

## **CHAPTER – IV**

### **NEW DIMENSION OF COMMUNIST MOVEMENTS (1946-1950)**

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The Second World War brought several problems in the life of the common masses of India and the working class and peasantry of India were the worst sufferers in the post war situation. The Indian peasantry and working class who were the victims of inhuman colonial exploitation for long past, rose to the highest peak of struggle after the end of the war and a period of mass upsurge opened in India. On the one hand, inflation, rising prices, food scarcity in different parts of India during 1945-46, unemployment caused by retrenchment in ordinance factories, railway workshops and in private industries engaged in war work generated economic discontent. On the other hand, nationalism was at its peak and all classes of the Indian people raised the demand for independence.<sup>360</sup>

#### **Peasantry and working class after independence:**

Even after independence, the condition of the Indian peasantry was not satisfactory. The nationalist leaders failed to bring any improvement in the life of the peasantry after independence which they committed during the freedom movement. The agrarian policy of the Government of India after 1947 has been criticized by the Communists. According to the left, the agrarian policy of the ruling class was to a large extent based on illusory economic and political assumptions. Firstly, it accused the ruling classes of preserving semi-feudalism while what they were doing was to change the agrarian structure but not by giving land to the landless tiller but by gradually transforming the landlords into rich peasants and capitalist farmers and by making middle and large peasants' landowners. Land ceiling, thus, did not generate land for distribution but it did generate a large number of rich peasant holdings.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Sen, Sunil. *Peasant Movements in India: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.*, Manisha, Calcutta – 1991.P-104.

<sup>361</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence - 1857 - 1947*, Penguin Books, New Delhi - 1988. P-345.

The post 1947 period marked a major change in so far as the country won political independence and state power was no longer exercised by alien rulers who were interested in accentuating the forces of national integration. But the process of peasantry's integration into the nation had not been completed and therefore continued.<sup>362</sup> The post independence Congress rule, as the successor of the imperialist rule of Britain, adopted capitalist path for the development of India. This was done without eradicating feudal elements and ending their exploitation on which was super imposed the exploitation of the capitalist class. The process of double exploitations carried on for decades, impoverished the peasant masses and pauperized large sections of them, reducing them to landless agricultural workers. Seething discontent was the inevitable result all over the countryside of India. In this situation, the kisan struggles brought about a substantial change in the alignment of class forces in the rural areas.<sup>363</sup> During post independence period, the peasant movement continued in different parts of the country with full enthusiasm and acquired more militant nature.

The socio-economic condition of the peasantry of Assam was not different from the rest of India. In Assam, the first land reform legislation was the Assam Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act 1948 – which was enacted when mass movement on *adhi* system was initiated by the Communists parties in the wake of the famous Tebhaga Movement of Bengal and Cachar district of Assam. The most important feature of the land tenure system of Assam is share cropping system which is known as '*Adhi Bhag*'. The word *Adhi* (means half) itself indicates that half of the produce should go to the non-cultivating landlord. Government, no doubt, enacted the Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act in 1948 prescribing that only one fourth and later one fifth of the principal crop should be given as crop rent by the share-croppers to the landlord, but for want of proper administrative mechanism to enforce the provisions, the legislation remained paper legislation only. The *adhiars* themselves were supposed to seek redress against the landlord which they could not do because of their weak bargaining power. The act of the *adhiars* did not improve even now though the Tenancy Act of 1971 recognises *adhiars* as tenants. The latest modus operandi of the landlords to prevent the *adhiars* being recorded as tenants is a novel one. The *adhiars* are forced to sign an agreement in which they bind themselves with the undertaking that they will plough the land that year for a lump-sum payment of Rs. 500/-. The

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<sup>362</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence* Ibid. P-364.

<sup>363</sup> Rasul, M.A. *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, National Book Agency. Calcutta - 1989. P-IX.

*adhiars* get the land only after signing these documents and the landlords produce these documents before the settlement staff to prove that the land is not under tenant or *adhiars*.<sup>364</sup>

Even after independence of the country, the condition of the Indian working class did not improve to a satisfactory level. After transfer of power, to promote better relations between employers and employees and to bring about an industrial truce an industries conference consisting of representatives of employers, workers and the government was held at New Delhi in December 1947. The conference revealed basic differences in the view point of labour and management, but eventually an Industrial Truce Resolution was arrived at unanimously. The conference recommended that fullest use should be made of statutory and other machinery for fixing fair wages and conditions of labour should be set-up, and in each industrial undertaking works committee should be constituted. After this Industrial Truce Resolution was passed, the Government of India incorporated the same in its Industrial Policy Resolution of 6 April 1948. In pursuance of the Industrial Truce Resolution, the government also appointed two committees namely, the Profit-Sharing Committee and Fair Wages Committee in 1948.<sup>365</sup>

After 1947, when the non-communists left the AITUC, the Communists were in full control. The attitude of the Communists to the Indian government was very different from that of other labour leaders. Believing that the central government was utterly reactionary, in 1948, the Communists organised a number of strikes in various industries all over India. The government at the centre and in the various states adopted repressive measures against the Communists. In March 1948, the West Bengal Government banned the CPI, arrested a number of Communist leaders and sealed the office of the Bengal branch of AITUC. In April 1948, the Bombay Government arrested a number of Communist leaders, including S. A. Dange-President of the AITUC and S. A. Mirjakar, President of the Bengal branch of the AITUC. Leading Communists were arrested in different parts of the country in 1948 under the Public Safety Act. In protest, the Communists campaigned for launching an all-India railway strike and for this a call was given by Jayaprakash Narayan, the Socialist leader and the President of the All India Railwaymen's Federation. The all

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<sup>364</sup> Goswami, Atul. (edited) *Land Reforms And Peasant Movement: A study of North-east India*, Omsons Publications, Guwahati- 1986. Pp-57-58.

<sup>365</sup> Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. P-65.

India railway strike was to take place from 9 March 1949 but averted as a result of negotiations between Jayaprakash Narayan and Gopalswami Ayyanger, the Minister of State and Transport. The Communists, however, continued to organise strikes in different parts of the industrial sector. Throughout the period from 1948 to 1950 the Communists campaigned for intensifying the strike offensive. The militant policy pursued by AITUC during 1948-1950 was countered by severe repressive measures by the government. Since India attained independence, the working class movement in India has developed very rapidly.<sup>366</sup>

### **Working class movement in Surma-Barak valley after the Second World War:**

After the end of the Second World War, like people from different walk of life, the Indian working class was also largely affected by the situation created by the war like-price rise of essential commodities, decrease in real income of the labourers, black-marketing etc. So like peasantry, the Indian working class also organised various movements to get redressal from the problem created due to the war as well as for their legitimate demands. Like other parts of India, the working class of Surma valley was also very active in organising various movements against all sorts of economic injustice and problems concerning their lives. In Surma valley, there was only one plantation workers' trade union, the Sylhet-Cachar *Cha-Bhagan Mazdoor* Union that continued to function. Its activity had, however, to be carried on stealthily. To forestall the advance of Communists in the plantations, five individual plantations labour unions, and the Assam Tea Labourers' Federation affiliating them, were formed in Shibsagar in May 1945 through the efforts of P. M. Sarwan.<sup>367</sup>

The condition of the working class which emerged after the Second World War provided a golden opportunity to Indian Communists itself to uplift their sinking image which they lost during the people's war period by utilizing the sentiments and grievances of the working class. The Communists in Surma valley was also not lagging behind in this respect. At the Communist influence, in Surma valley the postal employees also expressed their anger by holding public meetings. They had demands for increased pay and dearness allowances. Employees in Sylhet proposed to wear

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<sup>366</sup> Ghose, Sankar., *Socialism and Communism in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay – 1971. Pp-65-68.

<sup>367</sup> *Reports of Labour Investigation Committee* (Chairman: D. V. Rege) on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labours in Plantations in India. Delhi-1946. Pp-71-72.

“Hungry Postal Employees” badges from February 1946 and organise strike.<sup>368</sup> The nation-wide railway strike which was to commence on the mid-night of 27 June 1946 was supported not only by the postal employees but also by the Motor Transport and Commercial Carrying Company of Assam. These circumstances gave scope to the Communist leaders to increase their hold over the workers. But this was frustrated. After a three day session held in June 1946, the general council of the All India Railwaymen’s Federation which submitted the strike notice decided to withdraw it in view of Rail Board’s assurance to fulfill their more important demands by accepting the award of arbitration.<sup>369</sup>

The Communist workers of the Cachar district under the direction of the Assam Provincial Organising Committee of the CPI were busy in organizing railway strike in co-operation with the Rail Board Workers’ Union. They actively organized propaganda work in this regard in various places like-Katakhal, Badarpur, Lower Haflong and Langting centres by distributing leaflets.<sup>370</sup> A meeting of about 500 persons organized by the Rail Board Workers union was held at Badarpur on 10/06/46 with Jyoti Basu MLA (Bengal) in the chair. In the meeting it was decided to engage a mobile party to carry message and to collect information etc. During the ensuing strike, it was also decided to recruit a good number of volunteers from outside to render necessary help to the strikers. After this meeting, Jyoti Basu also visited Haflong, Lumding, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh for the same purpose.<sup>371</sup>

Regarding organizing the railway strike, a public meeting of about 800 persons was held at Silchar on 18/06/46 with Moulavi Golam Sabir in the chair. People from different political groups except the Muslim League attended the meeting. Shakti Ranjan Bose, Asstt. Secretary of the Railway Employees Association, Badarpur branch, Moulvi Abdur Rahman Khan, a member of the Bolshevik Party, Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee, Moulvi Jalal Uddin Ahmed and Moulvi Golam Sabir Khan addressed the meeting. They said that the strike would be for a short duration and the railway administration would surrender before long. Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee further appealed to the Assam Police not to interfere with the strikers.....he also

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<sup>368</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 78, Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 12 January, 1946.

<sup>369</sup> Bhuyan, A.C. *Political History of Assam. (Voll. III)*. Publication Board of Assam, 1999. P-193.

<sup>370</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.(Not visible) dt. 08/06/46, Silchar. File No. WCR-1946.

<sup>371</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.1168-72/C dt. 16/06/46, Silchar. File No. WCR-1946.

requested the people to form 'Strike Aid Committees' in every place to help the workers.<sup>372</sup> In this way the Communists tried their best to organize the working class to fight for their legitimate demands.

### **Peasant movement after the Second World War:**

The third phase of the Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district was started after the Second World War. Though the Communists were not able to make much influence among the working class of Surma-Barak valley in particular after the end of the Second World War, but reverse was the case in respect of the peasantry. After the war, the Communists were very active and dominant among the peasantry of the valley. The Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet district again raised its head after the war with full determination and militancy directly under the influence of the Communists. With the interference of the Communists, the historic Nankar Rebellion took a new dimension after the end of the Second World War and it can be regarded as the third phase of the Nankar Rebellion.

The Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area of Karimganj sub-division for the first time rose in organised form of revolt during the post war period. The revolt was initiated in 1945 and was continued afterwards under the direct leadership of the Kisan Sabha. A few leaders from the Nankars took initiative and started to organise various secret meetings to organise the Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area for a militant revolt. Among those Nankars, Naim Ullah was the most active and prominent. He took initiative to organise an open meeting of the Nankars of this area to start a revolt against the zamindars and mirasdars. In the month of April 1946, under the banner of Kisan Sabha, an open meeting of the Nankars was held at Tikarpara with Taiyab Ali in the chair.<sup>373</sup> The main demand of the meeting was to stop the zamindari oppression and abolition of the Nankar system. This was the first open meeting of the Nankars under Communist influence against the zamindars where Chittaranjan Das, Sylhet district Secretary of the Communist Party was the main speaker.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1946, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.1200-03/C dt. 22/06/46, Silchar. File No. WCR-1946.*

<sup>373</sup> *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.*

<sup>374</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II). P-18.

After this meeting, the Communists intensified on the propaganda work among the Nankars. A quite number of youths from middle class family also took part in this propaganda work. On the other hand, the zamindars and mirasdars did not sit silent. They attempted to suppress the propaganda work by adopting various measures but failed to break the unity of the Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area. The most powerful zamindar of the area was Soyab Mia (Nurul Islam Choudhury).<sup>375</sup> When the zamindar failed in every attempt to suppress the Nankars, he conspired to create a communal clash among the Nankars who were composed of both the Hindus and Muslims. Again, this attempt of the zamindar failed to divide the Nankars on communal lines.

In the month of November 1946, the Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area organised a mass rally in the demand of the abolition of the Nankar system, illegal eviction and to unite all the Nankars for resistance against the conspiracy of the zamindars.<sup>376</sup> During the last part of 1946, several secret committees of the Nankars were formed in the area. In December 1946, a local committee of Kisan Sabha was formed by uniting all the secret committees which was represented by the leaders of the Nankars of all the villages of Lauta-Bahadurpur area.<sup>377</sup> The important members of this committee of Kisan Sabha were- Najib Ali (President), Akbar Ali, Naim Ullah, Lalit Paul (Vice-President), Ajoy Bhattacharjee (Secretary), Jayed Ullah, Abdus Suban (Asst. Secretary), Shishir Chakraborty (Treasurer) and Shailendra Bhattacharjee as Office Secretary. Other members of the committee were Osman Ali, Tafajjal Ali, Asid Ali, Sona Mia Gagan Das, Yasin Mistri, Mantaj Ali, Bramar Das, Abani Malakar, Lakhicharan Paul, Sudhir Bhattacharjee, Birendra Chandra, Keshab Namasudra and Akal Ali etc.<sup>378</sup> With the formation of the Kisan Sabha in this area, the rebellion became more organised.

