

# Peasants Uprising in East Bengal/East Pakistan (1946 – 1950)

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## Introduction

The Tebhaga<sup>1</sup> movement is considered as the most organized and well-planned peasant movement of the 20th century United Bengal. Although there have been several other peasant movements in the past the importance of this movement lies in its political and ideological legacies (Majumdar 2011). This movement was led by the Communist party of India. During the four peak years (1946 – 1950) of this movement, the role of India's two major political parties - Muslim league and Congress - remained either indifferent or in opposition. A significant feature of the movement was the active participation of women. Bengal's area which came under the influence of this movement remained immune to communist riots.

This movement was a struggle of the Bengali sharecroppers for a two-third share instead of prevailing practice of half as their share of the produce. Initially, peasants were the main participants but soon other marginal groups such as agricultural laborers, small farmers and other poor groups in Bengal's villages, including potters and ironsmiths, also joined the movement and had actively participated in it. In this way, the Tebhaga movement became a people's uprising in which beside peasants, several other vulnerable groups contributed equally.

## Agrarian Relations in Bengal

Bengal had a long history of individual peasant land ownerships since ancient times (Powell, 1986, p. 178). There was no major change in said structure even during the Mughal era except the increase in state share of produce from Akbar's 35 percent to Aurangzeb's decision to increase it to 50 percent. There was no interference in peasant life from the central government after collection of the revenue.

A major change in the existing agrarian structure of Bengal was introduced by the British East India Company. Almost one-third of the

Bengali population died in 1769-1770 due to famine. As a result, the Company's revenue declined. To tackle any such incident occurring in future, The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 was introduced. This legislation brought a far-reaching change in the agrarian structure of Bengal. Cultivators lost the rights over their lands and a new class of *Zamindars* (land-owner) was given the land title; they were responsible for paying fixed rent to the government. The action of the Company was, in fact, a convenient solution for tax collection (Sen 1979). This legislation also introduced a class of permanent landlords. In most cases, the British allotted permanent land titles to those who were loyal to them. In this way, besides ensuring revenue collection, a class of influential land-owners was created as the base of support.

The settlement aimed to divert capital accumulation in the hands of rich urban dwellers as it would keep India an agrarian economy, raw material supplier and a market for British furnished goods. This new arrangement of permanent settlement had a serious negative impact on Bengal's society. The future agrarian crisis of Bengal is very much linked with this decision. To meet the revenue targets, *zamindars* indulged in the worst type of exploitation. Simultaneously, it introduced the concept of absentee landlord. The *Haptam* (seventh) Regulation of 1799 empowered the *zamindars* with an arbitrary power of distraint. While under British patronage feudal lords were strengthening their grip, simultaneously with the increase of population in the next decades and due to availability of surplus labor force, *zamindars* started demanding exorbitant rents from the peasants. This unfavorable developing situation made the peasants rack-rented and appraised and increased the *zamindar's* profit (Report 1940, 24).

The phenomena of absentee landlords introduced a new social class of *Jotedars*<sup>2</sup> (rich peasants) in Bengal. They were 'new men' belonging to the trading class or government employees who sought lands from absentee landlords and employed peasants to cultivate on their behalf (Sen 1979, 9). The *Jotedars* emerged as a middle tier between the *zamindars* and the peasants, who played havoc with the economy of Bengal. It increased indebtedness, subinfeudation and eventually land alienation (Majumdar 2011). The intensity of the worsening situation may be understood from the fact that in 1906, 45 percent of the peasant families were indebted. The percentage spiked to 83 percent by 1933. The wage rate of agriculture

labor, which was 100 *annas* (currency unit – 1/16 of a rupee) in 1842, increased by 16 percent reaching to 1600 *annas* in 1943. However, the price of rice per maund during the same duration also increased from Rs. 100 in 1842 to Rs. 3500 in 1933. Such exploitative situation became a ripe ground for the emergence of pro-peasant political parties such as Krishak Praja Party and Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti by Fazl ul Haque and Abdur Rehman respectively in 1928. However, the negative impact of these parties was that they led to communal politics as peasants were dominantly Muslims and landlords were Hindus. A number of laws were debated in the Provincial Legislative Council and laws favouring the Muslim peasants were passed, however, their implementation remained a major issue (Sen 1982).

This situation became more severe with the famine of 1943. Around three million deaths occurred within a few months. However, apathy on part of the government and *zamindars* made the environment conducive for the emergence of a peasant movement in Bengal.

