

CHAPTER-II

FORMATION AND GROWTH OF COMMUNIST ORGANISATIONS

CHAPTER-II

Formation and Growth of Communist Organisations

The Communist Party of India was initially formed in Tashkent in 1920 with the initiative of M. N. Roy with the active support 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 and leaders in different parts of India. By the end of 1922, through emissaries like Nalini Gupta, Saukat Usmani and others, M. N. Roy had been able to establish some tenuous and often intercepted secret links with embryonic communist groups which had emerged in Bombay under the leadership of S. A. Dange, in Calcutta under the leadership of Muzaffar Ahmed, in Madras under the leadership of M. Singaravellu and in Lahore under the leadership of Ghulam Hussain.⁶⁰ It was M. N. Roy who with his sincere and painstaking efforts not only established contact with communist world but also attracted the attention of the fiery Indian revolutionaries and converted them into Communists with an intention to establish economic order based on the Marxist line.⁶¹

Through emissaries, Roy started to send various magazines, pamphlets etc. to those groups- containing communist ideas and principles. Shortly after the formation of CPI in Tashkent-Moscow, communist pamphlets like - *India in Transition, What Do We Want* and a few others by M. N. Roy and journals like - *International Press Correspondence* or *Inprecor* in short, a bi-weekly in English, German and French published by the Comintern from Berlin since October 1921; the *Vanguard of Indian Independence*, later renamed as *Vanguard*, published by Roy under Comintern auspices from May 1922 started being smuggled into India. One of the earliest Marxist analyses on India penned by an Indian Communist was published in the *Communist International*, monthly organ of the Comintern, No.3, 1921, December

⁶⁰ Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi -2005. P-248.

⁶¹ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-49-50.

1921, written most probably by M.N.Roy (signed 'N') the article "*Present Events in India*".⁶² M. N. Roy made the first attempt as a Marxist interpretation of the various facts of the Indian political scene.⁶³

Within the country, the early Communists also took initiative to publish various magazines and pamphlets in order to spread the idea of communism. The *Socialist* appeared as a weekly from early August to December end of 1922. Being the first magazine on international Socialism to be published in India, it attracted the attention of friends and foes like S. S. Mirajkar and S. V. Ghate of Bombay actively joined Dange, while Muzaffar Ahmed of Calcutta, M. Singaravelu from Madras M. N. Roy from Berlin wrote letters congratulating the *Socialist*. A little more than a year, the *Labour Kisan Gazette* was started by Singaravelu in Madras towards the end of December 1923.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵ In pursuit of giving effect to his idea to establish the legal party, Roy discussed the matter with M. Singaravelu who had already formed a Labour and Kisan Party in Madras. Thereupon, Satya Bhakta, a committed Communist of Nagpur who had established correspondence 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 like Hasrat Mohani, V. H. Joshi, Rama Sankar Awasthi and Pandit Ram Gopal, they formed the legal Communist Party on September 1, 1924 with its headquarters at Kanpur. 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

⁶² Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. Pp-79-80.

⁶³ Ibid. P-52.

⁶⁴ Ibid. P-52.

whole community. It was also decided that an All India Communist Conference will be held after three months.”⁶⁶

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 Satya Bhakta convened the First Conference of the Communist Party of India in Kanpur in December 1925⁶⁷ – which ratified the formation of the party on all India level. This conference was presided by a leading Communist leader of Madras named M. Singaravelu. Several other Communist leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, S.V.Ghate, K. N. Gaglekar, R. S. Nimbker, Abdul Majid, Ajodhya Prasad and J. P. Bagerhatta who belong to different parts of the country took part in the conference. 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”.⁶⁸

As a result of the First Communist Conference in Kanpur the Provisional Indian Communist Party was dissolved and a formal party with its name as the Communist Party of India (CPI) has been formed. The ultimate goal of the party as declared at the time formation was the establishment of workers’ and peasants’ republic in India. And the immediate object of the party was the securing of a living wage for the workers and peasants by means of nationalization and municipalisation of public services; namely land, mines, factories, houses, telegraphs, telephones, railways and such other public utilities which require public ownership.⁶⁹

The formation of the Communist Party of India 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 of India 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

⁶⁶ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-56-57.

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Pp-640-641.; The proceeding of the First Conference of the Communist party of India has given in annexure II.

⁶⁹ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-299.

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 as well as the Communist Party of India.

The growth and development of the Communist Party of India was gradual in nature, in spite of its being declared illegal by the British rulers, emerging as apolitical force to be reckoned with not only amongst the workers and peasants but also a section of intellectuals and a centralized all-India leadership came into being to guide and to coordinate the activities of the party.

During the initial stage, the main form of political work of the Communists was to organise peasants' and workers' parties and work through them. The first such organisation was the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress organised by Muzaffar Ahmed, Qazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar and others in Bengal in November 1925. In late 1926, a Congress Labour Party was formed in Bombay and a Kirti Kisan Party in Punjab. By 1928 all of these provincial organisations had been renamed the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP). All Communist were members of this party. The basic objective of the WPP's was to work within the Congress to give it a more radical orientation and make it "the party of the people".⁷⁰

After the official formation of the Communist Party of India in 1925, communist activities were very much active in Indian politics. As a result of the gradual growth and development of the communist activities, the British Government of India was apprehended and launched various conspiracy cases against the Communists to suppress the development of communist activities.⁷¹ In this connection, the Kanpur and Meerut conspiracy cases were the most prominent. The rapid growth of Communist and WPP influence over the national movement was, however, checked and virtually wiped out during 1929 and after by two developments. One was the severe repression to which Communists were subjected by the government. Already in 1922-24, Communists trying to enter India from the Soviet Union had been tried in a series of conspiracy case at Peshawar and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. In 1924, the government had tried to cripple the

⁷⁰ Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence - 1857 - 1947*, Penguin Books, New Delhi-1988. P-301.

⁷¹ Roy, Sbodh. (edited), *Communism In India – Unpublished Documents, 1935-1945.*, National Book Agency Private Ltd., Calcutta- 1976. P-1.

nascent communist movement by trying S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta and Saukat Usmani in the Kanpur Bolshevik conspiracy case. All four were sentenced to four years of imprisonment.

Working class and their organisation:

Modern working class in India emerged as powerful proletariat class with the establishment of modern industries in India by British capitalists. For many years, the Indian working class after emerging as a proletariat class, they were not able to organise trade unions to resist the capitalist exploitation though they organise some resistant movements in organised and semi-organised form which were sporadic outburst in nature.⁷² The British economic policy expanded the number of workers and at the same time worsened their economic conditions. However, the Indian working class had begun to feel about the causes of their poverty and started to groan against their exploiters. But they did not know what to do.⁷³

The First World War was an epoch making era in the history of world and India as well. On the one hand, the war came as a boon to the new rising industrial bourgeoisie and on the other hand, it was a curse to the general masses and working class of India. The prices of essential commodities rose very high and as a result, the common masses and working class suffered very much. The situation was worsened towards the end of the war. During this period the working class movement moved towards stronger form of organised movement than before. This developed consciousness of collective bargaining which was lacking so long and took initiative for formation of modern type of trade unions.⁷⁴ It was only after First World War, that the Indian working class took to the road of organisation on class lines and increasingly developed trade unions and political consciousness with the help of the trade union leaders.⁷⁵

During the post war period, the national liberation movement and working class unrest in India took a new turn. It was on the eve of such a historical background the initiative for an all-India organisation of the working class of India was taken by some

⁷² Goswami, Dharani., *Trade Union Movement in India: Its Growth and Development*. People Publishing House. New Delhi – 1983. P-8.

⁷³ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-67.

⁷⁴ Op. cit. Pp-25-26.

⁷⁵ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-67.

national leaders, social reformers and other interested in the working class movement. They ultimately formed the first national organisation of the working class – the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in October 1920 with Lala Lajpat Rai as president.⁷⁶ The First Session of the AITUC was held on 31 October, 1920, at the Empire Theatre Hall, Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Rai.⁷⁷ It is to be mentioned here that, the All India Trade Union Congress at the time of its foundation and even up to the Second World War, was neither purely a communist organization nor a wing of the CPI. During that period, the communists were only a part of it. Thereupon, the country witnessed a dynamic change in the workers' activities and in their methods of protest when Indian labour movement got long awaited lead with the emergence of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920. The first lead came from the revolutionary and leftist leaders who organised the Trade Union Congress.⁷⁸ In the First Session of the AITUC, political leaders of that time representing different shades and opinions, attended.⁷⁹ So, it is clear that the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress or the trade union movement in India did not start with the initiative of any political party.

With the emergence of Communist Party in twenties, attempt to organise trade union on the basis of Communist ideology was initiated by prominent communist leaders. At a time when the AITUC was under complete domination of the nationalist leaders, gradual penetration of communist ideas became manifest. This period may be considered to be the preparatory stage to the emergence of socialist forces inside the trade union movement. In Bombay and Calcutta the early Communists were very much active in the trade union movement. In regard to the trade union movement, the policy to be adopted by the Communists was clearly stated in the fifth Congress of the Communist International held in 1924. It stated: “the Indian Communist Party must bring the trade union movement under its influence. It must recognize it on a class basis and purge it of all alien elements.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Goswami, Dharani., *Trade Union Movement in India: Its Growth and Development*. People Publishing House. New Delhi – 1983. P-35.

⁷⁷ Adhikari, G. (edited) *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India* (Vol.-I, 1917-1922), People's Publishing House, New Delhi - 1972. P-206.

⁷⁸ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-68.

⁷⁹ Goswami, Dharani., *Trade Union Movement in India: Its Growth and Development*. People Publishing House. New Delhi – 1983. P-44.

⁸⁰ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-58.

As a result of the efforts of M.N.Roy and other early Communist leaders, the Communists established their control and started to lead the AITUC by 1927. The seventh session of the AITUC was held in March 1927. This was the first session of the AITUC in which the left wing led by the Communists appeared in strength. Shapurji Saklatwala, the Indian who had become a British Communist Member of Parliament, was present in the session. Another Communist S. V. Ghate was elected Secretary. A close associate of M.N.Roy, Phillip Sprat, a British Communist was also present in the session. At the eight annual session of the AITUC, held in Kanpur in December, 1927, Communists were elected to several high offices within the organisation. S.H. Jhabwalla was made organising Secretary, S.A. Dange was chosen as one of the Assistant Secretaries and the Communist sympathizer D.R. Thengdi became one of the three vice-presidents.⁸¹ The Nineth Session of the All India Trade Union Congress held at Jharia in December 1928. The Conference passed the resolution for a future constitution of India with emphasis on a Socialist Republican Government of the working class, nationalization of land and industries, right to work and maintenance, provision of social and unemployment insurance including maternity relief, non-enactment of repressive and reactionary labour laws etc.⁸² The most attractive feature of the Jharia Conference was that, it elected two Communists - M. Ahmed and S.A. Dange as Vice-president and Assistant Secretary respectively for the Nagpur Congress to be held in 1929. Thus, at the initiative of the Communists, the activities of the Trade Union Congress became very much active by 1929.⁸³

The influence of the ideology of Communism gradually increased among the working class of India. Industrial labour particularly in Bombay and Calcutta, have since the 1920's been influenced by Russian propoganda and by the English and Indian agents of the Third International.⁸⁴ The emergence of the Communists into the AITUC and their emphasis on the class character of the working class movement led to conflict between the political leaders from different shades who were working in AITUC. In the year 1924 there were many strikes in India and particularly among the

⁸¹ Roy, Dipti Kumar. *Trade Union Movement in India: Role of M.N. Roy*, Minerva, Calcutta-1990.Pp-19-23.