In December 1946, the newly formed Kisan Sabha adopted a charter of demand which included – 1) The total abolition of the Nankar System, 2) Abolition of zamindary oppression, 3) Abolition of the system of obligatory supply of essential commodities to the zamindars by the Nankars, 4) To fix the unit of measurement of

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<sup>375</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II). P-120.

<sup>376</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet*. D.O. No. 3542/65, dated 13th October 1946. File No. A-3(7)46, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>377</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Sylhet*. D.O. No. 8412/54, dated 25th December 1946. File No. A-3(7)46, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>378</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II). Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. P-134.



land as per government rules, 5) To fix the land revenue, 6) To stop paying revenue in kind and 7) to stop eviction of tenant from *Jote* land. The committee also decided to boycott the obligatory services to the zamindars without proper wage.<sup>379</sup>

The Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area were prepared to start a armed revolt but only a spark was needed to flared the revolt and it was provided by killing of a horse of zamindar Soyab Mia. The event was that, in the night of 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1947, the Nankars were returning to their homes after a meeting at the Kisan Sabha office. On the way, they found that a horse of Soyab Mia was grassing in the paddy field of the Nankars. So, the Nankars, made an attack on the horse and as a result it died. Soyab Mia suspected the Nankars of Narayanpur village and next day on 16 January, 1947, he called all the Nankars of Narayanpur and imposed a huge amount of fine on the Nankars. As a result, the Nankars openly declared revolt against the zamindar and left the court of zamindar.<sup>380</sup> In this way, the open revolt of the Nankars was started. The Nankars had organised various rally, protest meetings and demonstrations in Lauta-Bahadurpur area against the Nankar system.<sup>381</sup> On that day (16 January 1947) at night all the Nankars of the area gathered together and declared that they will no longer render any obligatory service to their zamindars without any wages or remuneration. They also formed a volunteer group with the young Nankars to guard their village keeping in view the impending counter attack of the zamindars.<sup>382</sup>

Within a short period, the open revolt which was started from the court of zamindar by the Nankars of Narayanpur village spread to Lauta-Bahadurpur area like wild fire. The revolt spread to Botrashi, Kunashaleshwar, Mahakol, Dacca Dakshin and Gopalganj. Everywhere the Nankars refused to render obligatory services to the zamindar family and started to avoid the zamindars by not responding to their call. In the revolt affected areas, the government mobilized armed police to suppress the revolt.<sup>383</sup> The zamindars and mirasdars also instituted various fake criminal cases against the Nankar leaders. Though in some pockets, the suppressive measures was

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<sup>379</sup> Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-35.

<sup>380</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1946*, Sylhet district, From S.P,(D.I.B) Sylhet, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.62-69/C, dt. 20/01/46, Sylhet. File No. A-3(7)46, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>381</sup> Op. cit. Pp-37-38.

<sup>382</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. (Vol. II). P-163.

<sup>383</sup> *Report on the administration of Police Department for the year 1947*, by Inspector General of Police, Assam, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, No. 3254, Shillong, the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

successful to a certain extent, but in Lauta-Bahadurpur area, which was the centre stage of the rebellion, every attempts of the zamindars and administration failed to suppress the revolt as the Nankars of this area were more organised and politically more conscious than other parts of the district. After failing in their various attempts to suppress the revolt, the zamindars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area went to Shillong, the then capital of Assam and appealed to the government to carry on suppressive measures in the area. The Nankars also continued their revolt by ignoring the suppressive measures of the police and knaves of zamindars.

In this situation, under the leadership of Bahadur Ali, a delegation of Nankars went to Shillong and met many members of Legislative Assembly and ministers and placed their demands for the abolition of the Nankar system. The ministers assured the Nankars that the government will take necessary action to solve the problem. But the result was totally different. The government increased suppressive measure in Lauta-Bahadurpur area. The Congress Government of Assam established many police posts in the area and also appointed special constable to suppress the revolt.<sup>384</sup> But all these attempts failed to suppress the agitating Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area. In this situation, the Kisan Sabha gave a call for the social boycott of the zamindars. Accordingly, the common masses from every walk of life along with the Nankars started socially boycott the zamindars. Even the servants of the zamindars refused to do the domestic work and left zamindar family. So, the zamindars were socially boycotted and they became isolated and helpless in the society. The peasants also boycotted the land revenue.<sup>385</sup>

Though the Nankar Rebellion was very strong in Lauta-Bahadurpur area, from April 1947, it spread to different areas under the active leadership of the Kisan Sabha and the Communists. The important areas of Sylhet where Nankar tenants rose in organised revolt at that time were – Dacca Dakshin, Fulbari, Ronikheli, Bhadeshwar, Amura, Dakshinbhag of Borlekha police station, Bualjur of Balaganj police station, Mourapur of Fachuganj police station.<sup>386</sup> In the month of December 1946, a workers'

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<sup>384</sup> *Report on the administration of Police Department for the year 1947*, by Inspector General of Police, Assam, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, No. 3254, Shillong, the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

<sup>385</sup> Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas*. Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-p.44-46.

<sup>386</sup> *Report on the administration of Police Department for the year 1947*, by Inspector General of Police, Assam, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, No. 3254, Shillong, the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

conference was held at Burunga village in which Nankars from Dacca Dakshin participated. In this conference, many programme and policy regarding the revolt were adopted which gave a great impetus to the Nankars of Dacca Dakshin.<sup>387</sup>

During that period the important zamindars of Lauta-Bahadurpur were – Najmul Isalm Choudhury and Nurul Islam Choudhury(Soyab Mia) of Bhagprochandakha village, Abdul Mantakin Choudhury(Aptab Mia), Abdul Baki Choudhury(Faroi Mia), Abdul Moyead Choudhury(Mostoi Mia) of the above village and Suraj Kumar Deb (Shyamapada Babu) of Lauta.<sup>388</sup> All those zamindars were trying to find out a way to suppress the united revolt of the Nankars. The oppression on the Nankars by the armed police at Lauta-Bahadurpur area started to increase day by day but failed to suppress the united revolt of the Nankars. Day by day, the revolt of the Nankars at Lauta-Bahadurpur and other area were becoming more organised and militant.

Due to the increasing repression, a section of the agitating Nankars decided to resort to violence against zamindars and police force. But the Kisan Sabha adopted the constitutional line of the movement and adopted two methods: 1) To isolate the zamindars from all section of the people and 2) To spread the revolt to the common people.<sup>389</sup> In this way, the Nankar Rebellion became a mass movement when almost all section of the common masses joined the agitating Nankars. In this situation, repression became more and more high. The police arrested large number of agitating Nankars who were not free from inhuman physical torture.<sup>390</sup> From Lauta-Bahadurpur, the Nankar Rebellion spread to almost all the corner of Sylhet district. When the revolt became more powerful in the villages of Beanibazar and Borlekha Police Station of Karimganj sub-division, Gopalganj Police station of Sylhet Sadar division and some other villages of Fanchuganj and Balganj Police station area, the symptoms of the rebellion was noticed in almost all villages of Sylhet district. In all the area, the Nankars boycotted obligatory services to the zamindars. At that time, the

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<sup>387</sup> Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas*. Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-49.

<sup>388</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II). Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-164-165.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. P-187.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid. Pp-91-93.

revolt spread to new areas like – Joltup, Supatola and Dasgram of Beanibazar P.S, Sahabajpur, Chotolekha and Panidhar of Borlekha Police Station.<sup>391</sup>

### **Impact of partition on Nankar Rebellion:**

The Nankar Rebellion which reached its highest peak on the eve of independence was largely affected by communal feeling during partition and Sylhet referendum. The Nankar society of Sylhet was composed of both Hindu and Muslims and under the prevailing situation it was easily affected by the communal atmosphere. Though, there was no direct communal clash among the Nankars on the question of their struggle against their common enemy - the zamindars, but on the issue of the division of the Sylhet district, the Nankars were divided in to two groups. The Nankars regarding the future course of their action became hopeless and their militant spirit of revolt was largely jeopardized during that period. Most of the Nankars from Hindu society as well as Hindu middle class was thinking to leave Sylhet and to settle in the Indian territory. On the other hand, the Muslim Nankars thought that, with out abolition of the Nankar system with a hard blow, they will not be able to free themselves from the bondage of feudal exploitation.

By taking the opportunity of the communal situation, the zamindars and mirasdars who were socially boycotted started to move openly in the society. A quite number of Communist and Kisan Sabha activists also not free from communal feeling on the issue of the partition of the district. In spite of the fact, the Nankars of the Sylhet did not bow down before the zamindars and mirasdars. They continued their agitation by observing the boycott of obligatory service to their masters. Before few days of Sylhet referendum, the Assam government temporarily withdrew all the cases and arrest warrant against the agitating Nankars. All the arrested Nankars were released from jail on bond<sup>392</sup> which largely boosted the rebellion.

After partition, the Nankar rebellion again raised its head in different parts of Sylhet with full determination of the Nankars to get rid of the problem. Again Lauta-Bahadurpur became the storm centre of the rebellion.<sup>393</sup> So, the communal situation created on the eve of partition and Sylhet referendum was unable to cause an end to

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<sup>391</sup> *Report on the administration of Police Department for the year 1947*, by Inspector General of Police, Assam, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, No. 3254, Shillong, the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II). Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. P-248.

the Nankar Rebellion. The agitation continued with its basic demand i.e. the complete abolition of the Nankar system.

Though the communal problem was unable to cause any loss to the ongoing Nankar Rebellion, but the partition of the country caused a great loss to the Communist Party as well as communist movements of Surma valley. It is largely because of the fact that the leaders and activists of the Communist Party and communist movements of the valley were geographically divided on the basis of two nations i.e. India and Pakistan. After partition, among the Communist leaders of Surma valley Chanchal Kumar Sharma, Barindra Kumar Dutta, Rohini Kumar Das, Lala Shorodindhu Dey, Digendranath Dasgupta, Angira Kumar Sharma, Rabindranath Dash, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Dinesh Choudhury, Lalmohan Roy, Probodanda Kar, Suroth Paul Choudhury etc. decided to stay in Sylhet of East Pakistan.<sup>394</sup> Among other leaders like Bires Chandra Mishra, Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee etc. came to Cachar district of India. In spite of the fact, the Communists in both the part of the border dedicated themselves in the on going communist movements and tried their level best to continue the movement to reach the goal. At that time, the situation was very fertile for the Communists in Cachar in comparison with the Communist of Sylhet as the Communist of East Pakistan faced great repression by the Muslim League Government.

### **The Tebhaga in Bengal:**

Tebhaga was one of the militant peasant movements of Indian history. The period of Tebhaga Movement was 1946 to 1950 which covered both colonial and post colonial period. Basically, the Tebhaga Movement was started from Bengal and then the same was organised by the Communists in Cachar district of southern Assam. In 1946, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha gave a call to implement through mass struggle the Floud Commission's recommendation of *Tebhaga*: two-thirds of the crop, instead of half and even less, for the share-croppers. (*bargadar*, *bhagchasi* and *adhiar*) working on land rented from *Jotedars*. Communist cadres, including many urban student militants, went out into the countryside to organise *bargadars*, who had become a major and growing section of the rural population. The movement caught on suddenly

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<sup>394</sup> Aziz, Mohammad Abdul; Rahman, Mohammad Habibur; Bashar, Mohammad Abul; Imam, Shubhebu & Fattah, Abdul Fateh.(Edited) *Brihattar Sileter Itihas(Vol. II)*, Brihattar Sylhet Itihas Pranayan Parishad, Sylhet – 2006. P-38.

from harvest time in November, with the central slogan of *Nij Khamare Dhan Tolo*: (share-croppers taking paddy into their own threshing floor and not to the *Jotedars* house) to enforce Tebhaga. North Bengal Became the storm centre, particularly Takurgoan sub-division of Dinajpur and adjoining areas of Jalpaiguri, Rangpur and Malda. Tebhaga pockets also developed in Mymensing (Kishoreganj), Midnapur (Mahisadal, Sutahata and Nandigram) and 24 Parganas (Kakdwip).<sup>395</sup>

The Floud Commission popularly known as the Land Revenue Commission was the first attempt from the side of the Bengal Government to study the condition of peasants, land revenue and land tenure system. The main aim of the commission was “to examine the existing land revenue system of Bengal in its various aspects, with special reference to the Permanent Settlement to examine the effect of the system on the economic and social structure of Bengal and its influence on the revenue and disadvantages of the existing system.”<sup>396</sup> The Land Revenue Commission had gone through different aspects of the Permanent Settlement and found that the condition of the *bargadars* is really most miserable. The commission after going through all aspects of the system recommended: “the provisions of the John Kerr’s bill should be restored by which it was proposed to treat a tenant *bargadars* who supply the plough, cattle and agricultural implements. If it is thought too difficult to frame a workable definition then all *bargadars* should be declared to be tenants. We also recommend that the share of crop legally recoverable from them should be one third instead of half.”<sup>397</sup>

During that time, two district of Assam – Sylhet and Goalpara were under Permanent Settlement. So, the immediate effect of the appointment of the Floud Commission was felt in the province of Assam. In Assam also demand for abolition of zamindary system were raised along with. Moulavi Abdul Bari Choudhury asked in the Assam Assembly, do the government proposed to appoint a commission to go into the question (abolition of zamindary) as was appointed in Bengal – the Floud Commission? Bishnuram Medhi, the Revenue Minister in reply said that at present they did not contemplate the appointment of such commission because the commission appointed by the Bengal Government submitted their report three years

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<sup>395</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi -2005. P-440.

