even after independence, communist movements played an important role in politics of India. During the period under study, indeed various communist peasant and working class movements existed in Surma-Barak valley. But a little attempt has been made yet to explore various communist movements in Surma-Barak valley. Therefore the proposed study under the title "Communist Movements in Surma - Barak Valley: A Historical Study (1935-1964)" is an attempt to explore various communist movements and their significance in Surma-Barak valley.

### **Objectives:**

The basic objective of the research work is to study the communist movements of the Surma-Barak valley and their role in the freedom struggle and politics of the valley. Infact, a good number of communist movements took place in Surma Barak valley against the colonial rule and its exploitation. Those movements under the leadership of Communists and their organization took dominant part in mobilizing and

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<sup>58</sup> Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol.III)* Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati-1999. P-139.

<sup>59</sup> Misra, Profulla. *The Communist Party of India in Assam: A Brief History*, North East Quarterly,(A Journal of Social Science Research) Vol.-2, July 1984. P-10.



organizing the peasantry and working class against the colonial rulers and their native agents. Hence, the basic objective of the research work is to study:

- I) The historical background of communist movements in Surma- Barak valley.
- II) The formation and development of communist organizations in Surma-Barak valley.
- III) The involvement of the peasants and working class in communist movements in Surma-Barak valley.
- IV) The various communist movements in Surma-Barak-valley during 1935-1964.
- V) The role of communists of Surma valley in the freedom struggle of India.
- VI) The impact of the communist movements in the politics of Surma-Barak valley.
- VII) The role of communists during post colonial period in Barak valley and also the split of the Communist Party of India and its impact in Barak valley.

### **Methodology:**

The proposed study has been based on both primary and secondary sources, field study and private source. Primary source of data includes archival record, legal record, Intelligence Report, Organisational Reports etc. Secondary source of data included book, journal, news paper and other available materials.

In order to explore primary source and data; Cachar District Record Room; Office of the Superintendent of Police (DSB) Cachar, Silchar; Office of the Addl. Director General of Police, (S.B) Headquarter, Assam Police, Kahilipara, Guwahati; Assam State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati; National Library, Kolkata; National Archives of India, New Delhi; Office of Superintendent of Police (Sylhet Division), Sylhet, Bangladesh; Sylhet District Bar Library (Bangladesh) has been visited. Secondary as well as primary sources are collected from various individuals; Silchar District Library; Assam University Library, Silchar; National Library, Kolkata; Divisional Govt. Public Library, Sylhet (Bangladesh); Library of Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Samsad, Sylhet (Bangladesh); Arun Kumar Chanda Memorial Library, Gandhi Bhawan, Silchar; Dwijendralal Sengupta Smiriti Pathagar, Malugram, Silchar (CPI(M) Office); Library of CPI(M) Assam State Committee, Hedayetpur, Guwahati; B. C. Gupta Memorial Library, G. C. College, Silchar; and the Library of Womens' College Silchar has been visited. For collecting relevant data and their analysis, basically empirical and analytical methods have been followed.

## **Research Questions:**

The study intended to find out the answers of the following research questions.

1. What were the circumstances or causes for the rise and growth of communism in Surma-Barak valley in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?
2. How the Communist organisations were formed in Surma-Barak valley?
3. How the peasants and working class were mobilised towards communist movements by communist leaders in Surma-Barak valley?
4. What was the role of communists in different anti-colonial movements and who were the ring leaders of communist movements in Surma-Barak valley?
5. What was the role of the communists in Barak valley during post colonial period?
6. What was the impact of the split of the Communist Party of India in Barak valley?

## **Review of Literature:**

Though, a good number of works have been conducted on communist movements at national level and few have been done at provincial level, but the Communist movements of Surma-Barak valley did not exclusively touched by any scholar. Here, we have reviewed some published works related to the present study.

The memoirs and experience of some Communist leaders as well as activists of the communist movements of the valley and the works of some later Communist leaders are the important source materials for reconstruction of the history of the communist movements of Surma-Barak valley. Chanchal Kumar Sarma's memoirs – *Surma Upatyakar krishak O Sramik Andolonor Itihas* and *Srihatte Biplobbad O Communist Andolon- Smritikotha*, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta's *Je Path Diye Elam*, Ajoy Bhattacharjee's *Nankar Vidroha* (three vols.) and Hemago Biswas's *Ujan Gang Baiya* are very important source on Communist movements of Surma-Barak valley. Apart from this, Hemen Das's *Asomar Communist Andolanor Chamu Itihas*, Nandeshwar Talukdar's *Smritir Potot Asomar Communist Andolon* is also the valuable source of information of the study.