⁸² Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-69.

⁸³ Ibid. P-69.

⁸⁴ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-15.

textile workers first in Bombay and then in Kanpur. Most of these strikes were organised by the Communists.⁸⁵

There took place a split in the AITUC between the moderate group led by N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, Shiva Rao and Dewan Chamanlal and the extremist group led by the Communists who were supported by the nationalists. After 1929 the moderate came out of the AITUC and formed the Indian Trade Union Federation (ITUF). Though in 1929 the Communists, with the help of the left nationalists, gained control of the AITUC, it was still working with the alliance with, and not in opposition to, the nationalist political movement in India. But in 1931, the Communists led by B.T. Ranadive and S.V Daspande clashed with the left nationalists, then led by Subhas Chandra Bose, within the AITUC on the question as to what should be the relationship of AITUC towards the nationalist movement of India.⁸⁶ As result of this contradiction, the Communists were bound to secede from the AITUC in 1931. In 1929, the Communists, with the support of the left-nationalists, succeeded in capturing the AITUC and in ousting the moderates there-from. But in 1931 the left-nationalists proved stronger than the Communists, and the Communists seceded from AITUC to form the All India Red Trade Union Congress (AIRTUC).⁸⁷

Ban on the communist organisations:

After establishing its control over the working class of India, the CPI decided to wage a barge labour movement against the British Government. Subsequently, the CPI gave a call to the textile workers all over India to organise a general strike. Accordingly, the textile workers all over the country observed a three months long strike. Being afraid of the activity of the Communist Party of India, the British Government was bound to declare CPI and all trade unions under its control as unlawful organisations in July, 1934. As a result, the open activity of the CPI was stopped and the party's activities continued in underground.

The Communist Party of India after being declared illegal by the British Government, decided to enter into the National Congress and Congress Socialist Party. The 'Dutt-Bradley Thesis' which is the reflection of the policy adopted in the Seventh Congress of the Communist International – also encouraged the Indian

⁸⁵ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay–1971. Pp-58-59.

⁸⁶ Ibid. P-60.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Pp-69-70.

communists to project the National Congress as the platform of mass anti-British movement. In January 1936, the Congress Socialist Party, on the recommendation of its General Secretary, Jayaprakash Narayan, decided to admit the Communists to its membership. As a result of this decision Indian Communists joined the Congress Socialist Party, and thereby gained admittance into the Indian National Congress.⁸⁸ This was how the Communists established their hold in the left-wing of the Congress and many of them held official portfolios in the CSP and the Congress since 1934. Thereafter, the Communists and Socialists made systematic efforts to propagate the cause of the labourers and their effects were felt in the province of Assam as well.⁸⁹ During 1936-42, the Communists build up powerful peasant movements in Kerala, Andhra, Bengal and Punjab⁹⁰ as well as in Surma valley of Assam. During that time, this trend of the Indian Communists was largely felt in the Surma valley districts in the province of Assam.

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 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. Phanindra Nath Dutta was one of the pioneer Communists of Sylhet who became a Communist in the early thirties. Phanindra Nath Dutta took initiative to recruit some workers for organizing Communist party in the Surma valley. Himself being a man originally from Sylhet, he knew most of the students from Sylhet who were studying in Calcutta. In December, 1935, he picked up six of them and the District organizing Committee

⁸⁸ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-311.

⁸⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. II)*. Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-246.

⁹⁰ Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence - 1857 - 1947*, Penguin Books, New Delhi - 1988. P-304.

of Communist Party for Sylhet was formed with six members.⁹¹ The six members of the newly formed committee were – Lala Sharodindhu Dey, Chittaranjan Das, Digendranath Dasgupta, Chanchal Kumar Sarma, Dinesh Choudhury and Amarendra Kumar Paul.⁹² 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.⁹³ The prominent Communist leaders who formed the Communist Party in Sylhet district were Chittaranjan Das, Chanchal Kumar Sarma, Jyotirmoy Nandi, Prabodananda Kar, Rohini Das, Karunasindhu Roy, Biresh Mishra, Dwijen Sengupta, Hemanga Biswas, Suroth Paul Choudhury etc.⁹⁴ 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*’.⁹⁵ 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 13th and 14th December 1942. Biswanath Mukharjee, a communist leader of Bengal, presided over the deliberations of the conference.⁹⁶

An important fact about the communist movement of Surma valley is that, the Communist Party and other communist organisations of Surma valley took birth and developed as a political force in the condition of its being declared illegal by the

⁹¹ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19th 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 (Bangladesh History Association). Dhaka-1999. Pp. 257-258.

⁹² *Ibid.*;Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Sreehatte Biplabpad O Communist Andolon Smritikatha*. Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta 1984. P-157.

⁹³ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19th 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.

⁹⁴ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I(M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-10.

⁹⁵ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5261/34-35, dated 19th 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.

⁹⁶ *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 17th. December, 1942. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.; 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- 22.; The programme and proceedings of the conference is given in annexure III.

British Government. It was mainly due to the patriotic zeal and strong commitment to the national cause of the dedicated and hard-boiled revolutionary leaders of Surma valley, the Communist Party and communist movement took birth and developed in this valley in particular and whole province in general. 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. All most all the youth members of different revolutionary organisation of Sylhet attracted towards Communism and ultimately laid down the foundation of the Communist Party and communist movement of this valley and played an equal role in it with other parts of the country. During this period, the prominent revolutionary organisations of this area were – *Tarun Sanga*, *Anushilan Samiti*, *Jugantar*, *Srisanga* and Welfare Association etc.

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. A small number of them joined CSP and Forward Bloc but majority of them joined the Communist Party of India.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸

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

⁹⁷ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-60.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Pp-60-61.

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. Though the district of Sylhet was a part of the province of Assam, the nationalist and other allied activities of this district was governed by and directly related with Bengal. Behind this historical fact, the cultural, linguistic and geographical condition of the Surma valley is the most dominating factor.

When the British Government declared the Communist Party of India as an unlawful organisation, the Communists all over the country entered into the Indian National Congress and Congress Socialist Party. The Communists in Surma valley also followed the same principle. After the ban of CPI, most of its workers 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.⁹⁹ 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 worked as Secretary.¹⁰⁰ Chanchal Kumar Sarma who was actively associated with revolutionary organization *Tarun Sanga*¹⁰¹ 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

⁹⁹ *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.

¹⁰⁰ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-63.

¹⁰¹ *Copy of Memo No. 8439-40/4-34-11, dated the 12th. September 1942*, from the Superintendent of Police, Sylhet to the Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet. File No. A-3(6) 42, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

Committee in 1941¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³

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 19th June, 1942 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.”¹⁰⁴ 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. By projecting the Congress as an anti-imperialist platform, it was not possible for the Communist Party of India and Kisan Sabha to organise the peasants in uncompromising militant line against the British Imperialism. The Communists at that time were motivated to organise and lead all the peasant and working class movement considering the safety and interests of the Congress. To keep in view the safety of the newly formed Congress coalition ministry in Assam was the main aim of the Surma valley Communists at that time.¹⁰⁵

Trade union in Surma valley:

With the emergence of the communist organization in Surma valley, a new political situation was emerged which largely helped in consolidating the freedom movement of the valley. The new situation was manifested in the sudden spurt of trade union activities. In 1938, several Trade Unions sprang up one after another. These were

¹⁰² *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.

¹⁰³ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-63.

¹⁰⁴ *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.

¹⁰⁵ *Communist Survey, July 1936*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D. Memo. No.17596 dated August the 8th of 1936, 154/36 (Assam) Comm. File No. A-2(3) 36, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.; Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-17.

Sylhet Cachar Cha Bagan Mazdur Union, *Surma valley Dock-Mazdoor Union*, *Cachar Press Workers' Association* and *Silchar Dhangar Union*. The *Sylhet-Cachar Cha Mazdoor Sanghatak Committee* was formed in 1938 at the initiative of Barin Dutta, Pravodananda Kar and others. Both Dutta and Kar were Communists. In 1938, five tea gardens of Cachar were on strike where more than two thousand workers participated.¹⁰⁶ In the wake of this strike the organization consolidated its position and assumed a new name, *Sylhet-Cachar Cha Bagan Mazdur Union*. The organization was registered under the Trade Union Act on 27 April, 1939.¹⁰⁷ With Arun Kumar Chanda[□] (A. K. Chanda) as its President the organization made a rapid progress in Cachar. Subsequently, Pravodananda Kar became the president of the union with Digen Das Gupta as Vice-President and Barin Dutta as Secretary. All of them were Communists. *Dock Mazdur Union* was formed with Paresh Chandra Choudhury as President and Dwijendralal Sengupta as the Secretary. *Cachar Press Workers' Union* had Upendra Chandra Deb Roy and Mohitosh Purkayastha as President and Secretary respectively. *Dhangar Union* was formed with Abong Kalui as President and Pritiranjana Das as Secretary. Except A. K. Chanda, all the above leaders were Communists.¹⁰⁸ In 1946, *Assam Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union* was formed at the initiative of Gourisankar Bhattacharjee and Moni Bhoumik with Gourisankar Bhattacharjee as President and Moni Bhoumik as Secretary.¹⁰⁹

The Communists in Assam, in order to consolidate the working class of the province, formed various trade union organization and movements were organized under the banner of those organisations. Regarding the year of the formation of the state level organization of the AITUC in Assam, there are two different views. According to Hemen Das, member of the Assam State Committee the CPI (M) – there was no state level organization of the AITUC in Assam until 1944. In this year, the Assam branch of the AITUC was formed in a conference at Silchar with Arun Kumar Chanda as President and Sanat Ahir as Secretary. In 1945, the Assam State

¹⁰⁶ *Annual Report on the Working of Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act (Act XXII of 1932) for the Year Ending 30 September 1938.*

¹⁰⁷ *Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 14 November, 1940. (Govt's Reply to A.K. Chanda.) P-1313.

[□] Arun Kumar Chanda was left-minded Congress leader of Cachar as well as Assam. He was actively involved in various trade union movements organized by the Communists in this valley.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmed, Sharif Uddin (Edited). *Sylhet: History and Heritage*. Bangladesh Itihas Samiti (Bangladesh History Association). Dhaka-1999. Pp 259-260.

¹⁰⁹ *Annual Report on the Working of Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act (Act XXII of 1932) for the Year Ending 30 September 1946.*

Conference of the AITUC was held at Gouhati. In this conference, Arun Kumar Chanda and Gourisankar Bhattacharjee were elected as President and Secretary respectively.”¹¹⁰ But historian Profulla Mishra states: “The first Conference of Assam Provincial Trade Union Congress was held at Dibrugarh in 1943 and its Second Conference at Gouhati in 1945. The APTUC, at that time was the only central trade union organization in Assam, the Third Conference of which was held at Dibrugarh in December 1946.”¹¹¹

Peasantry and their organisation:

During colonial period, peasantry in India played an active role in the national liberation movement of the country. All most in every parts of India, the peasants’ movements were more or less militant in nature against Landlordism, Capitalism, and Imperialism which were responsible for the bad condition of the peasantry. So, the nationalists did not feel any hesitation to organise the peasantry in the national liberation movement. Whenever any sort of unrest took place among the peasantry, the nationalist leaders marched towards the peasantry in order to utilise the sentiments of the latter in the national liberation movement. Though almost all the peasant uprisings were militant in nature, those were not able to achieve their goal largely due to the interference of the nationalist leaders who did not allowed the peasantry to become more militant in their struggle considering their line of compromise and share of power with the British imperialism. But when the Communists emerged in the Indian political scene as an organised political force, they began to represent peasants’ interests in national politics. At the initiative of the Communists, the first all-India organisation of the peasantry – the ‘All India Kisan Sabha’ was formed in the year 1936 which provided impetus to the peasant movement of India in particular and communist movement in general.