<sup>396</sup> *Report of the Land Revenue Commission (Floud Commission)*, Bengal, 1938-1939. Government Publication. P-68.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.* Pp-68-69.

back and no step has been taken by the Bengal Government to abolish the zamindari system even in some of their districts.<sup>398</sup>

The battle cry of Tebhaga originated from these recommendations of the Floud Commission. Of course, the *adhiars* and the *bargadars* were agitating for justice since long and in some cases, they demanded two-third share even before the Floud Commission and the Bengal Kisan Sabha could think of such step. But these were sporadic outbursts only. Immediately after the submission of the report, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha had its 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Panjia, Jessore district, in 1940 for the first time gave the call for Tebhaga which to be the cry of *bargadars* in 1946 not only in Bengal but also in two district of Assam – Goalpara and Cachar. The demand was raised in 1940 in the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Kisan Sabha but it required six years for them to actually start the movement.<sup>399</sup> It was not before September 1946 that the BPKS decided to launch the Tebhaga Movement in the harvesting season. The Kisan Sabha held meetings in the villages, enrolled volunteers and distributed leaflets calling upon the *bargadars* to store paddy in their *khamars* and to demand tebhaga.<sup>400</sup>

Within three months of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference held at Moubhog in Khulna district the peasant started the Tebhaga Movement with the slogan, ‘cut the paddy quickly’ and ‘*Nij Khamare Dhan Tolo*’.<sup>401</sup> The movement started in Dinajpur district in early December. Between December 1946 and January 1947, the Tebhaga Movement spread to 19 districts of undivided Bengal. It seems that the *bargadar*’s response was overwhelming. Within a month the movement spread to 22 out of 30 police stations in the districts and was particularly intense in Thakurgoan sub-division. The Kisan Sabha volunteers went to the field cut and carried the paddy to the *bargadar*’s *khamar*. The movement spread to the adjoining Rongpur and Jalpaiguri districts. The pattern of the movement was the same. The *bargadars* took the entire crop to their *khamar* and demanded Tebhaga. The movement was intense in Pachagarh (Jalpaiguri)

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<sup>398</sup> Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1946.

<sup>399</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-52-53.

<sup>400</sup> Sen, Sunil. *Peasant Movements in India: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.*, Manisha, Calcutta – 1991. P-106.

<sup>401</sup> Op. cit. Pp-61-62.

where Charu Mazumder was a local leader. The Tebhaga Movement also spread to a few areas in Malda and Bogra bordering on Dinajpur district.<sup>402</sup>

The intensity of the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal was very high. In this movement about 60 lakh peasants actively participated.<sup>403</sup> An important feature of the Tebhaga Movement of Bengal was that, at initial stage of the movement, the entire Bengal was covered with Communal politics of Muslim League which had its great impact on the common masses. The observation of 'Direct Action Day' on 16 August 1946 by the Muslim League provided the fuel to communalise the Muslim masses. In this grave situation, the Communist Party and Kisan Sabha was able to give birth to the Tebhaga Movement by uniting the Hindu, Muslim and tribal peasants. Due to the communal politics of Muslim League, all most the entire people of the Muslim society of Bengal became the ardent supporters of the Muslim League. In spite of this fact, due to the efforts of the Kisan Sabha, a quite number of Muslim peasants participated in the movement and among them; a few emerged as leaders of the movement. Important Muslim peasant leaders of Tebhaga Movement of Bengal were – Haji Mohammad Danesh (Dinajpur), Altab Ali (Mymensingh), Mohammad Yakub Mia (Comilla), Munsii Jahir Uddin (Mymensingh), Dr. Abdul Kader (Bogura) and Kashim Mia (Rajshahi) etc.<sup>404</sup>

### **Tebhaga in Cachar district:**

In Cachar district, though the branch of Kisan Sabha was formed in 1937,<sup>405</sup> it was not possible for the Communist peasant activists of the district to launch any organised militant movement before 1945-46. Of course, sporadic outburst took place against tyrant landlords in local pockets of the district. But this did not leave any deep impact upon the whole peasantry. The year 1945-46 was the period of great peasant uprising in Bengal and Assam. In undivided Bengal, the *bhagchasi* under the banner of Kisan Sabha organised the historic Tebhaga Movement.<sup>406</sup> When the Tebhaga was

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<sup>402</sup> Sen, Sunil. Peasant Movements in India: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries., Manisha, Calcutta – 1991. Pp-106-108.

<sup>403</sup> Singh, Moni. *Jiban Sangram (An Autobiographical Book by Moni Singh)*. Jatiya Sahitya Prakashani. Dacca – 1983. P-91.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid. P-95.

<sup>405</sup> *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence*, No. 584, Cachar. Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (S.B), Shillong, dated 17 December, 1937.

<sup>406</sup> Goswami, Atul. (edited) *Land Reforms And Peasant Movement: A study of North-east India*, Omsons Publications, Guwahati- 1986. P-214.



started in Bengal, its echo was directly felt upon the peasantry as well peasant activists of Cachar district of Assam.

With the beginning of Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, the Communists of Cachar district also started to spread the propaganda and preparatory work among the peasantry of different villages of Cachar. When the harvesting time was nearing, all round preparation was made in different parts of the district such as Attarotillah, Udharbond, Kamranga and Borkhola etc.<sup>407</sup> The Secretary, Communist Party of India, issued a circular letters to all communist units of the province to hold public meetings and demonstrations in their localities in support of the Tebhaga Movement in Cachar. Intensive propaganda began following this directive.<sup>408</sup> The main methods of the Communists to mobilize and educate the peasantry and also propagate the ideology were public meetings, group meetings and distribution of leaflets etc. In the propaganda work, apart from Tebhaga, the Kisan Sabha and Communists gave due emphasis on other problems and demands of the peasantry and also the questions related to the National Liberation Movement of India.<sup>409</sup>

At Udharbond P.S area, a Kisan Conference was held on 06/02/46 at Udharbond bazaar with Biresh Chandra Mishra in the Chair. About 500 persons attended. Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee, Irabat Singha and the president delivered speeches. Achinta Bhattacharjee requested all to support the Communists in demand for the following:

- 1) Complete independence.
- 2) Over handling of the Government machinery
- 3) Confiscation of the tea gardens.
- 4) Abolition of zamindari system.
- 5) Prevention of profiteering in rice and paddy and fixing Rs. 6/8 as price of paddy per md.
- 6) Prevention of excess interests.
- 7) Opening of Cooperative societies.
- 8) Opening of agricultural societies.
- 9) Employment for all and

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<sup>407</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar.* D.O. No. 2541/25, dated 25th December 1946. File No. A-3(7)46, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>408</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-84.

<sup>409</sup> Op. cit.

10) Prevention of *bhagi* system.<sup>410</sup>

On 28/01/46 a meeting organised by the Communist workers was held at Borkhola with Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee in the chair. Achinta Bhattacharjee delivered a speech asking the Kisans to revolt against the zamindars if their legitimate claims were not fulfilled. Accordingly the Manipuri workers started to organise union<sup>411</sup> “A meeting of the Borkhola Thana Kisan Sammelani was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1946, with Irabat Singha in the chair. In the *Sammelan*, Achinta Bhattacharjee delivered speeches and called upon the peasants to organise public opinion against the zamindary system. Needless to say, zamindary was the root cause of *bhagchas* system”<sup>412</sup> Communist worker Jiban Benarjee and others organized many meetings in Lakhipur area and asking the cultivators not to give paddy to the landlords in lieu of rent.”<sup>413</sup>

As a result of the various propaganda work of the Communists and Kisan Sabha activists, the *bhagchais* of the district were organising themselves to establish their legitimate rights. Observing the situation in various places of the district, the police and the district administration apprehended in large scale violation and started giving red alarm to all the police stations of the district to face the impending situation. The following intelligence report<sup>414</sup> of the S.P (D.I.B) Cachar gives clear indication in this respect.

“The latest agitation launched by the Communists has taken a very sinister shape.

It is now the harvesting time and they are propagating amongst the ‘*bargadars*’ that they should pay only one-third of the produce to the owner of the land and not a half share as the usual practice is. There has been intense propaganda in this regard in the predominantly Manipuri and tea garden areas and it has been reported from some thanas that the ‘*bargadars*’ are collecting the whole produce of the land with the help of the Communist workers – as the land owners are refusing to accept only a third share. The movement has also been given prominent publicity in the daily “*Swadhinata*” of 28.11.46. All the Communist workers in this district are very actively busy and it is feared that all these may lead to serious breaches of peace in the near future. This situation is being closely watched and necessary steps are being taken.”

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<sup>410</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.87-90/C dt. 12/01/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1946. Memo No.275-78/C dt. 16/02/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.* 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1946. Memo No.485-88/C dt. 23/03/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.* 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1946. Memo No.1821-22/C dt. 09/11/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.* 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1946. Memo No.1966-67/C dt. 07/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

Following the call for Tebhaga by the Kisan Sabha and Communists in Bengal, the Kisan Sabha in Cachar as well as in Sylhet also gave a call to the peasants for Tebhaga Movement. The Second District Conference of the *Cachar Zila Kisan Sabha* which was held at Attarotillah-Panibhara area of Cachar district adopted the demand of Tebhaga in this district. The main demand of Tebhaga was that in *adhi* or *bhagi* land, the cultivator will receive two-third share of the produce instead of half. '*Langal Jar Jami Tar*' became the important slogan of the peasants.<sup>415</sup>

Side by side with the beginning of the Tebhaga Movement in Cachar, the propaganda works are also carried on by the Kisan Sabha activists and Communists. The S.P (D.I.B) in his report<sup>416</sup> states:

"Printed leaflets published by Dwijendralal Sengupta, Bhagirath Singha and others were found in circulation in this district demanding: 1) Abolition of *bhagi* system by framing law, 2) Payment of third share of the produce of the land holders during the interim period, 3) Cancellation of all cases of ejection made from 1940 to 1946, 4) Introduction of Payment of rents in cash instead of paddy, 5) Stopping of rent more than 5 times of the government revenue, 6) Fixation of price of paddy at Rs. 6/8 per md. and direct purchase by the government, 7) Introduction of rationing system in the villages and reduction of prices of commodities. The S.P further states: "The Communist workers are still doing propaganda work in Lakhipur and Dholai areas. The Manipuris of Lakhipur are working under the leadership of Jiban Benarjee, Mukta Singha and Madan Singha of Kamranga, P.S Lakhipur refused to give half share of the paddy to their land holders. Sunam Mia, the land holder files a petition to the Magistrate for action U/S 144 IPC. The matter is under police investigation. It is learnt that Secy. Of the Jamiat-Ulema of Dholai has sent a wire to the Hon'ble Revenue Minister stating that: "Karmacharis of mirasdar Asab Ali Laskar, Upendra Sarkar Dutta, Sajid Mia Mazumder and other are realizing rents violating the Tenancy Act. He further prayed to the Hon'ble Revenue Minister to intervene into the matter. After the sudden and large scale arrest, situation has vastly improved. Most of the *bargadars* have agreed and abide by the terms and it is expuded that everything will end peacefully."<sup>417</sup>

We find the first instance of the Tebhaga Movement at Udharbond area of Cachar district. In Udharbond P.S *aleka*, the Tebhaga Movement has become wide spread....With the Communist helpers *bhgidars* took paddy with out giving any portion to the land holders. Several cases U/S 424 IPC had been waged against the

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<sup>415</sup> Souvenir, C.P.I (M) Cachar-Hailakandi 18<sup>th</sup> District Conference, Silchar. P. 18.

<sup>416</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.2004-05/C dt.14/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. 21st December, 1946. Memo No.2050-51/C dt.21/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

accused persons.<sup>418</sup> Starting from Udharbond, the movement spread like fire to other villages of the district like – Lakhipur, Dholai, Kamranga, Joypur, Attarotillah, Sonai, Borkhola and Ramnagar. Even the Movement also spread to Bajarichara, Patherkandi and Ratabari areas of Karimganj sub-division. Against the agitating peasants, everywhere, the zamindars and mirasdars instituted cases and large scale arrest and severe repression was done by the police. In the beginning, though the agitating peasants were morally disappointed for time being but they again acquired energy and courage to continue the movement under the Communist leadership. The Communists were also very active in their propaganda work and motivate the peasants to continue the movement under the red flag.