Some published works are also available in the field of communist movements of Surma-Barak valley. Important among them are – *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)* by Girban Ranjan Biswas which basically deals with the historic Tebhaga Movement. Here the author established the fact that, though, the Tebhaga

Movement started in North Bengal, it was also spread to the different pockets of Cachar district. Tebhaga Movement was the first politically organised mass and militant peasant movement led by the Communist Party of India as well as Kisan Sabha. The research articles of Prafulla Misra like – *The Communist Party of India in Assam: A Brief history* and *Communist Movements in Assam* are authentic source on Communist Party as well as communist movements in Assam. Two books by Nishith Ranjan Das – *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party* and *Swadinata Sangrame Srihatta-Cachar* are also important works on communist organizations in Surma-Barak valley. In addition, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* by Amalendu Guha and *Political history of Assam* (three vols.) edited by H. K. Barpujari and A. C. Bhuiyan also provides valuable information about communist movements of Assam as well as Surma valley.

*Surma Upothyokar Krisak O Sramik Andoloner Itihas* by Chanchal Kumar Sarma is an important book on the communist movement of Surma-Barak valley. In this book the author vividly discussed about formation of Communist Party of India in Surma valley as well as various communist movements of this valley like the peasant movement of Bhanubil and Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district etc. Indeed the book is an immense source for study of communist movements of Surma valley.

*Sreehatte Biplabbad O Communist Andolon: Smritikatha* by Chanchal Kumar Sarma is a lucid narration of the Communist movements in Surma-Barak valley. Here the author discussed various activities of the Communists of the valley in mobilizing the peasantry and working class and their role in the freedom struggle of India. The book indeed a source of information of the research work.

Ajoy Bhattacharjee's *Nankar Vidroha* (three vols.) is the narration of the direct experience of the communist peasant movements of Surma valley, especially of Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district. This book is an immense source of information on the communist peasant movement of Surma valley, especially on Nankar Rebellion during the period under study. The writer himself was a leader of the historic Nankar Rebellion in Sylhet district. So, he was an eye witness of this great rebellion. Here the writer elaborately discussed various aspect of this rebellion. Background of the Nankar Rebellion, beginning of rebellion in scattered way and how the rebellion had took organised shape with the emergence of Communists in Surma valley has clearly discussed by the author. The author also has discussed the trend, spread and impact of

the rebellion in Sylhet district. The contemporary political situation like the Second World War, situation created during partition, Sylhet referendum and emergence of Muslim League government and its response to the Nankar Rebellion were briefly discussed. Indeed the book has largely helped to study the communist peasant movement, especially the Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district of Surma valley.

*Peasant Movement in North East India 1946-1950* by Girban Ranjan Biswas is a very important work in the field of communist-peasant movement in Barak valley. The Book deals with economic condition of peasant of Cachar, evolution of land tenure system, emergence of Kisan Sabha, mobilisation of peasantry and Tebhaga Movement in Cachar district. The scholar highlights about nature of Tebhaga Movement in Barak valley and discusses origin, spread and course of Tebhaga Movement in Cachar. The book is an important work in communist peasant movement of Cachar district.

*The Communist Party of India in Assam: A Brief History* by Prafulla Misra provides valuable information about origin and development of communist ideology and organisation in Assam especially Communist Party of India. It discusses origin and development of communist student organisation and trade union organisation in Assam as well as Surma Valley. The scholar also explains some trade union movements of Assam during British period.

*Political History of Assam* (edited) by A. C. Bhuiyan is an important source of the communist movement of Assam during colonial period. The volume-II and volume III of the book elaborately discuss origin and growth of communist movement, ideology and organisation in Assam as well as of Surma-Barak Valley. Various trade union, peasant and student movements of Assam during that period are vividly discussed in the book. It highlights birth and growth of various communist led organisations and also Communist Party of India (C.P.I). Role of leftists, students, peasants and labourers in communist movement as well as in freedom struggle are also discussed in the book. Hence the book is one of the important accounts of communist movement of Assam.

The book *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* by Amalendu Guha is a very important and authentic source to know and understand trend of communist movement in Assam as well as of Surma valley. The book throws light on industrial unrest and emergence of trade union and their movements. It discusses various trade union and peasant movements of Assam

lucidly. Though discussion regarding communist movement is not elaborate, yet the book is a help for research in the field of communist movement.

### **Organization of the Research Work:**

The study is divided into six chapters, beginning with an introduction and ending with a conclusion.