It seems that disillusionment at the result of the Civil Disobedience Movement led to heart-searching among the Socialists and Communists and radical Congressmen. There was a new found consciousness about the potential inherent in peasant mobilization in a country where the peasants comprised about 90 percent of

¹¹⁰ Das, Hemen. *Asomar Communist Andolanor Chamu Itihas*, Navayug Prakashan, Guwahati-2014. P-44.

¹¹¹ 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- 16.

the population. In this background, the All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936. The Congress Socialist Party and peasant leaders like – Ranga and Sahajanand took a leading part in its formation. The Communist Party, which was formally banned in 1934, adopted the policy of United Front in 1936, broke its isolation from the mainstream of the national movement and began to show considerable interest in the peasant movement.¹¹² The South Indian Federation of Peasants and Workers first voiced the need for holding a conference to form an all-India peasant organization in October 1935. The Communists and Congress Socialists took up the idea in the Meerut Conference of CSP in January, 1936. A preparatory conference was first held in Meerut on 16 January, 1936 under the presidentship of Kamala Devi Chattapadhyay, which was attended by representatives of peasant organisations of different provinces of the country. The preparatory conference resolved to hold the All India Kisan Congress and appointed an organising committee for this purpose.

The first all-India Kisan Congress was held in Lucknow under the presidentship of Swami Sahajanand on 11 April, 1936. Though the Kisan Congress from its inception tried to maintain a close link with the Indian National Congress, it failed to receive the blessing of the Congress, which declared in its Haripura session in February 1938, that the “Congress itself is the main a Kisan organisation.” The inaugural session prepared the All India Kisan manifesto which contained the fundamental and minimum demands. In its manifesto, the Kisan Congress declared its object as “To secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and all other exploited class.”¹¹³ In the maximum programme there was the demand for the abolition of zamindari, taluqdari, malguzari and jenmi system. The leadership of AIKS came from the intelligentsia and peasant leaders. Since inception it was dominated by Socialists and Communists. Few Congress leaders were associated with it.¹¹⁴ The Lucknow session decided to publish the *All India Kisan Bulletin* with Indulal Yagnik as its editor. Swami Sahajanand was elected the president and N. G. Ranga the General Secretary.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Sen, Sunil. Peasant Movements in India: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Manisha, Calcutta – 1991. P-72.

¹¹³ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-203.

¹¹⁴ Op. cit. P-73.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

At the time of its inception, the All India Kisan Sabha was known as All India Kisan Congress. The Second Congress of the All India Kisan Sabha was held on 26 December, 1936 where veteran Communist leaders Bankim Mukharjee and S.A. Dange were present. The most important political resolution of this session was on the new constitution contained in the Government of India Act, 1935. The Kisan Congress emphatically condemned and totally rejected it and called upon the peasants and workers to launch a vigorous movement to smash this slave constitution. Within a short period, provincial Kisan Committees had come into existence in Andhra, Tamilnadu, Maharastra, Malabar, Karnataka, Central Provinces, Gujarat Punjab, Delhi, U.P, Bihar Bengal, Utkal and Assam. In 1937, the Bengal Communists took the lead in organising the First Provincial Conference in Bankura.¹¹⁶

Kisan Sabha in Surma-Barak valley:

In the two districts of Surma valley namely Sylhet and Cachar, the branch of All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 and 1937 respectively. In Sylhet district, Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 with Lala Sharodindhu Dey as Secretary and it was known as Surma Valley Provincial Kisan Sabha.¹¹⁷ Prior to 1936, though there existed various peasant movements in Surma valley, there was no organization of the peasantry. With the formation of Sylhet branch of All India Kisan Sabha in 1936, the Communists and Kisan Sabha activists started to consolidate the peasantry and organize them under the red banner to fight for their legitimate demands. At the initiative of Surma valley Kisan Sabha, the First Peasant Conference was held at Behali of Sunamganj sub-division of Sylhet. This conference was presided over by Communist leader Bankim Mukharjee. In 1937, the Second Conference of Surma Valley Provincial Kisan Sabha was held at Beanibazar under the presidency of Muzaffar Ahmed and in 1939, its Third Conference was held at Moulvibazar under the presidency of Somnath Lahiri.¹¹⁸ In the Behali Conference, Karunasindhu Roy and Lala Shorodindhu Dey were elected as President and Secretary respectively of the Surma Valley Provincial Kisan Sabha. To initiate the peasant movement, the

¹¹⁶ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. Pp-203-204.

¹¹⁷ *Communist Survey, July 1936*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D. Memo. No.17596 dated August the 8th of 1936, 154/36 (Assam) Comm. File No. A-2(3) 36, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹¹⁸ Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Sreehatte Biplabhad O Communist Andolon Smritikatha*. Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta 1984. Pp-178-179.

conference adopted various demands for the peasantry and decided to organize movement in order to achieve those demands. This peasant conference of Behali had a great impact on the peasant society of Sunamganj as well as Sylhet which provided a great impetus to the peasant movement of the district in the subsequent years.

Like the peasants of Sylhet district, the peasants of Cachar district also fought against zamindari oppression and for their various demands under the banner of Kisan Sabha during the period under review. In 1937, the branch of All India Kisan Sabha also took its birth in Cachar district under the title - '*Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha*.'¹¹⁹ Behind the formation of Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha, the key role was played by Lala Sharodindhu Dey, Secretary of the Surma valley Kisan Sabha. Lala Sharodindhu Dey took this initiative in order to resist the oppression of Chakraborty zamindar family of Hailakandi sub-division. In this regard, two advocate brothers- Romesh Choudhury and Poresh Choudhury, Monmohan Bhattacharjee and Mohitosh Purkayastha, an activist of Students' Federation, came forward for assistance. Ultimately, '*Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha*' was formed with Dwijendralal Sengupta as Secretary and Poresh Choudhury as President.¹²⁰ After its formation, the Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha actively participated in various movements. In 1938-39, the '*Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha*' organised a movement against the zamindar of Jamalpur- Kamalpur area of Silchar sub-division. In this movement, the main demand of Kisan Sabha was to issue the money receipt (Farog) for land revenue by the zamindar to the tenants. In this way the Kisan Sabha in Cachar district became a popular organisation.¹²¹ Gradually the branches of Kisan Sabha and peasant movement spread to different areas like-Lakhipur, Joypur, Kamranga, Udharbond, Borkhola, Bashkandi, Ramnagar, Bualjur, Chatla, Sonai etc. On the basis of this mass base of the Kisan Sabha, the First Cachar District Conference of All India Kisan Sabha was held in 1940 at Silchar with communist leader Abdul Momin in the chair.¹²² In this conference, resolutions were accepted for organising peasant movement against price hike, corruption in trade,

¹¹⁹ *Communist Survey, July 1937*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D. Memo. No.14351 dated August the 10th of 1937, 154/37 (Assam) Comm. File No. A-2(3) 36, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹²⁰ *Communist Survey, July 1937*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D. Memo. No.14351 dated August the 10th of 1937, 154/37 (Assam) Comm. File No. A-2(3) 36, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.; Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-17. Pp-72-73.

¹²¹ Souvenir, C.P.I (M) Cachar-Hailakandi 18th District Conference, Silchar - 2005. P-29.

¹²² *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar*. D.O. No. 2451/23-27, dated 17th September 1940. File No. A-2(6)40, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

black-marketing and economic crisis created under the condition aroused out of the Second World War.¹²³ The Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha took a concrete shape when revolutionary leaders like Achinta Bhattacharjee, Motilal Jaygirdar, Gopendralal Roy joined the organisation and devoted themselves for the interest of the organisation.

There took place a speedy growth and development of Kisan Sabha than other communist organisations. The third Congress or All India Kisan Sabha was held at Comilla of Bengal (now in Bangladesh) in May 1938 in the context of large scale peasant mobilisation in many parts of the country. At the time of third session, the AIKS represented the organised strength of five and a half lakh paying membership. This session also adopted the constitution of AIKS.¹²⁴ At this congress, a clear programme was adopted, both for the aims of the fight against landlordism and imperialism and for the immediate demands of the peasants.¹²⁵ The Fourth Session of the AIKS was held at Gaya (Bihar) on 9-10 April, 1939. Many prominent Communists like-Muzaffar Ahmed, M. A. Rasul etc. attended the conference and took leading role in various committees.¹²⁶

Though the Kisan Sabha was functioning in the province of Assam since its inception i.e. from 1936, it was not possible for the Communists to organise the Provincial Kisan Sabha in Assam until 1945. But in some district, the district level Kisan Sabhas were already functioning. The first state level conference of Kisan Sabha was organised in 1946 at Tekarguri of Noagoan district where Kisan Sabha activists from various district of Assam came to attend.¹²⁷ The formation of the Kisan Sabha in Assam gave an organized shape to the hitherto un-coordinated peasant movements consolidated and further expanded its base.

In the spread of Kisan Sabha and peasant movement in Cachar district, the significant role was played by Hijam Irabat Singha, the fire-eater peasant leader of Manipur. Irabat Singha came to Cachar district to organise the peasantry and peasant movement of Cachar after his release from the Sylhet jail in 1943. In jail, he was largely influenced by the ideology of Marxism and afterwards dedicated his whole life

¹²³ Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-17. P-74.

¹²⁴ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-204.

¹²⁵ Dutt, R.P. *India Today*, Monisha, Calcutta - 1997. P-276.

¹²⁶ Op. Cit. P-205.

¹²⁷ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 354, Noagoan. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 29th September, 1946.; Misra, Profulla. *The Communist Party of India in Assam: A Brief History*, North East Quarterly. Vol.-2, July 1984. P- 16.

for the cause of the toiling masses of Barak valley. With the arrival of Irabat Singha, the Kisan Sabha and peasant movement of this area got a new momentum. In 1946, the biggest peasant conference of Cachar district was held at Katakhal with Irabat Singha in the chair.¹²⁸ At the initiative of Irabat Singha, the Kisan Sabha acquired a strong base in the Manipuri peasant community of Cachar like Borkhola, Sonai, Ramnagar, Patherkandi etc.

The All India Kisan Sabha, because of its consistent fight for the freedom of the country and rights of the common man, its fight to bring the food of the people within their reach, became an increasingly effective and popular body. Its membership rose from 225,781 in 1942 to 553,427 in 1944 and 829,686 in 1945. At the end of the war, a new awakening has swept the impoverished mass of Indian peasantry. The very intense and developing food crisis, the shortage and high prices of essential commodities, the atrocities of the government and oppression of the landlords in the villages, are rousing the Indian kisans to more and more militant action in defence of their rights. With demanding immediate agrarian legislation, to abolish landlordism, the peasant are already taking initiative and under the leadership of Kisan Sabha, seizing the fallow lands belonging to the landlords and fiercely fighting back any attempts at eviction and enhancements of rents.¹²⁹

The All India Students' Federation:

The Communist Party of India from time to time issued various calls to the students, youths, women and cultural workers to take part in its various programmes. After 1936, a notable progress was made by the party in organising students, youths, women and cultural activists. But the party achieved some success in this regard during and after the Second World War. The students and youth front was organised by the Indian Communists at the initiative and direction of the Communist International. The first important document on this front is "A Manifesto of the Young Communist International" to the Bengal Revolutionary Organisation of the Youths, published in *Masses of India* of July 1925. In the era of WPP's, when there was an upsurge in mass youth movements, the Bhatpara Conference of the WPP of

¹²⁸ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 5483/25, dated 24th September 1946. File No. A-3(7)46, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.; Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-17. P-74.