Most of the Congress leaders who hailed from the family of mirasdar adopted the path of compromise between the mirasdars and *bargadars*. The Congress leaders held a meeting at Udharbond on 22.12.46 for a settlement<sup>419</sup> between *bhagidars* and mirasdars. In spite of the severe repression and stand of the Congress leaders, the Communists laid more stress on organising the peasants in uncompromising line and to prepare the peasantry for a mass movement. All the communist units of the district have been directed by the POC of the CPI to pass resolutions demanding immediate release of the arrested persons, withdrawal of warrants against the absconders, withdrawal of armed pickets from the disturb areas and returned of seized paddy to the peasants.<sup>420</sup>

The police arrested a quite number of agitating peasant to suppress the movement in Udharbond area. The peasants were also forced to sign the *Bhaginama* during the harvesting seasons. But a number of peasants tried to cultivate the land with out any written agreement with mirasdars. A few Communist influenced cultivators of Udharbond area arranged land for cultivation from their mirasdar Ramnarayan Goala on *bhagi* system but in spite of repeated efforts by the mirasdar these cultivators refused execution of written *Bhaginamas*. In various places of Cachar the *bhagidars* were forced to sign *Bhaginama* by the powerful mirasdars who were actively linked with the ruling party. In Udharbond all most all the tenants of Sanat Kumar Das have executed written *Bhaginamas*. The Communist workers were doing propaganda amongst those tenants to denounce such *bhagi* documents. The

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<sup>418</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 21st December, 1946.* Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.2050-51/C dt.21/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid. 21st December, 1946.* Memo No.2050-51/C dt.21/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid. 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1946.* Memo No.2099-2100/C dt.28/12/46. File No. WCR -1946.

police speculated that the underground activities of the Communists show that the 'Tebhaga Movement' may again be revived during the next harvesting season.<sup>421</sup>

The S.P, Cachar reported that:

In most of the places, the police seized disputed paddy of the *bargadars*. The *bargadars* were also forced by the administration to make a compromise with the mirasdars and a quite number of Communist leaders were arrested by the police. After the first harvest of 1946, the Tebhaga Movement was temporarily petered out due to severe police repression. Tebhaga Movement appears to have petered out in Udharbond area. The arrested persons were enlarged on bail after they had executed bonds to maintain peace and to abide by the decisions of the Board of Arbitration set up on the same lines as done before. In Lakhipur area similar trouble developed at Kamranga. Some cases have been taken up and the ring leaders including Jiban Banerjee a very hard boiled Communist have been arrested and remanded to *hajot*. The area is now reported to be quit. Paddy harvesting is now peacefully over but the Communists were holding meetings reiterating their demand for 'Tebhaga' and violently criticizing the action of the police. Their hard words, however, will break no bones as all the disputed paddy has either been seized or disposed of in a manner so as to be beyond the reach of the mischief-mongers.<sup>422</sup>

Under the condition, a provisional compromise was affected by setting up a Board of Arbitration with representatives of mirasdars and *bhagidars*. It solved some disputes but the Communist agitators subsequently intervened and sabotaged the plan. A large number of *bhagidars* with Communist help reaped paddy and taking away to their *khamars*. Several cases under section 424 IPC have been lodged and warrants of arrest have been issued against the accused.<sup>423</sup>

Apart from the Communists, who inspired and guided the *bargadars* for Tebhaga Movement, some local leaders from the *bargadars* also emerged in different villages of Cachar district. Prominent among them were – Yogeshwar Sharma, Brijmohan Nunia, Kutu Das, Tamradwaj Singha (Udharbond); Toposhi Pasi, Boloram Ree, Joysam Bhumij, Kashiram Mura (Chatla), Jiban Banerjee, Madan Singha, Jadav Singha, Tambu Singha, Krishnadan Singha(Lakhipur); Sitaram Baroi, Abdul Wahid, Madhab Singha, Madhab Nath, Pritilota Barman, Srish Kar (Attarotillah); Chandrababu Singha, Gopi Mukherjee (Ratabari); Harendra Singha, Sona Singha

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<sup>421</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1947*. Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.1160-61/C dt.21/06/47, Silchar. File No. WCR -1947.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.* 28<sup>th</sup> December 1946. Memo No.2099-2100/C dt.28/12/46. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>423</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-90.

(Ramnagar); Baman Kailar, Rajyeshwar Sur, Nintou Singha, Chinten Singha and Padam Singha of Hailakandi Sub-division.<sup>424</sup>

Atarotillah and Borkhola area was the most powerful centre of the Tebhaga Movement. The main leader of Atarotillah area was – Sitaram Baroi. Mahadev Baroi was the mirasdar of this area and his son Sitaram Baroi was a kisan leader. Sitaram gave the leadership to the agitation in favour of the *bhagchasi* against his father. The father lodged an *ejahar* in the thana against his son. As a result, Sitaram had to go underground to evade arrest and to carry on the agitation at Attarotillah and its surrounding areas. The example set by Sitaram became an inspiration for the *bhagidars* and other peasants and provided them courage to join the agitation in large numbers. The people started cutting paddy forcefully and took them to their *khamar*. The people rose in union to fight the police *jhulum*. Tetry Goala, a female khetmazdoor, seeing the mass upsurge became so emotional that she threw her new born baby into the lap of another comrade and joined her compatriot in cutting the paddy and repulsing the police attack against the *bhagchasi*. Being inspired by the courage and dedication of Tetry Goala, other female khetmazdoors also joined the agitation. The story of the movement of Attarotillah figured in the daily ‘*Swadhinata Patrika*’ on 28.11.46 where a paragraph of women volunteers leading a procession was published.<sup>425</sup>

The ‘*Swadhinata*’ reports, Silchar, 27<sup>th</sup>. November, 1946:

“Harvesting had started in the cultivable land of Assam. Simultaneously a large expedition is developing for realization of Tebhaga at Borkhola, Udharbond, Joypur and all other centres of the circles No. 27. Open meeting, processions, assembly of volunteers and festivals of the red flag were the noticeable features. Girls, peasant has also formed their volunteer corps. Teenagers used to welcome and salute the red flag, wherever seen. The movement gradually spread to Hindu, Muslim and Manipuri peasants. A *Sangram* Committee has been formed with representatives from branch committees of the Kisan Sabha. After making a calculation of expenditure made for cultivation, the Bhagchasi do not gain anything rather they lose and half mound per *bigha* on average. In circle no 27, 5 Mirasdars, it was reported accepted the demand of Tebhaga. This year, after the formation of the Congress Ministry, a memorandum was submitted to the Revenue Minister Bishuram Medhi on behalf of Kisan Sabha demanding for promulgation an ordinance to stop indiscriminate eviction. But Sri

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<sup>424</sup> Sarma, Chanchal Kumar. *Surma Upatyakar Krishak O Sramik Andolener Itihas.*, Oriental Book Company Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1990. P-76.

<sup>425</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-86.

Medhi and Congress Government refused to oblige. The zamindars of Assam were quick enough to take the opportunity and carried out eviction.

Besides Attarotillah and Borkhola, the Udharbond area was also a strong centre of Tebhaga Movement. The largest and very intensive agitation took place in Udharbond thana particularly at Kalachera village. The principal organizers were Gopen Roy and Bhagirath Singha. Most of the people of Kalachera were Manipuri and ex-tea garden workers. Landlords in these areas used to take away forcibly major portion of paddy after harvest. No input was supplied by the landlord. People demanded two-third share for them and 1/3<sup>rd</sup>. for the land holders. The logic behind this was there were three ingredient for production – (I) Land, (II) Labour and (III) Inputs like plough, seeds, fertilizers, cattle etc. The owner used to give only land and rent are managed by the *bhagidars*. On the basis of this logic the owner is entitled to get his share for renting the land only 1/3<sup>rd</sup>. since the *bhagidars* gives the labour and the inputs, his share should be 2/3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>426</sup> The intensity of the movement in Udharbond area can grasp from the intelligence report of D.I.B Cachar – “the Communists are actively exciting the kisans of Udharbond, Joypur and Derby on these lines. In Udharbond P.S aleka the ‘Tebhaga Movement’ has become widespread.”<sup>427</sup>

The police apprehended that there may be clash between the police and the Communists agitators and their pawns very soon. The intelligence wing of the police reported that the Communist propoganda is forming to make great capital out of the police *jhulum* when the police began to execute the police warrant of arrest and preventing the unlawful activities. The police administration again expressed their frustration to the fact that the Cachar District Congress was doing nothing to counteract the movement affecting the localities. All they have done so far is passing some innocuous resolution at Silchar using some leaflets.<sup>428</sup>

The Tebhaga Movement was also wide spread in some villages of Lakhipur area, such as Joypur, Harinagar, Sibstan and Kamranga where Manipuri, Dimasa, Hindustani, Nepali and Bengali peasants organised militant movement in order to share two-third paddy from *bhagi* land. Peasants in some cases forcefully cut the paddy and took them to their *khamar*. Jiban Banerjee who was branded as ‘hard

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<sup>426</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-89-90.

<sup>427</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.2004-05/C dt.14/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>428</sup> Op. cit. P-90.

boiled communist' by the police was the leading light of the Tebhaga agitation in those areas with his two trusted activists, Joynarayan Singha and Senatombi Singha.<sup>429</sup> Under the leadership of Jiban Banerjee, Communists and peasant activists hold various meetings of the *bhagidars* and encouraged them to continue the movement to fulfill their various rights which was recorded by intelligence branch of the police that Communist worker Jiban Banerjee and others were holding meetings in Lakhipur area and asking the cultivators not to give paddy to the landlords in lieu of rent.<sup>430</sup> Apart from Joban Banerjee, other leaders of the movement at Lakhipur area were – Mukta Singha and Madan Singha. They were continuously busy in organising the *bhagidars* and propagating the demand of Tebhaga. The police report states:

“The Communist workers are still doing propaganda work in Lakhipur and Dholai areas. The Manipuries of Lakhipur are working under the leadership of Jiban Banerjee, Mukta Singh and Madan Singha of Kamranga, P.S Lakhipur refused to give half share of the paddy to their land holders. Sunam Mia. The land holder filed a petition to the magistrate for action U/S 144 IPC. Some cases have been taken up and the ring leaders including Jiban Banerjee – a very hard boiled Communist have been arrested and remanded to *hajot*”.<sup>431</sup>

When the Congress Ministry of Assam refused the demand of Kisan Sabha, the Communists laid more stress on propaganda work to involve mass peasant in this movement. They organised various meetings of the peasants, criticized the Congress Government and tried to organise the peasantry in a more militant line. On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1947, a large meeting of the peasants was organised by the Communists in Silchar with Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee in the chair. As per intelligence report of Assam police, about 500 persons attended the meeting. Achinta Kumar Bhattacharjee and Biswanath Mukherjee, a communist leader of Bengal, had delivered speeches dwelling on the Tebhaga Movement. Biswanath Mukherjee said that the Tebhaga Movement was gaining strength all over Bengal. This movement was supported by large sections of the people. He alleged that oppressions of the kisans in their movement by the police were a daily occurrence. He said that in spite of police repression in Udharbond and Joypur areas the kisans are fighting with unabated zeal. He appealed to the leaders of all parties to stand by the kisans in supporting their

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<sup>429</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-88.

<sup>430</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1946*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P.(S.B), Shillong. Memo No.1821-22/C dt. 09/11/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.* 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1946. Memo No.2099-2100/C dt.28/12/46, Silchar. File No. WCR -1946.



rightful demands. He further blamed the Congress leaders for not rendering any help to the kisans in Tebhaga Movement.<sup>432</sup>

The Communists of Cachar also organised a tour all over the district to organise the peasantry and to explain the kisans as to how the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal came out successful in introducing a bill supporting the demands of the kisans. Communist activists from Bengal and Sylhet also came to organise the peasantry in their movement. Ushabati Sen, Communist worker of Mymensingh came to Joypur with Hemango Biswas of Sylhet on 01.02.47 and she was putting up with Nareshwar Barman of Joypur. The object of her visit was to learn 'Barman Dance' and to form a 'Women Self Defence Committee' at Joypur.<sup>433</sup>

The communal events on the eve of independence and partition largely provided a set-back in the working class and peasant movements of different parts of the country and those movements became very weak. But this historical situation had a little effect on the Tebhaga Movement as the peasant from different community of Cachar fought unitedly against the mirasdars in the demand of Tebhaga. When the agitation was going on full force the probability of freedom with partition was looming large. Meanwhile the situation had changed. On the afternoon of 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1947 there was a fresh flare up of communal killings in Calcutta and troops had to be called out on the next day. All democratic movements of peasants, workers had to be called off. In Bengal, the communal riots that began on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1946 continued unabated up to the day before independence and the agrarian movement rapidly disintegrated. But this was not a deterrent problem in Cachar. When Bengal was burning with communal feeling, in Cachar the peasant movement was supported by Muslim League and Jamiat-Ulema-Hind, Muslim and Manipuri peasant fought shoulder to shoulder forming class like solidarity.<sup>434</sup>

In the beginning of 1947, the movement reached its peak in various pockets of Cachar. In many places, the *bhagchasis* with the help of the Communist volunteers forcefully started to cultivate the lands of the mirasdars with out their consent. Communist worker Amaresh Choudhury, who has been working amongst the kisans of Borkhola centre, was busy with the kisans to plough the lands of mirasdars with out

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<sup>432</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1947*. Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.69-70/C dt.11/01/47. File No. WCR -1947.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.* 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1947. Memo No.215-16/C dt.08/02/47. File No. WCR -1946.