#### **Chapter I: Introduction**

The first chapter of the study is '**Introduction**'. This chapter deals with the statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions, methodology of the study, review of related literature and also the short idea of Communism and a brief discussion of each and every chapter of the study.

#### **Chapter II: Formation and Growth of Communist Organisations**

The second chapter under the title "**Formation and Growth of Communist Organisations**" deals with the formation of the Communist Party of India in Surma-Barak valley in particular and India in general. This chapter is also deals with the different activities of the Communists of India relating to the life of the working class and peasantry as well as toiling masses of India from the period of the inception of the Communist Party of India in 1925 to the partition of the country in 1947. Apart from this, this chapter also includes discussion on the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha, All India Trade Union Congress, All India Students' Federation, Cultural organizations such as All India Progressive Writers Association, Indian People's Theatres Association and the role of the Indian Communists in moulding those organization according to their own political and ideological line in Surma-Barak valley.

The above subject matter of the chapter also discussed in the context of Surma-Barak valley as well as the province of Assam. In this regard, emphasis was laid on the activity of the Communists in Surma-Barak valley in consolidating of the peasantry of this valley.

### **Chapter III: Communist Movements in Surma Valley (1935-1945)**

Chapter III of the study under the title ‘**Communist Movements in Surma Valley (1935-1945)**’ deals with the peasants and working class movements under the banner of the Communist organisations during the period 1935-1945. In this chapter, we have tried to discuss about the working class and peasantry during the contemporary period and how those classes acquired political consciousness in India in general as well as Surma-Barak valley in particular. With the emergence of the Communists in Surma valley, the existing isolated peasant uprising of the valley had got a new momentum, acquired more and more ideological and political skill under the guidance of the Communists to fight for their legitimate rights. The Bhanubil peasant movement and Rebellion of the Nankars of the Sylhet district were most significant peasant movement of the valley which was concretely organized by the Communists in this valley and these things have been discussed in this chapter.

### **Chapter IV: New Dimension of Communist Movements (1946-1950)**

The title of the chapter IV of the study is ‘**New Dimension of Communist Movements (1946-1950)**’. In this chapter, we have discussed the peasant and working class movements of Surma valley which were organized under the Communist leadership in more organized and militant form. 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. With the end of the Second World War, a period of mass upsurge opened in India. Even after the independence, the condition of the Indian peasantry was not satisfactory. The post independence Congress rule, as the successor of the Imperialist rule of Britain, adopted capitalist path for the development of India. This was done without eradicating feudal elements and ending their exploitation on which was super imposed the exploitation of the capitalist class. In this situation, the kisan struggles brought about a substantial change in the alignment of class forces in the rural areas. During post independence period, the peasant movement continued in different parts of the country with full enthusiasm and acquired more militant nature. As a result of the intensive movement of the Nankars, the East Pakistan Government was bound to abolish the Nankar system in 1950.

The Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district again raised its head after the war with full determination and militancy directly under the influence of the Communists. The

revolt also spread to different areas of the district. Everywhere the Nankars refused to render obligatory services to the zamindar family. In this situation, 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.

In Cachar district, though the branch of Kisan Sabha was formed in 1937, it was not possible for the Communist peasant activists of the district to launch any organised militant movement before 1945-46. Of course, sporadic outburst took place against tyrant landlords in local pockets. But this did not leave any deep impact upon the whole peasantry. The year 1945-46 was the period of great peasant uprising in Bengal and Assam. When the Tebhaga was started in Bengal, its echo was directly felt upon the peasantry as well peasant activists of Cachar district of Assam. Though the Tebhaga Movement was first started in North Bengal by the clarion call of Kisan Sabha, the movement was organized in Cachar district of Assam with same intensity like that in Bengal. Here we have tried to establish the fact that the Tebhaga was not only a Bengal phenomenon but also carries equal significance in the life of the share-croppers of the Cachar district.

#### **Chapter V: Struggle for Survival of the Communists in Barak Valley**

The title of the chapter V is ‘**Struggle for Survival of the Communists in Barak Valley.**’ This chapter deals with the inter-party conflict of the communists on the question of the line of policy, split of the party and its role in socio-political issues of Barak valley. During post colonial period, the Indian communists faced various intra-party conflicts regarding its strategy. During this period, groupism became dominant within the party on the question of the different policies of communists and many Communist leaders were advocating different policies 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 by the party and ultimately there took place a split in CPI. All these things and other issues have been discussed in this chapter.

#### **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

The last chapter of the study is the **conclusion**. This chapter deals with the summary and conclusion of the entire chapters of the study.