¹²⁹ Dutt, R.P. *India Today*, Monisha, Calcutta - 1997. P-280.

Bengal during the months of March and April, 1928 passed a “Resolution on Youth.” A notable feature here was that young Communist cadre active on the working class front themselves took the initiative in forming a “Young Comrades’ League”. The league’s programme was of a high political level.¹³⁰

In mid-1930s the Communists succeeded in setting up a few local and provincial-level students’ organisations such as the Bengal Provincial Students’ League in December 1935. The students leaders who emerged from these organisation took an active role along with other democratic forces, in setting up the “All India Students’ Federation” (AISF) in August 1936. In some provinces it was under Communist influence from the very start – as in Bengal where vigorous political campaigns were very successful combined with struggles for elected students’ union, adult literacy drives etc. Gradually the entire organisation came under increasing communist influence.¹³¹

The All India Students’ Federation (AISF) was formed in a conference in 1936 in Lucknow. The conference was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and presided over by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. It was the only all-India student organization at that time with CPI students’ cadres very much active in it. The AISF provided hundreds of cadres to the CPI.¹³² The leftists in Assam, apart from their work in peasant and labour front, intensified their organizational activity in the students’ fronts. They also took the initiative to unite the students and youths into a single platform. In 1939, some left minded students of Gouhati formed a club at Paltanbazar of Gouhati named as ‘Radical Club’. The prominent students leaders associated with this club were – Haren Kalita, Upen Sharma, Haridas Deka, Tarun Sen Deka, Gokhul Medhi, Uma Sharma, Khagen Barborua, Arobindo Ghosh, Kamini Sharma, Bhupen Mahanta, Niren Lahiri, Mohanlal Mukharjee, Hena Ganguly, Saroj Sengupta, Govinda Kalita, Narayan Das, Upen Das, Kamala Mazumder, Lokenath Boruah, Shailen Medhi, Nihar Mukharjee, Aparajita Mukharjee, Boruna Mukharjee etc. Those students’ leaders laid the foundation of the Students’ Federation in Assam.¹³³

¹³⁰ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-206.

¹³¹ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha(edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents(vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-206.

¹³² 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-9-10.

¹³³ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-7.

Like the organisation of the Communist Party of India, the branch of the All India Students' Federation was formed in Sylhet district much earlier than the Assam valley proper. Like the peasantry, the student community of Surma valley as well as Assam played an important role in the communist movement of this province. In 1936, the Surma valley Students' Federation was formed in Habiganj of Sylhet district. The First Conference of the Surma valley Students' Federation was presided over by Gopal Haldar and communist leader Somnath Lahiri was the chief guest in this conference.¹³⁴ In 1937, Mohitosh Purkayastha, a student leader of Habiganj attended the conference of Habiganj sub-divisional Students' Federation. In this year, the Sylhet District Conference of the Students' Federation was presided over by Mansoor Habibullah who later became the speaker of West Bengal Legislative Assembly and Law Minister of the state.¹³⁵ At that time the prominent students' leaders who played their role in politics and socio-cultural activity of the undivided Surma valley were - Anadi Deb, Angira Sharma, Mahbubur Rab Choudhury, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Kripendra Barman, Debandra Kumar Shyam, Biswabandhu Sen, Gouranga Dutta, Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Mohitosh Purkayastha etc. But after few years, Mohitosh Purkayasth and Tarapoda Bhattacharjee left the Students' Federation. Mohitosh Purkayasth joined the Congress and Tarapoda Bhattacharjee gave up political line and joined the teaching profession.¹³⁶ Apart from them Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Premendra Mohan Goswami, Jyotirmoy Sen, Bijon Purkayastha, Manish Bhattacharjee, Gopesh Namasudra, Shyam Sengupta, Moni Dutta, Milonshashi Mazumder, Malati Bhattacharjee, Tulsi Bhattacharjee, Anurupa Bhattacharjee(Biswas), Manashi Bhattacharjee, Bela Sen, Beena Dutta Mazumder and others were also important student leaders.¹³⁷

Amiya Dasgupta, one of the pioneers of the formation of the All India Students' Federation contributed largely for the spread of the Students' Federation in Assam. Amiya Dasgupta, who came to Assam for attending the inaugural session of the Assam Provincial Socialist Party in September 1939, remained in the province for the

¹³⁴ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 128, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 25 August, 1936.

¹³⁵ Bhattacharjee, Tapodir and Bhattacharjee.,(edited) Tapojyoti. *Kaler jattrar Dbwani Jananeta Tarapoda Bhattacharjee Smarak Granta* (edited) Aruna-Tarapoda Smriti Samsad. Silchar - 2006. P-187.

¹³⁶ Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Sreehatte Biplabbad O Communist Andolon Smtitikatha*. Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta 1984. P-178.

¹³⁷ Op. cit.

purpose of organising students. The national and international developments during the late 1930s further radicalized the students and youths of India. Assam was no exception. This trend was reflected in the deliberations of the 1939 conference of *Assam Chatra Sanmilian* held at Jorhat, which was presided over by Prof. Humayun Kabir and addressed by Mansoor Habib, Communist leader of Bengal and Biswanath Mukherjee, Joint Secretary of All India Students' Federation. The conference decided to affiliate itself to All India Students' Federation.¹³⁸

It was on the All India Students' Federations initiative that in November, 1939, the All Assam Students' Confederation was formed consisting of *All Assam Chhatra Sanmilian*, a common platform of all students of Assam since its inception in 1916, *Manipur State Chhatra Sanmilian* and *Shillong Chhatra Sanmilian*. In 1940, the Confederation got affiliation from the AISF and as per the latter's direction it was named as Assam Students' Federation (ASF). Gourisankar Bhattacharya was made the General Secretary of the organisation and the editorship of the *Assam Chhatra Sanmilian's* old organ *Milan*, was given to Dadhi Mahanta. In this way, this conference was a land mark in the growth of the Communist movement in Assam because it was through the Students' Federation that a quite number of student cadres joined the CPI and it was they who virtually organized the party throughout the province. Thus, with right earnest the ASF began to exercise a pervasive control over the students' organisation of the Brahmaputra valley. Thoroughly trained and true to their beliefs, the ASF men thereafter secretly formed a Communist Students' Group even inside the Assam Students' Federation. And through this Federation many student cadres joined the Communist Party when it was established in Assam in the subsequent period.¹³⁹

In the two district of Surma Valley, the Communists were very active in spreading the seeds of Communism among the students and youths. In North Sylhet sub-division, in Karimganj, in Habiganj, in Moulavi bazar 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 the party. This attracted a section of the youths in Surma valley who formed a

¹³⁸ 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.

¹³⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. Pp-138-139.

Students' Federation in 1939 under the Secretaryship of Mohitosh Purkayastha.¹⁴⁰ In 1940, the conference of the Surma valley Students' Federation was held at Silchar which was presided over by Manikuntala Sen. In the reception committee Aparna Dhar and Tarapoda Bhattacharjee were President and Secretary respectively.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, the ban on the party was lifted in July 1942. In June 1945, a conference of Assam Students' federation was held at Nowgong. This conference helped to consolidate and expand the base of the Students' Federation in Assam. Phoni Bora, who was elected by this conference General Secretary of Assam Students' Federation, played a leading role in building the organization all over the province.¹⁴²

Communists in cultural fronts:

During colonial period, a large number of Indian Intellectuals gathered around the Communist Party. It was no coincidence that the "All India Progressive Writers' Association" (AIPWA, or PWA for short) was formed in 1936, the same time when the AISF was formed. Both organisations reflected the all pervasive advance of Leftism in Indian society and polity during this period. As in the case of AISF, the initiative of founding the PWA also came not directly from the party organisation, but from left- leaning intellectuals and writers like Prem Chand.¹⁴³ In the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in 1936, the Progressive Writers Association was formed with Poet Prem Chand as its first president.¹⁴⁴ The PWA mobilized a good number of writers, poets etc, many of whom later joined the CPI or provided the base for the CPI sponsored Indians Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA) founded in 1943.

In Surma valley also, the cultural activists and intellectuals played a prominent role in the spread of Communism as well as in the development of communist movement. In 1943-44, the Progressive Writers' Association was formed in Sylhet with Binode Bihari Chakraborty as President and Ashoke Bijoy Raha as Secretary.

¹⁴⁰ Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence, No. 969, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 7 June, 1939.

¹⁴¹ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar.* D.O. No. 3214/15-21, dated 7th September 1940. File No. A-2(6)40, Part II, Sub: Communism; Cachar District.

¹⁴² 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-11.

¹⁴³ Sen, Arindam & Gjosh, Partha (edited), *Communist Movement in India: Historical Perspective and Important Documents (vol. I)*, Samkalin Prakashan. Patna – 1991. P-207.

¹⁴⁴ Biswas, Hemango. *Ujan Gung Baiya (A Collection of Autobiographical Writings by Hemango Biswas)*. Anustup, Kolkata – 1990. P-79.

Satyabushan Choudhury was elected as Vice-President, Hemango Biswas and Bisheshwar Dutta as Joint-Secretary and Prakash Sanyal as Assistant Secretary.¹⁴⁵

Hemanga Biswas formed the Surma Valley Cultural Squad. Prominent cultural activists of this squad were – Nirmalendu Choudhury, Hena Dutta, Moni Dutta, Maya Gupta, Santa Sen, Ila Sen, Hansi Choudhury, Purabi Sharma, Badal Das, Reba Dhar, Gopal Nandi Mazunder, Khaled Choudhury etc.¹⁴⁶ This cultural squad, by presenting folk song and dance in various places, played a special role in the spread of the idea of Communism in this valley. The Surma Valley Cultural Squad (SVCS) was formed on 18th July, 1942 in a conference at Govinda Charan Park of Sylhet and the conference was presided over by Hemango Biswas.¹⁴⁷ Though the initiative to form the PWA was came from the left-minded intellectuals, but the Initiative to form the Surma Valley Cultural Squad came directly from the Communist leadership. The SVCS provided the base for the formation of the IPTA in Surma valley as well as in Assam.¹⁴⁸ The Surma valley Cultural Squad largely contributed in mobilisation of the peasantry of this valley in their struggle and organising various movements. The artists used to present various folk songs and dance related to the life of the peasantry in peasant meeting and relays. With the arrival of Hijam Irabat Singha in Cachar, this type of activity became very popular in the villages of Cachar district. Irabat Singha was not only a mass and peasant leader but also a great cultural activist. His proficiency in singing, dance and drama largely contributed in awakening of the peasantry of Cachar district.

The Indians Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA) was formed in Bombay in 1943 with declaring the aim as “for revitalizing the stage and traditional art and making them at once the expression and organizer of our peoples' struggle for freedom, cultural progress and economic justice.”¹⁴⁹ The IPTA was the attempt of the progressive cultural activists of the Indians to co-ordinate the freedom movement with

¹⁴⁵ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 354, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 19th September, 1944; Biswas, Hemango. *Ujan Gung Baiya (A Collection of Autobiographical Writings by Hemango Biswas)*. Anustup, Kolkata – 1990. P-140.

¹⁴⁶ Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-77.