<sup>434</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-65.

their consent. On 12.04.47, some Manipuris of Bhitargabgapur trespassed on the land of one Junab Ali of Sunapur and committed a riot causing injury to 3 persons. A case U/S 147/325 IPC has been instituted at Borkhola P.S against the Manipuries including Amaresh Choudhury.<sup>435</sup> In various places, cultivators also boycotted the payment of revenue to the mirasdars. It is reported that a few Communist controlled cultivators of Taranathpur, P.S Silchar has stopped payment of rent to their mirasdar Babu Pulin Behari Deb of Borjalenga on the plea that, the rate of rent fixed by the mirasdar is more than double of the land revenue. The mirasdar has lodged a case in the court against the defaulters.<sup>436</sup>

In spite of the police repression and arrest of the leaders in different centres of the movement, the Communist leaders did not sit idle. They moved heaven and earth to keep the tempo of the movement alive. On the other hand, the Congress made a plan to make an amicable settlement between the mirasdars and *bhagchasi*. Paddy harvesting was all most over. Along with this the heavy police mobilisation and terror let lose by them was responsible for petering out the movement. But the Communists and Kisan Sabha activists did not stop there. They carried out the propaganda holding meetings in different places and reiterated their demand for Tebhaga and violently criticized the repressive policy of the government. The Communist Party and the Kisan Sabha simultaneously tried to enlist the support of the people and different democratic organisations.<sup>437</sup> After the harvesting season of 1947, the movement was petered out. But the Communists and Kisan Sabha activists devoted themselves in reviving the movement and encouraging the peasants to organise militant movement.

### **Nankar Rebellion after independence:**

After independence, the Communist leaders who remained in the Sylhet district of East Pakistan faced various problems and inhuman torture by the League leaders and the government. The Communists were declared illegal and many of them badly treated by the Leaguers. By the activity of the League workers and leaders, the nature of the Nankar Rebellion took a new dimension. Most of the Communist leaders went

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<sup>435</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1947*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.685-86/C dt.20/04/47, Silchar. File No. WCR -1947.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.* 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1947. Memo No.1148-49/C dt.14/06/47. File No. WCR -1947.

<sup>437</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-91.

underground to continue the movement and many of them were tortured in imprisonment.

Under the situation, a section of influential Nankar leaders left the Kisan Sabha and joined the Muslim League but they did not get any prominence within the League. Though these leaders joined the League remained supporter of the rebellion and became the dissident group within the Muslim League. In their power struggle, they adopted a strategy that they apparently became the supporter of the Nankars. By taking the advantage of the absence of the Communists, those League workers ultimately snatched the leadership of the Nankar Rebellion from the hands of the Communists.

The Nankar Rebellion which had reached its climax on the eve of the partition under the leadership of Kisan Sabha faced a great ideological obstacle after independence in the district of Sylhet of East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh) During that period, the Muslim League was the only dominating political force in Pakistan as well as in East Pakistan. The League leaders of Sylhet wanted to establish their control over the rebellion and destroy the Communist influence from this great rebellion. The Muslim League leaders who were ideologically not concerned with the interests of the peasantry and toiling masses, wanted to turn this Communist peasant movement to a new direction and to their own interests. So, erstwhile class character of the Nankar Rebellion faced an ideological crisis due to the interference of the Leaguers. The League leaders initiated to push communal essence to this rebellion and to reduce the Communist influence from the Nankars. So, from above, the historic Nankar Rebellion was forced to take a new dimension after independence.

In September 1947, the League leader Abdur Rab visited Lauta-Bahadurpur area and invited the Nankars for a compromise with the zamindars and to find out the solution of the Nankar problem. But the League leaders did not want any participation of the Communist and Kisan Sabha leaders in this compromise and the Kisan Sabha leaders accepted the proposal of the league leaders. Accordingly, the meeting of compromise was held on 16 September 1947. But on that day, the police arrested the Kisan Sabha leaders Birendra Chandra and Ajoy Bhattacharjee.<sup>438</sup> When the news of the arrest of the leaders reached to the Nankars at the meeting place, the Nankars in

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<sup>438</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1947*, Sylhet district, From S.P.(D.I.B) Sylhet, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.25-29/C, dt. 23/09/47, Sylhet. File No. A-3(8)47, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

protest walked out the meeting. In the meeting League leader Abdur Rab threatened the agitating Nankars to give up the path of rebellion and to accept their earlier socio-economic position. But as a result of the protest of the Nankars, the attempt of the League leaders in this respect failed.<sup>439</sup>

After independence and partition, the Muslim Nankars thought that the Muslim League Government will abolish the Nankar system through constitutional way. On the other hand the Hindu Nankars were confused about their role to be played in the rebellion as they were feeling insecurity due to the large scale migration of the middle class Hindus to India. In spite of the fact, the Nankars of both the community did not abandon the path of rebellion. In this situation, the government adopted inhuman repressive measures against the agitating Nankars but failed to suppress the rebellion. More was the repression, more was the protest. In protest of the arrest of the Kisan Sabha leaders, a mass strike was observed in Beanibazar, Gopalganj and in Borlekha Police Station area.<sup>440</sup>

After the emergence of the Communists in Surma valley, they actively provided leadership to the Nankar rebellion. But after independence, the communist leaders failed to make realize the Nankars about the political condition which was replaced by the colonial government. The Communists failed to motivate the peasantry about the basic political fact i.e. the League Government was the sole representatives of landlords and capitalist class. The communists attempted to carry on the rebellion only to bring some economic reform for the peasantry. So, the political side of the rebellion was ignored by the leadership and the Nankar Rebellion became only an economic reform movement instead of becoming a movement against landlordism and capitalism which was mainly responsible for the bad condition of the peasantry. Gradually the Nankar rebellion had lost its political significance in East Pakistan after independence.

From the month of October 1947, the East Pakistan Government set up various armed police posts in the villages which were affected by the Nankar Rebellion and the armed police started inhuman physical torture on the Nankars. The League Government, with the armed police created a situation of terror in those areas. In this situation maximum number of Nankars went underground to continue the movement. From the underground, the Kisan Sabha and Nankar leaders gave a call for social

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<sup>439</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II), Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-250-253.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid. P-254.

boycott of the zamindars. In response the call, the peasants as well as the common masses again started socially boycott the zamindars and mirasdars. At that time, the Nankars also became more militant than earlier position. One night, a group of police force headed by Karam Ali started raid at the Nandirpal village and arrested Naim Ullah, a local Nankar leader. In this situation, the women folk of the village came out with indigenous weapons. One lady named Kaloi Bibi suddenly attacked Karam Ali, the police officer. Following Kaloi Bibi, the entire women folk of the village attacked the police force. Seeing the situation, the entire police force left the village by leaving Naim Ullah. Where ever and whenever the agitating Nankars got any opportunity, they made various attacks on the police to resist oppression.<sup>441</sup> In the harvest of 1947(December), the government issued order to the Nankars U/S 144 which prohibited the Nankars to collect crops and cutting any tree from the nun lands of the Nankars. But the militant Nankars gave a reply to the government order by uniting themselves and collecting the entire crops violating the government order.

During the last part of 1947, when the police oppression became intolerable, the Nankars in various places started to physically assault the zamindars and mirasdars. Under the situation, some victimised zamindars went to Dacca and met the provincial Muslim League leaders and requested the League leaders to interfere into the matter to solve the problem. Under the pressure of the zamindars, the provincial Muslim League Government appointed an inquiry committee to conduct an inquiry into the problem. The zamindars alleged that the Communist are mainly responsible for creating the problem and some of the League workers joined hands with the Communists and creating the situation more critical. The government sent the Commission to Sylhet to detect the League workers who joined their hands with the Communists. The Inquiry Commission was formed with three Muslim League leaders of the East Pakistan Legislative Council. They were – Moazzem Uddin Hussain, Aolad Hussain and Abdul Bari. In December 1947, the commission visited the revolt affected areas of Sylhet with local League leaders and Kisan Sabha leader Barin Dutta. After going thorough the situation, the commission invited both the Nankars and zamindars for a compromise settlement. The Communists ultimately drifted themselves from the commission and the proposal of the commission for the

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<sup>441</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II), Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-259-264.

compromise settlement lost its importance. The Inquiry Commission ultimately submitted its report to the East Pakistan Government which recommended:<sup>442</sup>

- 1) The zamindars, on the basis of their income should be classified into three categories viz. big, middle and small zamindars.
- 2) The Nankars should surrender half to one fifth of their nun land to the zamindars and the remaining nun land can be purchased by them in cash from the zamindars.
- 3) The zamindars, if wants can evict the Nankars from their home land and also from the land adjoining to the residence of the zamindars.
- 4) The zamindars may also evict the Nankars from any portion of land if the desire so.
- 5) In case of eviction of the Nankars from their home land, compensation should be made to the evicted Nankars by the zamindars.
- 6) The zamindars will have the right to collect revenue from the Nankars on the purchased lands of the Nankars.
- 7) The entire Sylhet district area will come under the implementation of those provisions of the commission.
- 8) After the implementation of the provisions, all the cases against the Nankars will be withdrawn by the zamindars.

Initially, the Nankars were ready to accept those recommendations of the commission but at last rise in protest in order to get more advantages. So, the commission organised a meeting with the representatives of the zamindars, Nankars, the Communists and some League leaders. In this meeting it was decided that, a conference will be convened at Dacca to solve the Nankar problem. After few days, the proposed conference was held at Dacca in December 1947. In the Dacca Conference, the Muslim League leaders (mainly the dissidents) from North Sylhet attended the conference as the representatives of the Nankars. Communist leader Chittaranjan Das wanted to attend the conference on behalf of the Nankars but he was not allowed as a full-fledged representative. On behalf of the zamindars, all the important League leaders attended the conference. Other important representatives of the conference were – Hamidul Hoque Choudhury, representatives of the Revenue Minister and also the three members of the Inquiry Commission. In the conference, the League leaders who represented the Nankars placed their demand for the abolition of the Nankar system. But under the pressure of the provincial League leaders and

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<sup>442</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II) Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. P-284.

also the representatives of the zamindars, the representatives of the Nankars drifted from the demand of the abolition of the Nankar system as they were whole heartedly not concerned with the interest of the Nankars and wanted to achieve their political motive<sup>443</sup>

By this way, gradually the Communists lost their hold from the Nankar Rebellion and the leadership of the rebellion was snatched away by the local League leaders from the Communists and the Kisan Sabha. The Communists were mainly responsible for the lost of the Communist influence from the Nankar Rebellion. The Communists did not conduct any ground work for the ideological and political development and class conscious of the agitating Nankars. The movement under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha and Communists remained a constitutional and economic reform movement. The oppressed Nankars resorted to revolt in order to get rid of the zamindary exploitation and they were not concerned about the leadership and character the movement.

The proposed Dacca Conference continued for 19 days and ultimately, the representatives signed an agreement. The important provisions of the agreement were:-<sup>444</sup>

- 1) The Nankars who possessed the nun land of measuring to four *kear* or more, they should hand over half of their land to the zamindars.
- 2) The zamindars can evict the Nankars from the home land of the Nankars if it falls adjoining to the residence of the zamindars.
- 3) The zamindars will have the right to evict the Nankars from any land.
- 4) The zamindars will pay compensation to the Nankars who will be evicted from their land.
- 5) The Nankars will pay revenue for their land in kind instead of rendering obligatory services to the zamindars and the Nankars will be granted tenancy rights over their land.
- 6) In order to implement those provisions of the agreement the Provincial Government will appoint an official.
- 7) After the implementation of the agreement, all the cases against the Nankars will be withdrawn by the zamindars.

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<sup>443</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II) Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-285-286.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. Pp-288- 289.

8) The agreement will come in force in those areas which were affected by the rebellion.

At the time of implementing the provisions of the agreement, the Communists were not in a position to play any significant role due to various problems such as the communal situation created during the time of independence and Sylhet referendum and the Communists were being declared illegal by the East Pakistan government. After the Dacca Conference, all the detained Nankars were released from imprisonment on bond in the first week of January 1948. When the government was preparing to implement the provisions of the agreement, the Nankars within a few days came to realize that the agreement was framed in order to safeguard the interests of the zamindars and interests of the Nankars did not get any due importance in this agreement. In various places, in the name of implementing the agreement, the police started to harass the Nankars. But the Nankars did not sit silent. They also prepared themselves to resist the oppression and the Nankar Rebellion again resumes its earlier position and became a militant mass movement.

The Nankars started to resist the police and zamindary oppression with armed and various armed clashes took place between the Nankars and the police and Knaves of the zamindars. Lauta-Bahadurpur area again became the storm centre of the rebellion. In this area, when the police oppression became intolerable, the Nankars started to resist those police *jhulum* and direct armed conflict became common event in various places. One such incident may be cited here for the better understanding of the prevailing situation. The Nankars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area, one day, under the leadership of Akbal Ali united and acquired themselves with traditional weapons such as – *Dao, Kural (Axe), Lathi*, hook etc. to face the police oppression. Seeing the aggressive Nankars, a group of armed police headed by Karam Ali started to flee from the area but the Nankars surrounded the entire police force. The police force ultimately surrendered before the Nankars. The Nankars, after heavily beating the most oppressive police officer Karam Ali, freed the entire police force.<sup>445</sup>

After this incident, all the zamindars and mirasdars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area gathered at the court of zamindar Mostoi Mia in order to find out new repressive measures against the militant Nankars. They decided to institute fake cases against all the Communist and Kisan Sabha leaders who were the pillars of the rebellion. After

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<sup>445</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II) Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. P-308.



this meeting of the zamindars and mirasdars, the police oppression became intolerable by the Nankars. Even the women folk were not free from the police *jhulum* and many of them were openly raped by the police. In this terror situation, almost all the Nankars left their homes and village in order to take shelter in other places. On the other hand, all the important Communist leaders like Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Shailendra Bhattacharjee and other Nankar leaders were arrested. After the arrest of the main leader Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Suroth Paul Choudhury took up the responsibility of local Kisan Sabha to continue the movement.<sup>446</sup> After the arrest of the Communist leaders, the zamindars felt that the Nankars will not be able to rise in revolt again and they invited the Nankars to return to their home and peaceful co-existence by paying security tax to zamindar Mostoi Mia. Under the situation, the Nankars started to return to their home but they did not remain silent for ever.