¹⁴⁷ *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 20th July, 1942*, Sylhet district, From S.P.(D.I.B) Sylhet, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.25-35/C, dt. 20/07/42, Sylhet. File No. A-2(6)42, Part II, Sub: Communism; Cachar District.; Rahman, Mahfujur (Edited). *Gano-Sanskritir Shankochil Hemango Biswas*. Gothidhara, Dacca – 2012. P-217.

¹⁴⁸ Biswas, Hemango. *Ujan Gung Baiya (A Collection of Autobiographical Writings by Hemango Biswas)*. Anustup, Kolkata – 1990. P-114.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* P-148.

cultural one. The IPTA in different parts of the country largely helped in arousing consciousness among the toiling masses of India. In Surma-Barak valley, Hemango Biswas and Irabat Singha played a leading role in this context. In the province of Assam, the first Assam State Conference of the IPTA was held at Silchar in April 1947. The conference was inaugurated by Prof. Nalini Mishra of Shillong and poet Ashoke Bijoy Raha of Sylhet. Jyotiprasad Agarwala, the prominent activist of IPTA was not able to attend the conference due to his illness. So, the conference was presided over by Niranjana Sen, Secretary of the All India Committee of IPTA. Cultural groups from different parts of Assam represented the conference.¹⁵⁰ Nileswhar Brahma and Robin Basumatari from Goalpara, Laxminath Dolai from Jorhat, Guru Kamini Singha from Manipur attended the conference. Cultural activists from different community like – Tripura, Joyantia, Manipuri, Dimasas, Kachari, Bodo, Miri, Chamjur, Assamese and Bengali participated in the conference where about 200 delegates were present. The conference formed the Assam State Committee of the IPTA with Jyotiprasad Agarwala as President and Hemango Biswas as General Secretary and Nagen Kakoti was elected as Joint Secretary and Moni Bhattacharjee as Office Secretary. The Second Conference of the IPTA was held at Dibrugarh in July 1949 and the Third Conference of the Assam IPTA was held at Gouhati from 19 February to 22 February 1955.¹⁵¹ After the death of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha became the President of the Assam State Committee of the IPTA.¹⁵² Though IPTA was dominated by the Communists and left-minded intellectuals, it was not the direct wing of the Communist Party of India. It was only after the split of the CPI; the IPTA came under the direct influence of the CPI (M) and became a cultural wing of the party.

In Surma valley, the main initiative to form IPTA was taken by Hemango Biswas. The IPTA in Sylhet was formed in 1943-44 with Satyabushan Choudhury as the President and Hemango Biswas and Phoni Das as the Secretary. Ashoke Bijoy Raha was elected as the Vice-President of the Committee. Other important members

¹⁵⁰ *Reports on the Proceedings of the First Assam State Conference of the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association*. Memo No. 245105-20/3-47, dated the 24th. August, 1947. File No. A-3(8) 47, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹⁵¹ Biswas, Hemango. *Ujan Gung Baiya (A Collection of Autobiographical Writings by Hemango Biswas)*. Anustup, Kolkata – 1990. Pp-152-153.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* P-163.

of the Sylhet IPTA were – Nirmalendu Choudhury, Hena Dutta, Sandhya Das, Gouri Sharma, Purabi Sharma, Ashu Sen and Khaled Choudhury.¹⁵³

In Assam valley, a quit number of cultural activists joined the Communist Party through IPTA. Hemango Biswas came to Gouhati from Sylhet and started to organise the IPTA. At his initiative many cultural activists like - Anil Das, Sukleshwar Roy, Anadi Das, Hem Sharma, Pranab Ghosh, Dilip Sharma, Bhupen Hazarika, Binoy Shom, Brojen Borua, Ramen Borua, Nagen Kakoti, Bimal Sharma etc. joined the IPTA.¹⁵⁴ Among them, some directly joined the Communist Party and other remained as supporters of the party or pro-communist.

CPI in Cachar district:

In Cachar district, a unit of the CPI was functioning with few student activists under the guidance of the communists of Sylhet. Four student leaders of AISF laid the foundation of the Communist Party of India in Cachar district. They were - Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Phoni Bhattacharjee and Mohitosh Purkayastha.¹⁵⁵ The base of the party in Cachar district became strong when Achinta Bhattacharjee, Motilal Jaygirdar, Moni Roy, Dwijen Sengupta, Gopen Roy, Pritiranjana 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.¹⁵⁶ 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 Bombay.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 354, Sylhet. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 19th September, 1944; Biswas, Hemango. *Ujan Gung Baiya (A Collection of Autobiographical Writings by Hemango Biswas)*. Anustup, Kolkata – 1990. P-137.

¹⁵⁴ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-15.

¹⁵⁵ Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-176.

¹⁵⁶ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-118.

¹⁵⁷ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 654, Cachar. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 25th July, 1938.

In Karimganj, the foundation of the party organisation was laid by Swadesh Paul Choudhury, Yogeshar Das and Surath Paul Choudhury.¹⁵⁸ The four student leaders as mentioned above did not remain with the formation of the party organisation in Cachar district though they initiated the foundation of party unit in this district. Mohitosh Purkayastha left the party during August Revolution of 1942 on the issue of 'Peoples' War' policy of the party as he was against this stand of the party. Ajoy Bhattacharjee was deputed by the party in Sylhet to look after the activity of Surma valley Students' Federation. Tarapoda Bhattacharjee was first sent to Karimganj and later to Habiganj to organise student movement. Phoni Bhattacharjee, after completing his study joined government job and left Cachar. So, the four student leader who initiated the party activity in Cachar did not remain in Cachar at the time of the formation of the party organisation in this district. The key role in the formation of the party in this district was mainly played by Digen Dasgupta and Barin Dutta.¹⁵⁹ In Cachar Achinta Bhattacharjee, Gopen Roy, Mohitosh Purkayastha, Shudangshu Ghosh, Tarapoda Bhattacharjee, Motilal Jaygirdar, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Dwijendralal Sengupta were the important founder leaders of the Communist Party of India.

It was only after the withdrawal of the government ban from the Communist Party of India, 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. The Communist leaders of the Cachar could not attend the conference for some constraints. So, it was decided in the conference that, a separate branch should be formed in Cachar.¹⁶⁰ Ultimately, Cachar District Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India was formed in 1943 with Surath Paul Choudhury as Secretary.¹⁶¹ 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.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Souvenir, C.P.I (M) Cachar-Hailakandi 18th District Conference, Silchar – 2005. Pp-17-18.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-73.

¹⁶¹ *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)/44, dated the 31st. Oct. 1943. File No. SBI/37/43 of part. II, 1943. Sub: Communism: Cachar.

¹⁶² Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-180.

Communism in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam:

In the province of Assam, the first communist organisation emerged in Sylhet district in 1935. But in Assam proper or Brahmaputra valley of the province the communist organisation took its birth a little later. Socialists and Communist thought gripped the youth and the student intelligentsia in both the valleys bore relevance to the experiences of toilers all around them. There was also an increasing awareness even among nationalists that the demand for national freedom had to be concretely linked with workers and peasants' aspiration.¹⁶³

Banned during the years 1934-July, 1942, the Communist Party of India carried on its underground activities under the cover of mass organisation. It viewed the Congress as a national front of all anti-imperialist forces and was keen on using its platform. It stood for a socialist unity within the Congress and constituted the mainstay of the Congress Socialist Party, (CSP) formed in 1934. The Communist League, formed in the same year by Soumendranath Tagore of Bengal was a recalcitrant offshoot of the CPI. It viewed the Congress as a bourgeois party and believed in organising the toiling masses for Socialism and national freedom, on an independent political platform outside it. All these left parties made their belated but simultaneous appearance in Brahmaputra valley after 1937. In the Surma valley, the Communist and Socialist ideology appeared a little earlier, but the Communist League was totally absent there. Founded in 1939, the Forward Bloc struck its root in a few districts of Assam during the early war years.

By 1938 Congress Socialist Party groups were functioning in several places of the province such as Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Sylhet and Goalpara. Jadhunath Saikia and Dharendra Chandra Dutta of Golaghat, Benoybhusan Chakrabarty and Nilmoni Barthakur of Dibrugarh, Pabitra Roy of Bengal, then residing in Goalpara and Sriman Prafulla Goswami, a student and youth leader of Gouhati – they all conferred together and decided to take steps towards forming the Assam Congress Socialist Party. “At present four district are organised and there are four Congress Socialist Parties, but,” wrote Goswami to Jayaprakash Narayan on 18 January 1939, “we must take a provincial party in Assam.” A provincial (Brahmaputra valley) Conference of Congress Socialist was held at Misamara near Golaghat on 29-31 January, 1940,

¹⁶³ Guha, Amalendu. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. Indian Council of Historical Research. New Delhi - 1977. P-249.

under the presidency of Somnath Lahiri of Calcutta.¹⁶⁴ Two prominent Communist student leaders Biswanath Mukharjee and Amiya Dasgupta also attended it. There the Assam Congress Socialist Party was formed with Sriman Prafulla Goswami as the General Secretary and an executive committee consisting of 21 members. On the same night, a more exclusive inner group was formed with Benoybhusan Chakrabarty, Dharendra Chandra Dutta, Pabitra Roy, Nilmoni Barthakur, Bishnu Borah and Jadhunath Saikia to carry on secret communist activities. Later Jagannath Bhattacharya was also taken into the group. On 20 April, 1940, the executive committee of the Assam CSP held its first meeting at the house of Siblal Pandit at Lumding.¹⁶⁵

The initiative and process for the formation of the organisation of the Communist Party of India in Assam valley was taken by some leading Communists of this province. At that time, the communist organisation was existed in Surma valley, but no such organisation was there in Brahmaputra valley. But communist groups were existed at Gouhati, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Shibsagar, Noagoan and Goalpara. The important members of the communist group in Dibrugarh were Nilmoni Barthakur, Dr. Benoy Chakraborty, Girin Barthakur, Rohit Bhattacharjee, Nagen Kakoti, Madan Barpujari, Sadhu Singh etc. All of them worked for the propagation of Communism mainly from the platform of the Indian National Congress. In Golaghat, the important members of the communist groups were Jadhu Saikia, Dhiren Dutta, Khangeshwar Tamuli, Dadhi Mahanta, Bishnu Borah, Kirti Bordoloi, Chida Saikia, Jagannath Bhattacharjee, Bhodrakrishna Goswami, Kedhar Barthakur and others. In Noagoan Atfoni Borah, Suchen Bhuiyan, Moni Borah, Kehoram Hazarika and Narayan Borah were the important members of communist groups.¹⁶⁶

Even before the formation of the CPI organisation in Brahmaputra valley, organisation of the party was functioning in Sylhet and Cachar district of Assam. Prior to the formation of the party organisation in Brahmaputra valley, there was a District Committee in Sylhet and District Organising Committee in Cachar. Though these two districts were parts of the province of Assam, the party organisation of these

¹⁶⁴ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 845, Golaghat. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 14th July, 1940.

¹⁶⁵ Guha, Amalendu. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. Indian Council of Historical Research. New Delhi - 1977. Pp-250-251.

¹⁶⁶ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. Pp-9-10.

two districts were functioning under Bengal Provincial Organising Committee of the CPI as there was no provincial level organisation of the party in Assam. In 1942, communist group emerged in Gouhati with Nandeshwar Talukdar, Gourisankar Bhattacharjee, Lohit Lahkari, Dwireshwar Kalita, Madhab Deka, Dhudar Borua, Shib Sen and Maniram Saikia.¹⁶⁷

In Surma valley, the organisation of the Communist Party of India was formed in the banned condition of the party. But in Brahmaputra valley, it was not possible to form the party organisation at that time. It was just after the withdrawal of the ban from the party, the organisation of the party was formed in the Brahmaputra valley after the first open party congress of the CPI. After withdrawal of the Government ban on the CPI in July 1942 and subsequent release of most of the Communist leaders from jails, Communists in Assam got a new lease of life to carry on their party work openly and independently. In January- February, 1943 they formed Assam valley District Committee under the Bengal provincial Committee of the CPI. The first meeting for the formation of the CPI organisation in Assam valley was held on 31st December 1942 to 2nd January 1943, at the residence of Khangeshwar Tamuli at Golaghat. This meeting was presided over by Pranesh Biswas, one of the leading Communist of Surma valley and Biswanath Mukherjee was present in this meeting on behalf of the Central Committee of the party.¹⁶⁸ From Surma valley Biresh Mishra, Pranesh Biswas and from Shillong Suparna Roy attended the meeting. It was in this meeting, the Assam Valley District Organising Committee of the party was formed with Jadhunath Saikia as Secretary and nine other members. The members were – Dhiren Dutta, Nandeshwar Talukdar, Dadhi Mahanta, Pranesh Biswas, Kirti Bordoloi, Phoni Borah and others. This committee was functioning under the Bengal Provincial Committee of CPI as there was no provincial level committee of the party in Assam. Biswanath Mukherjee, member of the Central Committee of the party was put in-charge of the Assam valley and Sylhet District organising committee of the party.¹⁶⁹

The first open Congress of the Communist Party was held in Bombay in 1943. Prior to this, there was no state level organisation of the party in Assam. It was only in the First Party Congress; the formation of the Assam State Organising Committee of

¹⁶⁷ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. Pp-10-11.

¹⁶⁸ *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 113, Lakhimpur. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 16 January, 1943.

¹⁶⁹ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramar Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. Pp-118-119.

the Party was decided. Accordingly, the Assam State Organising Committee of the party was formed in 1943 by uniting the district committees of Sylhet, Cachar and Brahmaputra valley. In the First Party Congress of the party held in Bombay from 23rd May to 1st July, there was no elected delegate from Assam. But six number of observing delegates attended the congress. Among them from Surma valley – Biresh Mishra, Chittaranjan Das, Jyotirmoy Nandi, from Brahmaputra valley Gourisankar Bhattacharjee, Bishnu Borah and from Shillong Anjali Das attended the congress.¹⁷⁰

On the basis of the decision adopted in the First Party Congress, in May 1943, Assam Provincial Organising Committee of the CPI came into being under the Secretaryship of Biresh Chandra Mishra who by then attained the status of a provincial leader in the communist organisation.¹⁷¹ The Assam State Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India was form with six members. They are Biresh Chandra Mishra, Jyotirmoy Nandi and Chittaranjan Das from Surma valley and Gourisankar Bhattacharjee, Bishnu Borah and Nilmoni Barthakur from Brahmaputra valley. After the formation of the Provincial Organising Committee, the party office was set up in Gouhati and Shillong and Central Committee leader Biswanath Mukharjee was put in-charge of the Assam POC of the party on behalf of the Central Committee.¹⁷² Considering the well functioning of the committee, later on some other members were also included into the committee. They are Dr. Binoy Chakraborty, Nilmoni Barthakur, Nandeshwar Talukdar, Dhiren Dutta, Jadhu Saikia, Dadhi Mahanta, Phoni Borah, Romesh Sharma, Rohini Das and Pranesh Biswas.¹⁷³ The first Assam State Conference of the CPI was held in the beginning of 1948 at Ambari of Gouhati. In this Conference Biresh Chandra Mishra was elected as the Secretary of the Assam State Committee of the CPI. Other important members of the State Committee were – Gourisankar Bhattacharjee, Achinta Bhattacharjee, Barindra Kumar Choudhury, Nilmoni Borthakur, Bishnu Bora, Dadhi Mahanta, Romesh

¹⁷⁰ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon*. C.P.I (M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-14.

¹⁷¹ *Communist Survey, September 1943*. Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated September the 25th of 1943, 284/92 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(7) 43, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.; Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-168.

¹⁷² Dasgupta, Mrinal Kanti. *Je Path Diya Elam*, Published by C.P.I Silchar -1994. P-184.

¹⁷³ Das, Nishith Ranjan. *Swadhinata Sangramer Biplobi Dharay Asom Prodesher Communist Party*. Sabitri Publication, Karimganj - 2006. P-120.

Sharma, Pranesh Biswas, Benu Binode Choudhury, Jyotirmoy Nandi, Hemango Biswas, Irabat Singha, Phoni Bora, Nandeshwar Talukdar and Nitai Ganguly.¹⁷⁴

So, the united work of the Communists of the three district of Assam was started only in 1943. Prior to this, there was no proper coordination among the three Districts Committees of CPI in Assam and they were working separately under the Bengal Provincial Organising Committee of the CPI. Now organizationally, these district committees were detached from Bengal Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of India and added with Assam Provincial Organising Committee of the party. Since then, the Communists gradually came to the fore front to expose public grievances in connection with the economic crisis and this attracted some of the Congressmen and radicals either to be greatly influenced by the issue or to join the party cadres in course of time.¹⁷⁵ The year 1943 is a landmark in the history of the communist movement of Assam. In this year, organisation of the Communist Party of India acquired a concrete shape in Assam. The Assam Provincial Organising Committee and the Cachar District Organising Committee of the party was formed in the beginning of 1943. A few months before, i.e. in December 1942, the first party conference of the Surma Valley (Sylhet) District Committee of the party was held and this committee ultimately attached to Assam Provincial Organising Committee of the party which provided a strong base of the party in the province of Assam.

The Second World War and the Indian Communists:

The outbreak of the Second World War was a boon for the national liberation movement of India. With the beginning of the war, the nationalists as well as the Communists of India wanted to take full advantage of the crisis of British imperialism created due to its involvement in the war. But the nationalists were in a dilemma regarding the stand to be taken during the war time crisis. However, they took almost three months to adopt a concrete decision regarding national policies and ultimately decided to strike very hard against British imperialism by launching the famous Quit India Movement. Even before the out break of the Second World War, the Indian Communists were trying to build a united front which will be controlled by them. But when Soviet Russia involved in the war after Hitler's attack on Russia, the Communists all over the world started to propagate the matter of the safety of the

¹⁷⁴ Das, Hemen. *Asomar Communist Andolanor Chamu Itihas*, Navayug Prakashan, Guwahati-2014. P

¹⁷⁵ Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-168.

Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. But the Indian Communists at that point of time were in a dilemma which could be exploited in favour of the Indian freedom struggle.

Before the occurrence of the World War II, the CPI wanted to build around Congress a united front of the left forces under its own leadership, so that during the anti-imperialist movement for national independence it might be able to seize an opportunity to lead the mass to victory and establish a form of government that might save their interests. The CPI soon got this opportunity when the World War II broke out in the last quarter of 1939 between imperialist and fascist forces. At this very circumstance all the leftist forces of India decided to fight against the imperialist forces with a view to breaking up its backbone. Indian Communists, who had worked out the details of underground plans like sabotage of communication, tampering with the royalty of the troops and police and creation of feeling of financial and economic instability by inviting mass strikes, took the war as a boon. To them it was 'the deepest crisis of Capitalism.' So, they did not want to miss the opportunity for raising 'the Red Banner of Revolt.'¹⁷⁶

When the World War II broke out, the Indian Communists declared that it was an imperialist war and became busy with propaganda work against British imperialism as well as its war efforts in India. At the time of the outbreak of the war, Russia was not involved in it. Because of Stalin's neutrality and non-aggression pact with Hitler, signed on 23 August 1939, the Communists all over the world, as per direction of USSR, condemned the war from the beginning as an imperialist war. The Indian Communist opposed the British in their war efforts and on that account they were not pro-British.¹⁷⁷ With full determination and energy they badly became busy with programme of creating mass insurgency. As the CPI had succeeded in influencing the Kisan Sabha, the All India Students' Federation which had become an open forum for party politics by the beginning of the war, they also joined the CPI's and other leftists groups' subversive activities, the government soon adopted repressive methods. A number of Communist and Socialist leaders were arrested and sent to the detention camp at Deoli. However, undetected Communists continued their underground activities. By the beginning of 1941, the government took more drastic action against all those who were involved in propagating the communist propaganda

¹⁷⁶ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-84.

¹⁷⁷ Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-153.

and harming the British interests. Consequently, except Joshi and Adhikari all most all the top ranking Communist leaders were detected and kept behind the bars with the result that the CPI was disorganized and seriously crippled.¹⁷⁸

Imperialist war to people's war:

During the Second World War, there was a radical shift in the international situation when Germany under Hitler made an attack on Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, in spite of Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact made in August 1939. Hitler committed a grave mistake by invading Russia. It meant he challenged both the imperialist and communist forces of the world together. Hence, the need of the circumstance demanded that despite their differences and enmity, the imperialist and the communist forces must join the common platform to protect identities from the fatal onslaught of the Fascists and Nazis. At this very critical juncture, no alternative was left for Stalin other than to align himself with the capitalist countries which created a puzzling situation for the Communists all over the world. They had been fighting hitherto against the capitalists. Now the circumstances compelled them to side with their enemies. As a result, the communists' "Imperialist War" turned overnight into "People's War".¹⁷⁹

Most Communist Parties of Europe, with the entry of Russia into the war declared that the war had become a people's war. But the Indian Communist Party for about six months after Hitler had invaded Russia opposed to Indian participation in the war. The changing circumstance of the international situation compelled the International Comintern to pressurize Indian Communists to follow the line of the Comintern on the one hand and forced the British Government to make negotiation with the CPI's leader to obtain their help to meet the demand of the situation on the other. R. Palme Dutt, a member of the British Communist Party, too, suggested the Indian Communists to support the British during the war period with out raising the issue of India's independence because the very existence of the Communists' Centre (USSR) was in stake. In the beginning the efforts made by the Communist International and British Communist leaders could not cut much ice in bringing the revolutionary Indian Communists to the required line. From the underground they

¹⁷⁸ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-85-86.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

declared that “However, by August 1941, they agreed to follow the theory of two wars – the war on the eastern front of Russia between Russia and Germany and the war between Britain and Germany on the west front. Indian Communists thought of supporting the Russians in the first front against the Germans. At the same time they wanted to harm the interests of the British.”¹⁸⁰

When the Communist International termed the war as People’s War the Communists of many countries of Europe adopted the Soviet stand. On the question of People’s War, the Indian Communists were suffering from their ideological crisis in the prevailing Indian political situation. In fact, after declaring the CPI as an illegal party and a mass hunt against them by the British divided the party into two camps- the ‘Old Guard’ detained in the Deoli detention camp and the camp of the Communists outside the jail led by P.C. Joshi. The former showed their willingness in favour of the demand of the international communist authorities to support the imperialist forces in the war unconditionally while the camp of the youth did not want to miss the opportunity to strangle the British Indian Government during the war period and replace it with their own ‘People’s Republic.’ The factor which worked behind the intension of the Communists led by Joshi was their revolutionary trend which had its origin in nationalism. Though most of the revolutionaries had turned towards Communism, the national ferment was yet the base of their energies and activities.¹⁸¹ However, the Indian Communists could not remain strict to their theory of ‘two wars’ for more than six months. With their successful negotiation with British Indian Government they abandoned their ant-imperialist war principle and agreed to cooperate with the British during the war period. Thus, by July 1942, like their British counterpart they also declared the imperialist was as a People’s War.¹⁸²

The Indian Communists who labeled the Second World War as imperialist war from the very beginning of the war and was in a state of confusion regarding their role to be played considering the national and international situation, ultimately decided to support the British in its war efforts considering the cause of international Communism at the cost of the freedom movement of India which was at that time in its zenith. When the Communist Party of India accepted the Second World War as a ‘People’s War’, it was an illegal party. So, the party expressed its view from the

¹⁸⁰ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-87.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Pp-86-87.