### **Second phase of the Tebhaga in Cachar:**

It has been already discussed that, the Tebhaga raised its head in some pockets of Cachar in the harvest of 1946 and after the harvest; the movement for a short period petered out. But the Communists again intensified on the propaganda work to prepare the ground of the movement and encouraged the *bhagchasis* for impending militant struggle to achieve the basic demand of the movement. The year 1947 was the year of propaganda to build mass base of the future movement. Along with this, a circular was issued by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India. P. C. Joshi. All the provincial and district committees were asked to carry out solidarity campaign with the Tebhaga struggle. As soon as the harvest season was over in Cachar, the Tebhaga Movement to a large extent subsided but the Communist Party and Kisan Sabha carried out propaganda to keep the tempo which made the government specially the police administration nervous.<sup>447</sup>

The Intelligence report of the police confirmed the intensity and future strategy of the Communists. The District Intelligence Branch of the police warned the government that in the next harvest season the Communists may strike back. The Superintendent of the Police (D.I.B), Cachar suggested the government which states, “the Bengal Government is passing a bill accepting the modified Tebhaga system. He

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<sup>446</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha*. (Vol. II) Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. P-315.

<sup>447</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-110-111.

was apprehended that the Communists of Cachar may demand similar action and it is desirable that something similar to what the Bengal Government is doing also be done to take the wind out of Communist sail before the next ploughing season to tame the Kisan front.”<sup>448</sup> In spite of this warning there was no sign of the government coming forward to take any positive step conceding the demand of the Kisan Sabha of Cachar. Rather dubious tactics were adopted to divide on communal lines. Efforts were also made by the government to instigate other political parties particularly the Congress to initiate counter offensive to isolate the Communists and the activists of the Kisan Sabha. On the administrative front, the government came forward to pass “Assam Maintenance of Public Order Bill 1947” to equip the police organ to deal with the situation.<sup>449</sup>

The administration was preparing itself to face any eventualities with hard measures. But the Kisan Sabha did not removed from the stand to prepare the mass base of the movement. In various places of Cachar district, the Kisan Sabha leaders were very active in propaganda work which was confirmed by the intelligence report of the D.I.B, Cachar which states “Communist worker Jiban Benarjee of Joypur propagated for the necessity of launching Tebhaga Movement for the introduction of Tebhaga system.”<sup>450</sup> In spite of the police oppression, the Communists continued their propaganda work and also started to collect funds for launching campaign against police oppression. Underground Communist leaders of Patherkandi area are trying to form an organisation styled as “*Sangram* Committee” to collect funds for launching campaign against the police.<sup>451</sup> The Communists are active in their propaganda work in the garden areas of Derby, Allenpur, Nayabil Basti.<sup>452</sup>

The student community and Communists of Sylhet also rendered their support to the Tebhaga Movement in Cachar. A public meeting was organised by the Students’ Federation of India at Govinda Chandra Park, Sylhet town on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1947 under the leadership of Anil Das. The speaker Shah Mumtaj Ali, Hena Dutta supported the Tebhaga and Nankar Movement of the Communist Party and requested

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<sup>448</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1947*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No. 140-41/C, dt. 25/01/47, Silchar. File No. WCR-1947.

<sup>449</sup> *Report on the Administration of Assam for the year 1946-47*. Government of Assam. Assam Government Press. Shillong.; Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-11-112.

<sup>450</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 20th December, 1947*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.(Not visible) dt.20/12/47Silchar. File No. WCR-1947.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid. 08th February, 1950. Memo No.2205-06/C dt. 08/02/50. File No. WCR-1950.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid. 18th March, 1950. Memo No.2549-50/C dt. 18/03/50. File No. WCR-1950.

the Government of Bengal and Assam to lend support to the just cause of the peasants and labourers. The support of the students, workers and women boosted the morale of the people. They started touring the district throughout the entire year of 1947 to explain to the kisans as to how the Tebhaga Movement of Bengal came out successful in introducing a bill supporting the demands of the kisans.<sup>453</sup> In order to revitalize the morale of the peasants and further strengthened the movement, under the initiative of the Communists, the conference of the *Surma Valley Kisan Sabha* is being held at Kathakhal under Sonai Police Station from 28/02/47 to 01/03/47 under the presidentship of Irabat Singha. He encouraged the kisans to face police repression with courage and determination.

Resolutions were passed demanding:

- 1) Abolition of zamindari system,
- 2) Settlement of forest and unused garden lands with the Kisans.
- 3) Supporting the Tebhaga Movement in Cachar and other district etc.<sup>454</sup>

There was no large scale incident during the year 1947. The year 1948 was also the year of preparing the ground for spread of the movement to new areas. The Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party was desperately trying to extend the movement to Hailakandi and for that Bhagirath Singha and Amaresh Choudhury were placed there to search for a new beginning.<sup>455</sup> Communist worker Bhagirath Singha and Amaresh Choudhury of Silchar carried their propaganda amongst the Kisans of Hailakandi. They held two meetings in camera (closed door meeting). In these meetings they told the kisans and tenants that a bill was going to be enacted during the next session of the Assembly in February, 1948 in favour of the kisans and tea garden labourers. They also induced the kisans not to give paddy to the mirasdars until the bill is passes in February 1948.<sup>456</sup>

The Communists also organised various public meetings to get the mass support in favour of the movement. A public meeting of about 300 people organised by the Communist Party, was held at Patherkandi on 18/01/1948 under the presidency

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<sup>453</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-113-114.

<sup>454</sup> *Confidential Report of the Superintendent of Police (D.I.B) Cachar* to the Dy. Inspector General of Police (C.I.D), Assam. Memo. No.309-10/C. dt. 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1947.

<sup>455</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-117.

<sup>456</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 27 December, 1947*. Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.4206-07/C dt.27/12/47. File No. WCR-1947.

of Communist worker Swadesh Ranjan Paul. Communist workers Mrinal Kanti Das, Sambhu Singh, Sachindra Banerjee, Abdul Khaliq, Abdul Majid and the president delivered speeches urging the Assam Government to abolish the zamindari and Nankar system, for withdrawal of orders U/S 144, CRPC from Karimganj subdivision and for autonomy of Cachar district<sup>457</sup> In those propaganda works, confrontation also took place between the police and Communist workers which were confirmed by the police. The Weekly Confidential Report<sup>458</sup> states:

“It is reported that the Communists held a meeting in camera on 25/03/48 at Dolchera, P.S. Patherkandi in which they decided to asked the kisans not to pay rent to the landlords....Communist worker Mrinal Kanti Das still evading service of the exterment order. Mrinal Kanti Das arrived at Chatrigrum on 30/09/48 and would stay there. On the night of 01/04/48, the O.C, Patherkandi P.S sent one A.S.I with some constables to this village to serve the exterment order. When the police party entered the house, Mrinal Das and others putout the light and assaulted the police party. A case has been taken up at the P.S and 5 arrests have been made so far. The exterment order could not be served and Mrinal Still evading the police. On 06/04/48, searches were conducted in the offices of the Communist Party and houses of the prominent Communist workers of this district. Communist workers Jiban Banerjee, Brojendra Das and Birendra Roy have arrested at Silchar. All the other leading workers went underground before the orders of the government were reached.”

Communist worker Jagneshwar Sharma who has been very active in connection with the Tebhaga Movement has been arrested. Upendra Chandra Dutta of Hailakandi also arrested and later released on bail. Communist workers Achinta Bhattacharjee, Motilal Das Jaigirdar, Digendra Dasgupta were in underground along with other Communist fire eaters.<sup>459</sup> Nabin Majhi of Taranathpur was arrested on 19/07/48. Dwijendralal Sengupta, Sitaram Baroi, Gopendra Roy, Manidra Barman were arrested on 10/08/48. Fron January 1949 to February 1950, the police arrested various underground Communists from the various places of the district. Orders about the detention of the active Communist workers have been passed under the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act (A.M.P.O) but all of them have gone underground.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 24th January, 1948. Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.139-40/C dt.24/01/48,Silchar. File No. WCR-1948.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid. 08th April, 1948. Memo No.856-57/C dt.09/04/48. File No. WCR-1948.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. 15th April, 1948. Memo No.(Not visible). File No. WCR-1948.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid. 06th May, 1948, Memo No.1274-75/C dt.07/05/48,Silchar. File No. WCR-1948.

Simultaneously, counter offensive by the Congress Party also began. On 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1948, a public meeting was organised by the West Katigorah *Kisan Sammelan* at Gumra under the Katigorah Police station. Satindra Mohan Deb presided over the meeting. About 200 persons attended. Babu Bidyapathi Sinha, M.L.A, Hurmat Ali Barlaskar delivered speeches dwelling on the abolition of the zamindari system. They urged the people not to be guided by the false propaganda of the Communists and self-interested parties. They also assured the people that government knows the condition of the peasant and some favourable action would be taken by the government very soon.<sup>461</sup>

Throughout 1948, no major struggle broke out except two significant developments. The Communist Party of India started recruiting about 1000 volunteers over 16 years of age and has captured the Kisan front at Ramnagar and Attarotillah in Silchar police Station, Joypur, Rajabazar, Banskandi in Lakhipur Police station, Shalganga, Tikalpar, Bagerkona in Udharbond Police Station, Bijoypur, Jaroiltola under Borkhola Police Station, Natanpur, Garerbhitor under Katigorah Police Station and several villages in Patherkandi Police Station.<sup>462</sup> Although, repeated attempts were made to spread the movement in Hailakandi but the Kisan Sabha failed to make any breakthrough. The simple reason being democratic and Communist movement was very weak in the sub-division all along. Moreover, there was no organised network of the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party. In the sub-division of Cachar the poor Manipuri and ex-tea garden workers as cultivators are being indoctrinated by the dedicated work of Irabat Singha and Sitaram Baroi.

When the Tebhaga Movement was at its low ebb women also participated in the propaganda work of the movement. Women from middle class families came out to strengthen the Tebhaga agitation. The leading light of the women leaders were – Sandhya Chaterjee, Usha Dutta, Hena Mazumder, Anurupa Roy Choudhury, Gouri Dutta, Subarnalata Das, Kalyani Das, Anjali Das, Sati Devi, Nirupama Burman, Bijoya Choudhury and others.<sup>463</sup> Seven Manipuri women were convicted. Several women delegates of Patherkandi have attended the Assam *Mahila* Conference being

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<sup>461</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-117.

<sup>462</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar*. D.O. No. 6541/18, dated 25th December 1948. File No. A-3(8)48, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>463</sup> Op. cit. Pp-117-118.

held at Silchar on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March 1949.<sup>464</sup> Some women from the town also participated in the movement. Besides the above mentioned names some other women also attended the conference. They were Sumana Ghatak, Manashi Jaigirdar, Lahiri Roy, Bina Dasgupta, Amiya Devi, Bani Bhattacharjee.

The Bargadar Act which recognized the right of the peasants over two-thirds of the paddy was not implemented. The peasants of Joypur, Kamranga, Udharbond, Borkhola, Attarotillah, Putikhal, Dholai, Ramnagar and Patherkandi revolted to assert their right. The peasants forcibly harvested the paddy and took away the entire paddy directly to their granary.<sup>465</sup> The Act of 1948 was enacted 'to provide for the protection of the tenants of the agricultural lands paying rent in kind. However, the act conferred on the *adhiars* security of tenure in a limited measure. The act also made provisions for constitution of an Adhi Conciliation Board with one member from the landlord, one from *adhiar* from the area concerned and the Revenue Officer as the Chairman. It will settle any dispute arising between a landlord and an *adhiar* and its decision will be executed by the Revenue Officer.<sup>466</sup>

But the said legislation, due to the lack of proper implementation, failed to provide any security to the *adhiars* or *bhagidars*. In most cases, the *adhiars* or *bhagidars* were bound to pay half of their produce to the landlord as rent. The main interest of the government behind the passing of the act clearly explained by historian Amalendu Guha who states: "With a view to bring tenancy reforms the government passed the Adhiar Protection and Regulation Act, 1948 but in a manner that...Even otherwise the government could not but heavily depend for electoral support on these classes."<sup>467</sup>

Under the situation, the economic condition of the peasantry did not improved rather deteriorated day by day due to rising prices of essential commodities. So, the situation was fertile for the Communists to prepare the peasantry for the second phase of the Tebhaga Movement. It was evident that the Communist Party and the Kisan Sabha took the year 1947 and 1948 as the year of propaganda for the final assault in

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<sup>464</sup> *Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1949*, Cachar district, From S.P.(D.I.B) Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.56-61/C, dt. 19/03/49, Silchar. File No. WCR-1949.