¹⁸² Ibid. P-88.

platform of the All India Students' Federation. At the Patna Conference of the AISF in December 1941, the CPI declared the war as a People's War. In this conference on December 1941, the CPI passed the resolution which *inter alia* said: "We are a practical party and in a new situation it is our task not only to evolve a new form of struggle for it but also to advance new slogans.....The Key slogan of our party is 'make the Indian people play a people's role in the People's War.'¹⁸³

In this connection on 8th June 1942, the Home Department of the Government of India had issued a letter¹⁸⁴ to all the Provincial governments and Chief Commissioners which stated:

The Communist Party of India has announced as far as it is possible for any disintegrated and unlawful association to make such an announcement, that its official policy is now on line that of the Communist Party of England and that it regards the war as a people's war deserving the support of the people of India, and no longer an imperialist war. 2) The Central Government's Reviewing Committee has recommended the release of the sixteen leading communists, who had been arrested and detained as security prisoners. 3) The Provincial Governments were also recently asked to consider not only the release of communist security prisoners, but also all those members of the party who had been convicted offences not involving violence."

It is to be mentioned here that the first Sylhet District Conference of the party was held during the period when the party accepted the Second World War as the people's war. Though the Communist Party virtually advocating the support to the British Government in its war efforts, it had no cordial support and faith on the British Government. The party did not deserve the stay of the British Government in India. It advocating the all party unity to attain independence and was projecting itself as the sole vanguard of Indian independence. Again, it was advocating the Congress-League unity and demanding the release of the Congress leaders including Gandhiji who were detained during the Quit India Movement. The resolution of the First Sylhet District Conference of the CPI states, "that the conference says that the British Government, police and military are responsible for the repressive policy adopted in the country, the British Government have taken advantage of the weakness of the leadership of the political leaders in the country, but the Communist Party warned the government

¹⁸³ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-89.

¹⁸⁴ *Copy of letter 7/2/42 – Political (1), dated the 8th. June, 1942.* From the Government of India, Home Department to all Provincial Governments and Chief Commissioners (except Panth-piploda). Sub: Policy towards Communism. File No. A-3(6)42, Part II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

against it. This conference requests the government to release Mr. Gandhi and the Congress leaders”¹⁸⁵ Again, Bires Chandra Mishra while delivering speech said, “the British Government would not be able to protect India from foreign invasion. So, it was essential for the country to form a national government and other resistance against Japanese aggression.....For this end, all the political parties should be united, should form a national government and carry on agitation against the repressive policy of the government.”¹⁸⁶

In the Patna Conference of the AISF, Gourisankar Bhattacharjee, Bishnu Borah, Dadhi Mahanta, Romesh Sharma and Pranesh Biswas represented the conference from Assam. Like other parts of India, the student community of Assam also confused with the adoption of the ‘People’s War’ policy of the party who were engaged in anti-war propaganda from the beginning of the war. Many students’ leaders of AISF of this province rose in protest against this stand of the party and ultimately left the AISF. Uttam Tahabildar, Baidya Barpujari, Rupram Suth, Biswadeb Sharma are the important students’ leaders of Assam who left the AISF on that issue.¹⁸⁷

In Surma valley, Mohitosh Purkayastha, one of the prominent student leaders among the four students’ leaders who laid the foundation of the party unit in Cachar district left the AISF as well as Communist Party and took active part in the Quit India Movement and ultimately elected as an MLA from the Congress party.¹⁸⁸ Since the adoption of the Patna resolution an influential section of the ASF strictly and honestly adhered to the party’s stand. In an Independence Day celebration meeting held at Gouhati on 26 January 1942, Gourisankar Bhattacharya while asking the students to fight against Fascism and Imperialism did not forget to remind them tactfully of the Patna decision. The Federation’s unit at Shillong in its conference held on 11-12 April 1942 and presided over by Gourisankar Bhattacharya and Hena Dutta, respectfully, endorsed the anti-fascist resolution adopted at Patna and decided to join the united front in this war against the fascist aggression. Under the circumstances the Communist led units did not participate in the August Revolution of 1942 and by

¹⁸⁵ *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 17th. December, 1942. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Talukdar, Nandeshwar., *Smritir Potot Asomor Communist Andolon.* C.P.I(M), Assam State Committee. Guwahati – 2004. P-9.

¹⁸⁸ *Interview with Noorul Huda*, aged about 82 years. Ex- MLA & MP (LS), Silchar and member of the Central Committee of the Communist party of India (M).

joining hands with the British war efforts, they strengthened the hands of the British. For their adherence to the 'People's War' resolution with firm conviction and 'fanatical zeal' during the mass revolution of 1942, they were disliked by the people at large and some of their leaders were also badly treated.¹⁸⁹

The Indian Communists, by the end of 1941, agreed to support the British Indian Government in its war effort but they put certain demands before the Government like – release of all the Communists from detention, right to independence, organise strike and increase in the daily wages of the industrial workers. In April 1942, the party served a memorandum to the government regarding policy and plan of work of the Communists which *inter-alia* said, "today we 5,000 Indian Communists with our numerous followers and sympathizers have only one demand to make on the government to make us the chance to rally our people, give us the opportunity to move freely among our fellow patriots, we have only one desire today to do 24 hours duty against Jap and German invaders of our land, the enslavers of all mankind. What ever our political differences with the existing government (are) we are blaming the government today not for conducting the war but for not conducting it efficiently enough."¹⁹⁰

In the said memorandum regarding policy and plan of work of the Communists, included to undertake countrywide propaganda and recruitment of fighting forces, the training of guerrilla work, recruitment of volunteers, the organisation of civil defence and the settlement of industrial disputes etc. The Viceroy accepted those demands of the communists but refused to allow the Communists to recruit armed forces because it would help the Communists to utilise in their own purpose. Thereupon, the story of the CPI took a new turn. The ban from the party was lifted by the government on 23rd July, 1942.¹⁹¹ At the same time all the Communist detenus were released from jail. One of the government letter in this regard states, "the Provincial Governments were also recently asked to consider not only the release of Communist security prisoners, but also all those members of the party who had been

¹⁸⁹ Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam (Vol. III)* Publication Board of Assam, 1999. Ppp-156-157-167.

¹⁹⁰ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-89.

¹⁹¹ *Communist Survey, July 1942*. Government of Bengal, Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated August the 18th of 1942, 242/42 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(6) 42, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

convicted offences not involving violence.”¹⁹² The CPI began to function as a legal party enjoying the favour of the Government of India which used them as counterpoise to the Indian National Congress which was preparing for mass opposition to forced the British to quit India.¹⁹³

In Surma valley also, the anti-fascist propaganda work also carried on by the Communists. In order to make arrangement for training of the Communist workers of the valley, Pradyut Kumar Mukharjee and Sushil Roy, two prominent Communist leader of Bengal arrived at Sylhet from Calcutta on the 20th June 1942, as squad. From Sylhet, they left for Karimganj on 23rd June along with Amal Palit, a Communist student activist of M.C. College. At Karimganj, Sudhir Ranjan Deb of Biyanibazar P.S of Karimganj joined the squad and came to Silchar on 24th June. Though the squad was not successful in making arrangement for training of workers for anti-fascist propaganda, they had discussions with the Communist in this regard which had its impact in the valley.¹⁹⁴ The C.I.D Inspector, Habiganj prepared a report on the anti-fascist propaganda work of the Communists of Sylhet which stated:¹⁹⁵

“A conference of ‘Habiganj Soviet Friends Union’ was held at Habiganj Town Hall on the 28th and 29th April, 1942. Mr. Bankim Chandra Mukharjee, MLA, Bengal, Presiding.

In his presidential address Mr. Bankim Chandra Mukharjee referred to the present situation of the country and the world. The speaker spoke about the evils which would follow in the event of Japanese occupation of India. He strongly criticized those who would believe that Japan would liberate India and would deliver independence. He exhorted the audience to get united and offer stout resistance to Japanese aggression. Defeat of Soviet Russia and China would mean perpetual bondage for India. For this they are going to lend their unconditional support to the allies in war efforts and ‘Not sympathy for the cause of the allies’ as stated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. If Soviet Russia wins the war it would mean the end of Imperialism and Capitalism.

¹⁹² Copy of letter 7/2/42 – Political (1), dated the 8th June, 1942. From the Government of India, Home Department to all Provincial Governments and Chief Commissioners (except Panth-piploda). Sub: Policy towards Communism. File No. A-3(6)42, Part II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹⁹³ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-90.

¹⁹⁴ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet.* D.O. No. 6061/39-40, dated 6th July 1942. File No. A-3(6)42, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

¹⁹⁵ Copy of a Report of CID Inspector, Habiganj, dated 01.05.42 on *the proceedings of the Habiganj Soviet Friends Conference held on 28th and 29th April, 1942.* File No.A-3(6)42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

On the next day's sitting on the 29th, comrade Mansoor Habib, presided in place of Mr. Bankim Chandra Mukharjee. The following resolutions were adopted.

1. (a) This conference is extending whole hearted support to Soviet Russia for their bold and courageous stand against Nazism and Fascism, which are destructing the world culture and civilization.

(b) This conference requests all organisations to get united for extending their whole hearted support against Fascism and fascist aggression.

2. This conference demands the withdrawal of restrictions impose on workers and ban on meetings and processions in order to facilitate the anti-fascist campaign.”

Though the Indian Communists adopted the ‘People’s War’ policy and assured the government to support its war efforts, it was not possible for them to forget the interest of the party organisation. The party activists very tactfully took advantage of the situation created due to the withdrawal of ban from the party and intensified to develop the part organisation in their apparent anti-fascist propaganda by organising meetings and conferences. The Communists of Surma valley were not lagging behind in this respect. The Intelligence Report¹⁹⁶ of D.I.B, Sylhet have endorsed this fact which stated:

“The communist workers of the district of Sylhet are making intense propaganda to spread communistic ideas among the people in the garb of anti-fascism. Though, they are posing to anti-fascist and are speaking in favour of war support, they do not seem to be sincere. It will appear from the publication of their organ “*Sanghati*” dated the 23rd. March 1942 and 6th. April, 1942 that their object is to excite hatred and contempt towards to government established by law in British India and also to drive the mass people towards chaos and disorder. Their hidden object is to seize power by force, when there will be an opportunity, by attacking the Thanas and other government institutions. In consideration of their apparent anti-fascist propaganda, are probably giving them undesirable scope in organising meetings and conferences to enable them to organise their party all over this district.”

The Communists in Surma valley, in their apparent anti-fascist propaganda, were able to lay down the strong base of their mass organisation such as student,

¹⁹⁶ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police, from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B) Sylhet, D.O. No.3760/24-41, dated the 2nd May, 1942. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.*

labour and Kisan fronts which is confirmed by an intelligence report of D.I.B, Sylhet. The Report¹⁹⁷ stated:

“The Communist Party has got a good footing in the Kisan, Labour and students fronts and it had made much progress in the organisation in this district. Though at present they are showing sympathy with the Soviet Union in the Nazi attack and want co-operate with the British in the war effort, the underlying principles of the party to overthrow the present government and to replace it by the Soviet form of government has gained ground, and the party is making much headway.”