<sup>465</sup> Goswami, Atul. (edited) *Land Reforms And Peasant Movement: A study of North-east India*, Omsons Publications, Guwahati- 1986. Pp-218-219.

<sup>466</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-210-220.

<sup>467</sup> Guha, Amalendu. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. Indian Council of Historical Research. New Delhi - 1977. P-330.

1947. As a sequel to this, Communist meetings were held on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1947 at Kalachera in Udharbond Police Station. It was decided in the meeting that “non-payment of paddy” and “no money campaign” be started immediately. Similar meetings were held at Jaroiltola, Harinchera in Borkhola police station. These meetings were organised in response to the direction received by the Cachar District Committee from the Provincial Kisan Committee to start the campaign in the present harvest time.<sup>468</sup>

In 1949 the centre stage of the agitation was shifted from Attarotillah and Udharbond to Borkhola Police Station. The village Bhitorgangapur and Panjigram were pre-dominantly Manipuri villages where Irabat Singha was a frequent visitor. In 1949, Kisan activists with renewed vigour were reported from everywhere. But the Kisan Sabha concentrated more on Bhitorgabgapur and Panjigram as the main centre of their activities. A meeting was held in the last part of November 1949, where all the *khetmazdoor* and *bhagchasi* of this area assembled. Sona Singha, Gour Singha, Chandrashwar Singha and Nathan Singha delivered fiery speeches demanding that the pay of the servants should be enhance to Rs. 80/- and working hours be fixed at 8 hours a day.<sup>469</sup> After the meeting, they organised a massive procession with *lathis* and came to Panjigram. Chandrasheswar Singha, Durga, Baburen Singha of Bhitorgangapur, Kalachand Singha, Jogendra Singha, Babudhan Singha, Jhulam Singha, Subhadra Deb, Brojeshwari Devi, Sanatombi Devi of Panjigram joined the procession and attended the meeting.<sup>470</sup>

The *khetmazdoors* of Bhitorgabgapur and Panjigram demanded Rs. 8/- per day in place of Rs. 4/- per day and Rs.80/- per month in place Rs. 12/- per month from the landowner. But the landowner refused to concede their demand. Those who were doing the *bhagi* cultivation demanded implementation of the Adhi Act. In the face of arrogant attitude of the landowner the khetmazdoor struck work in the land. In order to carry out the strike the Kisan Sabha and the Khetmazdoor Association collected subscription in the form of paddy and money to feed the striking peasant who

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<sup>468</sup> Weekly Confidential Report for the week ending the 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1947, Cachar district, From S.P.(D.I.B) Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.36-41/C, dt. 15/11/47, Silchar. File No. WCR-1947.

<sup>469</sup> Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar. D.O. No. 6541/18, dated 25th December 1948. File No. A-3(8)48, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.

<sup>470</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. P-121.

survived on hand to mouth. But a time came when all the resources got exhausted. To save themselves from starvation, about 300 – 500 peasants came out and started cutting paddy forcibly of zamindar Junab Ali, Mahadev Kairi, Upendra Nath, Monindra Choudhury and others and they took away these to their threshing floor and distributed equally to the striking peasants. Observing the tremendous enthusiasm and intensity of the agitation and its success, the hesitant peasants also joined the strike. The movement took place in the month of December 1949.<sup>471</sup>

The affected zamindars lodged an *ejahar* at the Borkhola Police Station. On getting the complaint, the police came with a hostile attitude being ably supported by the Congress party. The Kisan Sabha also gave a call to resist the police in case they attack the people. Large number of people came out; when they came to know that a police party is coming towards Panjigram. In the skirmishes the police opened fire and killed five peasant activists on the spot. They were – a) Goura Singha, aged 21 years, b) Joy Kumar Singha, aged 20 years, c) Imachao Devi, aged 42 years, d) Gour Hari Singha, aged 23 years and e) Sanatan Bauri, aged 40 years. The survivors expressed their satisfaction that the sacrifice of their comrades did not go in vain. The landowner recognized the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> share of the produce for bhagchasi and Rs. 8/- per day and Rs.80/- per month for the khetmazdoor.<sup>472</sup>

The police report gave the explanation of the event as, “on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1949, at about 10:30 P.M while an investigation was made by the police party regarding a theft case about 1000 people surrounded and attacked Officer-in Charge and the police. The Officer-in-Charge accompanied by 3 constable of the police station, a head constable and 8 constable of Assam Police armed battalion. Observing the belligerent and aggressive attitude of the mob the Officer-in-Charge declared the Assemble unlawful and ordered for dispersal. But the mob was reluctant to listen to the order of the Office-in Charge. The mob instead became violent and wanted to snatch away the rifle. The situation became serious and uncontrollable. Finding no other alternative, the Officer-in Charge ordered to open fire as a result of which 5 peasant activists died on the spot on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1949. The death list does not differ from the statement of the survivors. But what differs is that two more Manipuri

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<sup>471</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-121.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. Pp-121-123.



women received bullet injury. They were- Kharden Devi, Wife of Late. Nand Singh and Tunnabai Devi, Wife of Ihungton Singh both of Panjigram.<sup>473</sup>

One of the police constables who was on duty was a Manipuri and gave another version of the whole incident. He said that on the previous day of the incident, i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> November the zamindars filed a case in the Borkhola Police Station that his paddy has been forcibly taken away by the Communists of Panjigram and Bhitorgangapur. On receiving the complaint the Officer-in-Charge of Borkhola Police Station along with four constables, two with rifle went to Jarailtola for investigation. While approaching Panjigram they were surrounded by the Communists from all side with belligerent and aggressive attitude. The people were armed with conventional weapon. The said constable being a Manipuri tried in vain to pacify them. The total numbers of people were around 200 and led by a woman. He warned them that unless they listen and disperse the police may open fire. But none was ready to hear. Rather somebody from among the masses was making mockery of the police and the gun and was telling that they have rifle but not bullet. There was nothing to be scared of. Even when blank fire was made that also failed to convince them that there may be real firing. When the police found that the mob is in no mood to cool down rather they were becoming more and more aggressive, the Officer-in-Charge ordered for firing. In the firing 5 persons died on the spot and one lady who received injury died in the Police Station. The constable disclosed that neither he liked the belligerent attitude of the peasants nor the death of people who belonged to his community. Out of remorse, he resigned from the job at a later date.<sup>474</sup>

The suppression of the movement by the ruthless police action and subsequent police terror let loose on the Kisan Sabha activists all over Cachar gave a signal that there is no difference of the colonial and the independent government of India's policy towards the fighting peasants. Any movement of the Communist will be suppressed with iron hand. After the death of five peasants activists in 1949 no further news of the Tebhaga Movement from anywhere surfaced in the district of Cachar.<sup>475</sup>

But police repression continued and various underground Communists were arrested. In spite of terror situation created by the administration and police firing at

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<sup>473</sup> *Intelligence Report to the Dy. Inspector General of Police from Superintendent of Police (D.I.B), Cachar. D.O. No. 6541/18, dated 25th December 1948. File No. A-3(8)48, Part II, Sub: Communism; General Activities.*

<sup>474</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-124-125.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.* P-125.

Panjigram, the Communists continued their efforts and propaganda work to reorganize the peasantry and resist police repression.<sup>476</sup> Communists were also trying to reorganize themselves after the breakdown of the agitation by the anti-state drive. They organised meetings at Joypur, Attarotillah and other areas.<sup>477</sup> The Communists were also active in their propaganda work in the garden areas of Derby, Allenpur, Nayabill Basti.<sup>478</sup> The Communists secretly carried out propaganda to organise successful 'No Rent' campaign and forcibly paddy cutting programme in 1950. Posters and leaflets were found in different areas asking the people to fight out the undemocratic policy of the government and putting behind prison bars large number of patriotic democratic people. Through posterings demands were made to put pressure on the government for release of the people. But after the incident of Panjigram where five agitating peasants died, it was not possible for the Communists to organise any programme of forcibly paddy cutting and boycott of rent by the peasants. In 1948, the Government of Assam passed the Adhiar Protection and Regulation Act conceding and recognizing the rights of *adhiars* in Assam.

### **Tebhaga in Bengal and Cachar-a comparison:**

In Bengal and Cachar, this Tebhaga Movement was strongly organised by the Communists under the banner of the Kisan Sabha. In Bengal, of course, many peasant movement have taken place in the in the colonial and post colonial period but in Cachar it was the first and the last. Though, Tebhaga took place in both region, but the objective condition and the subjective preparation was not the same in Bengal and Cachar. In Bengal the land tenure system was Permanent Settlement. From the womb of this system a neo-zamindar class emerged called *Jotedars*. They were originally no basic agricultural people linked to agriculture as their only means of income. This class proved to be the most ruthless and organised class and were the principal social base of British imperialism in Bengal. Cachar was a ryotwari area where there was no zamindar and *jotedars* class in true sense of the term. The land owners were the petty mirasdars. Their grip and control over the state machinery was nor as strong as that of Bengal. More over in the rural countryside of Cachar the presence of middle class at

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<sup>476</sup> *Weekly confidential report for the week ending the 08th February, 1950*, Cachar district, From S.P Cachar, To I.G.P (S.B), Shillong. Memo No.2205-06/C dt. 08/02/50,Silchar. File No. WCR-1950.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.* 1st March, 1950. Memo No (Not visible). File No. WCR-1950.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.* 18th March, 1950. Memo No.2549-50/C dt. 18/03/50. File No. WCR-1950

that time was insignificant as a result; the wave of national struggle for freedom did not reach the countryside. Democratic movement was almost non-existent in Cachar. But Bengal was considered to be mother land of all democratic movements. It inherits a bright tradition compared to Cachar. The level of consciousness of the people of Bengal including the peasants was exemplary for the whole people of India. But in Cachar it was minimal and confined to only few western educated family only.

In Cachar, due to the absence of education and non-existence of democratic movement the people were meek and dumb and did not know how to protest against injustices. The modern light of enlightenment has not entered into the district. So, the peasants were ignorant of what is happening outside. They were afraid of the village '*Bhdrolok*' class and dared not entered into their campus with shoe and umbrella. But in Bengal the picture was different. The peasants fought against all kinds of injustices even with out the help of the Kisan Sabha. There were sporadic outbursts of peasant revolt right from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, the national movement for freedom has swept the entire Bengal which has helped the peasant to raise their level of political consciousness. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Adhiar Movement had began in North Bengal and even when the leadership had no linking of the peasant on their own have started demanding two-third share right from the days of Sepoy Mutiny.

In Cachar, in spite of a limited movements in certain pockets compared to Bengal where it was widespread the peasant did not stop their fight in 1946 which was almost ended in Bengal. The Cachar Tebhaga continued till the demand of the *bhagchasi* was fulfilled. The continuous agitation by the peasants of Goalpara and Cachar, ultimately forced the Government of Assam to enact Adhiar Protection and Regulation Act in 1948 conceding the demand of the *bhagchasi* which the Bengal peasant failed to realize in spite of more organised, more intensive and extensive movement. The peasants of Cachar wee motivated to agitate for two-third share and for tenancy rights and the peasants were ready to go to any extend even taking up arms and forceful seizer of *jotedar*'s property and fighting the repressive state machinery but the leadership did not allow them to so.

The Tebhaga Movement took simultaneously in Bengal and Cachar. Despite the most experienced leadership and very favourable objective condition and subjective preparation and illustrious tradition for revolutionary movement the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal failed to realize the demand of the peasant. On the contrary, the

Cachar Tebhaga was the first organised peasant movement and it succeeded. Compared to Bengal Cachar had no such experienced leadership, a tradition of democratic movement and oppressive state machinery and also oppressive land owning class. But the movement in Cachar was also the last one. After Tebhaga no such organised movement has taken place to date despite more favourable conditions. In Bengal, of course, the movement has failed but the impact of the movement was far reaching. The peasant of Bengal derived valuable lesson and this lesson became the future teacher for launching peasant movement. The Tebhaga lesson made the Bengal peasants stood always as vanguard force of all the democratic and peasant movement in Bengal.<sup>479</sup>

### **Last phase of the Nankar Rebellion:**

The last phase of the Nankar Rebellion existed from 1949 to 1950. The attitude of the Muslim League leaders of East Pakistan and their policy to remove the Communists from the scene of the rebellion largely weakened the Communist leadership of the Nankar Rebellion. In spite of the fact, the Communists of Sylhet were not ready to remain a silent spectator of the suppressive method of the government regarding the militant Nankar Rebellion when the zamindars and police gave birth to a terror situation in Saneshwar area of Beanibazar Police Station. After partition, in order to reorganize the peasant movement, the Communists of the Sylhet district organised the first Peasant Conference of Sylhet in October 1948. Due to the repressive measures of the administration, the Nankar Rebellion of Sylhet largely suffered after independence but the movement did not come to an end. So, in order to find out new strategy and method of organising peasant movement, mainly the Nankar Rebellion, this conference was convened by the Sylhet Communists. At that time, it was not possible for the Communists to hold the conference openly and so, the conference was organised very secretly.