Even during the ban condition, when the Communists were carrying anti-war propaganda, the hard boiled Communists of Assam as well as Surma valley carried the work very tactfully and the police failed to check their activities. The Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam while intimating the ‘Policy towards Communism’ to the Secretary to the Government of India stated, “the 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.”¹⁹⁸

Impact of the people’s war policy on the CPI:

The adoption of the ‘People’s War’ had worked as a boon as well as curse for the Indian Communists. When the government lifted the ban from the CPI, the Indian Communists started to play dual role in the prevailing political scene of India. On the one hand, they intensified their work in the growth of the party organisation and supporting the British during the war by abandoning strikes and movements on the other. No sooner did the ban from the Communist Party was lifted and its detained leaders were released then it became busy with increasing its further growth. In the absence of the Congress leaders who were arrested in regard to the Quit India Movement, the CPI got ample opportunity to capture the leadership of the organisations of workers, peasants, students and Trade Union Congress. The party leaders, in fact, abandoned the policy of mass strikes.

¹⁹⁷ *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police, from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B) Sylhet*, D.O. No. 1341/5-42, dated the 16th. Feb.,1942. File No. A-3(6) 42, Part. II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

¹⁹⁸ *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.

The gain which the CPI obtained due to its pro-imperialist war policy was many times less than what it lost when the war was over. Keeping the entire national ferment away the Indian Communist leaders began to hit the national spirit of the people at the time when it had reached at the peak of climax.¹⁹⁹ By supporting the British Government in its war effort, though the Indian Communists were organizationally benefited it destroyed their image before the conscious masses of India as well as Indian National Congress, their rival political party. By their pro-war campaign, they committed a blunder which they realized in the subsequent years. The Quit India Movement had given an impetus to the freedom loving people of India. Under this circumstance, the Indian Communists by acting against the interest of the freedom movement, earned bad reputation and lost the support and sympathy of the politically conscious people. Even the Socialist minded Congress leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had their soft corner for the Indian Communists had started to become anti-communist.²⁰⁰ After coming out of prison, Congress leaders began to criticize the Communists for their role in supporting the British during the Quit India Movement. On 23 October 1945, at a public meeting Nehru said: “when lakhs of Indians staked their all for the country’s cause, the Communists were on the opposite camp, which can not be forgotten. The common man associates the Communist Party with Russia and Communism. But the action of the Communist Party of India has prejudiced both Russia and Communism.”²⁰¹

The Communists’ pro-war campaign has lost much of its early drive and still fails to arouse enthusiasm among the public or to evoke any response from rival political parties other than active hostility.²⁰² The Communist Party of India which once tried to establish a united front by maintaining good relations with the Indian National Congress was ultimately lost its ground due to the adoption of the ‘People’s War’ policy during the Quit India Movement. Making the ant-national activities of the Communists during the ‘Quit India Movement’, the Congress high command decided

¹⁹⁹ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. Pp-90-91.

²⁰⁰ *Communist Survey, July 1942*. Government of Bengal, Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated August the 18th. of 1942, 242/42 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(6) 42, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

²⁰¹ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. Pp-316-317.

²⁰² *Communist Survey, July 1942*. Government of Bengal, Office of the Deputy Inspector General Police, C.I.D, Memo. No.17596 dated August the 18th of 1942, 242/42 (Assam)Comm. File No. A-3(6) 42, II, Sub: Communism: General Activities.

to shake off all relations with the Communists. The All India Congress Committee on December 9, 1945, recommended the expulsion of the Communist members from the All India Congress Committee (AICC)²⁰³ In this way, the Communist Party was totally isolated from the Indian National Congress and the relation of the two party ended which had been coming since the inception of the Communist Party of India. Although the Communist Party of India gave whole hearted support to the war against Fascism, it consistently campaigned for the release of the Congress leaders who were arrested during the 'Quit India Movement' and for the formation of a National Government. This positive side of the Indian Communists should not be ignored in the context of the then historical situation. Considering the international political situation and interest of the Communism as well as toiling masses of the world, the Communists had no other alternative other than to adopt the 'People's War' policy though it was harmful to the cause of Indian independence.

Trade union activities after the Second World War:

After the split of the AITUC in 1929, another split took place in this organisation of the workers during the Second World War. During the war, the supporters of the policy of M.N.Roy declared that the war against Germany was an international civil war against Fascism, the enemy of liberty and all working class movement; and that, accordingly, the Indian working class should support the British war effort unconditionally. On the question of support to the war effort the Royists seceded from the AITUC in 1940 and formed the Indian Federation of Labour. (IFL)²⁰⁴ However, by taking the advantage of the withdrawal of government ban from the CPI and detention of the Congress leaders during the August Revolution, the Indian Communists intensified their organizational work in all the mass fronts and established their leadership over those fronts. During this period, the Communists functioned effectively in various trade unions, peasant and student organisations and came to dominate the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the All India Kisan Sabha and the All India Students' Federation.

After political and trade union leaders were released from prison in 1945, they found that the Communists had come to control the AITUC. In these circumstances,

²⁰³ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-94.

²⁰⁴ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-63.

most of the Congress members withdrew from the AITUC.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, the Congress leaders formed a separate trade union organisation in 1947 named Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). It was formed at a conference presided over by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.²⁰⁶ When the Congress leaders left the AITUC in 1947 to form Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the Socialists, who remained within the AITUC, also came into conflict with the Communists, and eventually in 1948 the Socialists left the AITUC and formed the *Hind Mazdoor Panchayat*.²⁰⁷ So, during the colonial period, the history of the All India Trade Union Congress is the history of conflict, dissension and split of the organisation on the issue of leadership and ideological conflict.

The Indian Communists and the partition of India:

After the Second World War, when the Congress leaders came out of jail, they decided to take disciplinary action against the Communist members of the Congress for acting against the Congress resolution of the 'Quit India movement'. "The All India Congress Committee on December 9, 1945, recommended the expulsion of the Communist members from the AICC. Meanwhile, P.C. Joshi to register the protest against the enemical attitude of the Congress asked all Communists, except the members of the AICC to resign from the Congress."²⁰⁸ One of the reason given for taking this action by P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the party, was that the Congress was determined to fight the Muslim League, and had denied the right of self-determination to a section of their countrymen by opposing the demand of Muslim League for the partition of the country. Because the Congress did not support the demand of the Muslim League for self-determination, P.C. Joshi charged that it was guilty of "sectarian arrogance". "Their declaration of fight against the Muslim League," said P.C. Joshi, "will only unleash forces of civil war, not forge the future Indian Union. To glorify the strength of the Congress and deny that of the League is

²⁰⁵ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-63. P-316.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. P-65.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. P-316.

²⁰⁸ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-94.

to be blind. To demand self-determination from the British and to deny it to a section of our own countrymen is plain injustice.”²⁰⁹

On the issue of the partition of the country, the Communists clearly supported the Muslim League’s demand of Pakistan by formulating the theory of ‘Multinational Entity’ and right to ‘Self-determination’. There was a time when the Communists regarded the National Congress as the only party which represented the people of India as a whole. But now, began to recognize the Muslim League as the true party representing the interest of all Indian Muslims and also started to support the League’s demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims.²¹⁰ Though the Indian Communists were suffered from ideological conflict and difference in opinion on the ‘People’s War’ policy, but all the Indian Communists forwarded various arguments in support of the partition of the country. According to prominent Communist leader B.T. Ranadive – “what is the progressive essence of the Pakistan demand? The application of the principle of self-determination to certain nationalities in India, Muslims in certain areas do form a distinct nationality bound together by common culture, history and tradition. In consonance with the demands of justice and fair play, they must have the completest liberty to build their own life and liberty sanctioned by the right to form a separate state if and when they choose.”²¹¹

The Communist Party of India, from 1942, openly began to support and expresses its views on the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan. In September 1942, The Communist Party passed a resolution which spoke of the multi-national character of the Indian sub-continent and of the right of the various nationalities which constituted the Indian union, to secede from it if they so desired. This resolution stated that every section of the Indian people which had a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make-up and common economic life should “be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire.” Accordingly, the free India of the future would be “a federation or union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims),

²⁰⁹ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-317.

²¹⁰ Singh, Chandrika. *Communist and Socialist Movement in India (A Critical Account)* Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987. P-93.

²¹¹ Op. cit. Pp-317-318.

Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajastanis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Biharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharastrians, Keralas etc.”²¹² The Communist Party considered that the demand of Pakistan was justified on the basis of the principle of self-determination. On 15 October 1944, the *People’s War*, a Communist Party organ, wrote that the rational kernel of the Pakistan demand was that wherever people of the Muslim faith lived together in a territorial unit, they formed a nationality and had a right to autonomous state existence just like other nationalities in India, such as Andhras, Karnatakis, Marathis and Bengalis.²¹³

The adoption of People’s War and the condemnation of the Quit India Movement by the Communists were the two great set back to the Communist Party of India which largely damaged the party’s image and till date, the Indian Communists are not free from criticism for their those two stands at the cost of the interest and integrity of the nation. The condemnation of the Quit India Movement by the Communists and the promulgation of the theory of the multi-national nature of the Indian sub-continent widened the gulf that separated the Indian National Congress from the Communist Party of India. Referring to the multi-national theory of the Indian Communists and their role during the Quit India Movement, Nehru later said that he was greatly surprised at the treacherous attitude of the Indian Communists, who want to create a dozen or perhaps more divisions of India. The part of the Communist Party had played during recent years has no relations with the Communism, and if there is any part which done the maximum harm to the cause of Communism, it is the Communist Party of India which has its treacherous policy isolated itself from the masses.²¹⁴

R.P. Dutt, the famous Marxist theoretician and founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain who maintained good relation with the Indian Communists did not support the multi-national theory of Indian Communists. In 1946, R.P. Dutt endeavoured to bridge the gulf that separated Congressmen from the Communists. In this connection, Dutt suggested that the Communist Party should not support the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan. He said that the sharp division between the Congress and the Communist Party had to be bridged in order that both could march forward for the achievement of full independence and for the

²¹² Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-318.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

implementation of the economic and social demand of the people, mainly land reform, nationalization and planned industrial development. But Dutt's effort to lessen the sharp divergence that existed between the Congress and the Communist Party on the basis *inter alia* of the Communist Party dropping its support for the demand for Pakistan, did not succeed.²¹⁵

After independence and partition to February 1948, the Communists of India and Pakistan worked under the same central organization of the Communist Party of India. The Communists of both the countries formally divided on the basis of two nations at the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India which was held at Mohammad Ali Park of Calcutta from 22 February, 1948 and continued for seven days. In this conference, 632 delegates participated both from India and Pakistan (mostly East Pakistan). Out of them, 125 delegates were from East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh). At that time there were about 90 thousand members of the CPI and among them 12 thousand were from East Pakistan. As decided by the Congress of the party, the delegates of East Pakistan met separately on 6 March, 1948 and give birth to the Communist Party of Pakistan.²¹⁶ In 1971, when East Pakistan became an independent nation of Bangladesh, the Communist Party of Pakistan was renamed as the Communist Party of Bangladesh.

²¹⁵ Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-318.

²¹⁶ Singh, Moni. *Jiban Sangram (An Autobiographical Book by Moni Singh)*. Jatiya Sahitya Prakashani. Dacca – 1983. P- 105.