The underground conference was held at Sankarpur village of Daserbazar area at the initiative of Lalmohan Roy, Mahendra Das, Khirendra Das, Tripurendra Sharma, Yogesh Deb Nisad Ali and Botu Patradar. The conference was held on 15 October 1948 and about 100 number of peasant delegates from the different parts of

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<sup>479</sup> Biswas, Girban Ranjan. *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*. Regency Publications, New Delhi- 2002. Pp-142-143.

the Sylhet attended the conference. Bires Chandra Mishra, the Communist leader of Sylhet, came to Cachar after independence. He attended the said conference as the only person from outside of Sylhet district. In order to reorganize the peasant movement, the conference adopted the following resolutions and charter of demands:

- 1) The conference laid great stress to organise militant peasant movement against police oppression,
- 2) To work to resist the entry of communal feeling among the poor masses and peasantry,
- 3) Total abolition of the Nankar system,
- 4) To withdraw all the fake cases related to the Nankar Rebellion and to release all the peasant leaders from imprisonment,
- 5) Land reform on the basis of the principle of land to the tillers.

The conference formed the *Sylhet District Kriśak Samiti* with Karunasindhu Roy as president and Rohini Das as Secretary. After the conference, the peasant activists secretly started propaganda work to reorganise the Nankar Rebellion and revolt started to rise in different areas of the Sylhet district. The police started to arrest the peasant leaders in large numbers. Prominent among the arrested leaders were – Abdul Jabbar, Arkan Ali, Prasanta Dutta, Dwijen Shome, Ismail Ali, Sudhamba Deb, Ashwani Deb, Samrat Chunilal and Abani Barman.<sup>480</sup>

During the second half of 1948, the peasant activists had formed various Kisan Samities in Saneshwar area. They also raised volunteers groups and armed training was provided to them. Against this strategy of the Communists, the League leaders instituted various fake cases against the Communists and a large number of peasant activists were kept behind the prison bar without any trial. The League leaders also started the anti-Communist propaganda by using the religious sentiments of the peasantry.

On 14 August 1949, a mass meeting was organised at Saneshwar bazaar. The Communists and peasant leaders delivered speeches in the meeting demanding the abolition of the zamindari and Nankar system. This mass meeting left great impact on the peasantry which boosted the morale of the peasant of the area.<sup>481</sup> Under the situation, the zamindars and mirasdars did not sit silent. All the zamindars and

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<sup>480</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-45-49.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid. Pp-88-89.

mirasdars of Lauta-Bahadurpur area met in the court of Mostoi Mia to find out the counter offensive against the rising situation of the peasantry. They prepared a fake report on the peasant meeting which was held on the Independence Day of Pakistan i.e. 14<sup>th</sup> August. In their report, they claimed that the meeting was held on 15<sup>th</sup> August to celebrate the Independence Day of India. The zamindars submitted the fake report to the district administration and demanded the immediate interference of the government into the matter.

In response to the report of the zamindars which claimed the celebration of Independence Day of India, the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police and other officers met on 16<sup>th</sup> August to take action against the Communists and peasant activists. It was decided in the meeting that an armed raid will be made at Shaneshwar area against the Nankars and peasant activists. Accordingly, a group of armed force of East Pakistan Rifle arrived at Shaneshwar on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1949. At night, when the people of the area were sleeping, the armed force made an attack on the mass people of the area and destroyed the property and houses of the Nankars. Even the women folk were also raped by the armed forces. The knaves of zamindars who were accompanied the armed forces looted the houses and property of the people. When the armed force were attacking the people, the peasantry of other adjoining area decided to make a counter attack on the armed force with traditional weapons.

The peasants of Ulu-uri, Miyaree, Shilkura, Kandigoan, Noagoan, Ujirpur, Nasirpur, Gorerteka, Bibarai, Rongpur, Bilbari, Supatek and Anandapur marched towards Shaneshwar and an open clash took place between the armed force and the peasants. The armed force opened fire and as a result five people died on the spot many got injury. A large number of peasants including women were also arrested.<sup>482</sup> The details of the death injury and arrest in this clash were as follows:<sup>483</sup>

**Death:** 1. Brojonath Das (50) of Ulu-uri, 2. Kotumoni Das (47) of Miyaree, 3. Prasanna Kumar Das (50) of Ulu-uri, 4. Pabitra Kumar Das (45) of Ulu-uri, 5. Amulya Kumar Das (17) of Ulu-uri who died in Sylhet jail on 19<sup>th</sup> August.

**Injury:** 1. Dhananath Das (50) of Ulu-uri, 2. Hridoy Ranjan Das (30) of Ulu-uri and 3. Adwaitacharan Das (32) of Miyaree.

**Arrested on the spot:** 1. Prakash Chandra Das (95), 2. Mona Chandra Das (30), 3. Hiranyabala Das (32), 4. Priyomoyee Das (40), 5. Prahallad Chandra Das Of Ulu-uri,

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<sup>482</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. Pp-90-101.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid. P-107.

6. Aparna Paul (28) of Digirpar part V, 7. Shushoma Dey (28) of Sunamganj and 8. Ashita Paul (20) of digirpar part. V.

Even after this incident, the Muslim League leaders continued their propaganda to inject communal feeling into the Nankars and divide them on the basis of religion i. e. Hindu and Muslim. But the agitating Nankars themselves did not broke their unity and both the Hindu and Muslim Nankars fought together against their common enemy i.e. the zamindars and mirasdars. After the event of 18<sup>th</sup> August, a terror situation was created by the police force in the villages of Sylhet where Nankars were living. In this situation, a quit number of Nankars decided to leave their original homeland and take shelter anywhere and most of them left their villages and after crossing the border, permanently settled at Patherkandi and Hojai of Assam.<sup>484</sup>

The zamindars and mirasdars were totally communalized during the partition and Sylhet Referendum. But in the question of exploiting the Nankars and to suppress the agitating peasants, both the Hindu and Muslim zamindars and mirasdars carried common identity and there was no difference among them on the issue of exploitation. Both the Hindu and Muslim zamindars and mirasdars tried to level the police-peasant encounter of 18<sup>th</sup> August at Shaneshwar as a communal violence on the issue of India and Pakistan. At that time, the Hindu upper class and mirasdars were treated as Congressmen. Both the League and Congress leaders, after the event of Shaleshwar formed a 'Peace Commission' with the active support of the East Pakistan Government. The members of this so called 'Peace Commission' were – Shyamapada Babu, a Congressmen and zamindar of Lauta, Bipin Bhattacharjee, a non-political leader, Arjad Ali, President of the Beanibazar Muslim League and Atoi Mia, a local League leader. In the name of solving the communal dispute between the Hindu and Muslim Nankars, the Commission went to Shaneshwar area but did not find any communal essence among the Hindu and Muslim Nankars. The main conflict was a conflict between the exploited and exploiters which was economic in nature.

In this socio-economic struggle, all the Hindu and Muslim Nankars were on the one side and the Hindu and Muslim zamindars were on the other side and the latter was actively supported and backed by the administration. So, there was a common cause of grievance of both the Hindu and Muslim Nankars against the government

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<sup>484</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. P-119.

which ultimately resulted in the armed conflict between the Nankars and armed police. In the name of establishing peace and order, the police force and the knaves of zamindars looted the property of the poor Nankars when most of the Nankars were out of the village in search of peace. On August 21, 1949, the members of the Peace Commission reached into the Shaneshwar area and established their control over the entire area by establishing police posts and a terror situation was created everywhere.<sup>485</sup>

From August 21, 1949, attacking, looting and plundering of the houses and property of the Nankars of the area by the police, ruffians and knaves of the zamindars became a common event. At the initiative of zamindar Faroi Mia, the police and knaves of zamindars made a raid at village Ahirkunj in Dasebazar area. The police attacked the innocent people whom they found and looted the property of the Nankars like – paddy, cattle, goat etc. The same behaviour and actions of zamindar and the police was repeated in other villages such as – Saneshwar, Hakaluki Haor, Borlekha, Rangjial, Supatek, Anandapur, Kewatkuna, Raukarbazar etc.<sup>486</sup> In spite of the repeated suppressive measures, the Nankars did not bow down before the administration and they stood firm on their demand i.e. the abolition of the Nankar system.

### **Abolition of the Nankar System:**

The main nature of the Nankar system was inhuman exploitation of the poor peasants by the landed gentry. So, it was not possible for the Nankars to survive with out any resistance movement against their exploiter. When the militant movement of the Nankars had reached its zenith, it was not possible for the government to suppress the revolt with out abolishing the Nankar system.

An important feature of the Nankar Rebellion was its non-communal nature from the beginning to end. The Muslim League leaders as well as the zamindars tried in several times to communalise the rebellion but they repeatedly failed in their attempts.<sup>487</sup> Both the Hindu and Muslim Nankars unitedly fight against their common enemy- the zamindars and mirasdars. So, the Nankar system and its problem became

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<sup>485</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Muktaadhara, Decca - 1986. P-125.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. Pp-129-130.

<sup>487</sup> Wadud, Abdul., (Edited) *Nankar Krishok Bidraha Sharok*. Beanibazar Sanskritik Command. Sylhet – 2009. P-9.



a burning problem before the East Pakistan Government. Ultimately, the East Pakistan Government was bound to abolish the system.

Regarding the abolition of the Nankar system, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, the Communist leader of the Nankar Rebellion in his book '*Nankar Vidroho*' states "the East Pakistan Government passed an ordinance on the Nankar System in 1950. This ordinance declared the abolition of the Nankar system and introduced the system of paying revenue for nun-land in kind without rendering obligatory services to the zamindars and mirasdars by the Nankars. The ordinance also granted tenancy rights to the Nankars on the nun-land.<sup>488</sup> But during the course of study, it was found that the contemporary volumes of 'The Bangladesh Code'<sup>□</sup> published by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, does not contain any reference of such ordinance regarding the abolition of the Nankar system.

The East Pakistan Government passed 'The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 (XXVIII of 1951)' by which zamindari system was abolished in East Pakistan and along with this the Nankar system was also officially abolished by the government. The State Acquisition and Tenancy act, 1950 is more or less is a confiscatory piece of law. By this act (under sub-section (1) of section 3), the government was empowered to acquire all the rent-receivers' rent-receiving interests by notifications in their states.<sup>489</sup> The State Acquisition and Tenancy bill was introduced in the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly in 1948. In order to review the bill, the government appointed a special committee consisting of 43 members with Tafazzal Ali, Minister-in-charge of the Revenue Department as the chairman of the committee on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1948.<sup>490</sup> After reviewing different aspects of the bill, the special committee submitted its final report to the government on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1949.<sup>491</sup> On the basis of the recommendation and reports of the special committee, The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 was passed in the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly. By this act, estates were acquired by the government and the system of zamindari was abolished in East Pakistan and also the Nankar system of Sylhet

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<sup>488</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Mukta dhara, Decca - 1986. P-154.

<sup>□</sup> The Bangladesh Code is an index of all the acts and government ordinances passed by the Government of East Bengal, the Government of East Pakistan and the Government of Bangladesh from colonial period to the current year.

<sup>489</sup> *The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act. (XXVIII of 1951)*, Dhaka Law Reports-2007. P-37.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. Pp-53-54.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. P-68.

district was also officially abolished. The Act gave the service tenure-holders<sup>492</sup> the status of occupancy raiyats.<sup>492</sup>

After the rent-receiving interests have been acquired by the government, the raiyats directly under the government enjoyed the right to occupy and use the land comprised in his holding in any manner. There was no restriction on the rights of the raiyats as regards the use of the land. Further, a raiyat should not be liable to ejection from his land except on a decree passed by a civil court.<sup>493</sup> Thus, the century old slavery of the Nankars was ended in Sylhet due to the continuous movement of the Nankars. But it would be wrong to say that with the abolition of the Nankar system, the exploitation of the peasants ended. Abolition of exploitation is not possible without accomplishing the task of socialist revolution in any capitalist society.

The Nankars, even after the abolition of the Nankar system, did not get any relief from oppression and exploitation which they faced before. After officially abolishing the Nankar system, the government did not withdraw the armed police posts which were set up at the revolt affected areas and the police used to collect illegal taxes from the erstwhile Nankar peasants. The fake cases which were instituted by the zamindars against the Nankars during the period of rebellion were not withdrawn and a number of Nankars leaders were kept behind the bars of the peasants. Ajoy Bhattacharjee, the main leader and light of the historic Rebellion was awarded with life imprisonment. Even after the abolition of the Nankar system, the zamindars and mirasdars did not stop to harass the Nankars by different means like – forceful eviction, social disrespect and ill-treatment. As a result, even after the abolition of the Nankar system, the Nankars did not become the supporters of the Muslim League as all the zamindars were the base of Muslim League. The Nankars remained loyal to the Jamiat-Ulema-Hind and its leader Hussain Ahmed Madani. In some pockets of the district, where Communists were surviving, the Nankars remained active supporters of the Communists.<sup>494</sup> This situation continued for almost a decade and gradually this social culture was eliminated from the society.

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<sup>492</sup> The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act used the term 'service tenure-holders' to mean the Nankars. The Nankars were really the service tenure-holders as they used to enjoy a tax free land from their zamindars in return of obligatory services to the landlords.

<sup>493</sup> *The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act. (XXVIII of 1951)*, Dhaka Law Reports-2007. P-55.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid. P-62.

<sup>494</sup> Bhattacharya, Ajoy. *Nankar Vidroha. (Vol. III)*. Muktdhara, Decca - 1986. P-154.