### **Emergence of the Peasant Organization**

1936 was a turning point in India's peasant history. The Indian National Congress in its Lucknow session of 1935, instead of suggesting specific measures to address the peasant question in India (and specifically in Bengal) held British imperialistic exploitation responsible for such a situation and demanded its removal. This demand completely ignored the role of native exploiting classes especially *zamindars* and *jotedars*. This Congress attitude of ignorance towards the peasant mobilization in Bengal resulted in the formation of the All India Kissan Sabha (AIKS) and Bengal Provincial Kissan Sabha (BPKS) in 1936 (Rasool 1974).

It will be pertinent to mention here that besides the Congress, the Muslim League was also not in favor of peasant unity on economic issues. The leadership of both parties was against the peasants' radical demands as they were afraid of losing the support of the influential landowners in rural Bengal. Their own class interest played a role here. Hence, the Communist party of India decided to raise the economic issues of the peasants. The Communist Party (CP) of India took a leading role in organizing AIKS and BPKS. The main objectives of AIKS and BPKS were "to secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and achievement of full economic and political power to the peasants and

workers and other exploited classes". Its manifesto further emphasized that "Kissan Sabha shall be the organization of peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands in order to prepare them for their emancipation from every form of political exploitation" (Sen 1947).

It was the CP which brought in for the first time in Indian politics the peasant question on a class basis. BPKS with the support of CP organized *Hattola*<sup>3</sup> and *Adhiar* movements<sup>4</sup> in 1938-1939 in North Bengal. Burdwan Canal Tax Movement<sup>5</sup> of 1938 was another attempt of the said struggle. These movements were the outcome of efforts of the grass root leadership of CP and BPKS. In fact, the formation of BPKS coincided with the release of a number of Bengal revolutionaries after years of detention in the Andaman and Bengal jails in 1937-1938 (Laushey 1969). They had become Marxists in jails. After their release, they joined CP and engaged themselves in working with peasants in villages.

### **Emergence of the Tebhaga Movement**

Agrarian tension was in severe shape in Bengal throughout the 1940s. BPKS and CP were busy in setting up peasant organizations in villages. By the end of World War 2 and early 1946, anti-imperialist sentiments were on the rise. The communal riots of August 1946 highlighted the fragile situation in the province. Any further delay could have resulted in damaging peasant unity due to communal rifts. BPKS and CP decided to launch the Tebhaga movement from October 1946, even though the party was not fully ready to launch such a vast movement.

A wide spread and intense peasant movement like Tebhaga needed a strong organizational structure. The leadership of such a mass movement needed to create sympathizers among women, students, workers and other sections of society. However, despite this, it developed a strong hierarchical structure of leadership and soon extended its structure to most of rural Bengal.

The Tebhaga movement's leadership may be divided into three types (i) urban-based middle class. They comprised of provincial leaders of CP and BPKS. While operating at provincial level they were responsible for providing general organizational guidance, coordination and supervision, (ii) urban leaders working at district level; they were the link between provincial leadership and those working at villages and were

responsible for obtaining policy direction from provincial leadership and handle day to day affairs and (iii) those working at grass root level. These were mostly peasants and operated at village level. The peasants active in villages were in coordination with the leadership active at district level. In fact, it was the grass root leadership that managed and made this movement as one of the greatest movement of 20th century Bengal (Majumdar 2011).

The third type of leadership of the movement established village level committees of the Krishak Sabha. Before the start of the movement, they were responsible for organizing the peasants. After the start of the movement in October 1946, some committees were renamed as Tebhaga committees. The committee members were responsible for looking after the day to day problems arising out of this movement. They provided guidance to the villagers. They established their parallel judicial system in the villages. All disputes were reported to these committees instead of the police. This parallel trial courts system irritated the Muslim League's provincial government.

Village level leadership was asked to generate support for the movement while using *baithaks* (small meetings) in the villages, *Hat Sabha* (weekly market meeting), assemblies and campaigns. They were asked to distribute literature and develop slogans. They developed as a propaganda squad, who was responsible for keeping the villagers informed about the latest information of the movement and policy matters. A volunteer force was raised to keep a watch on the activities of the police and *jotedars*. Legal Aid committees were assigned the responsibilities of contesting the cases of arrested peasants. In every village, volunteers were asked to make local *Bahini* (volunteer committee). Each *Bahini* had ten members without discrimination of gender, religion, caste and age. Out of ten, one was selected as *Nayak* (Captain). Volunteers were provided physical training and they provided effective protection to the peasants from police and *jotedars*. They were asked to wear a red cap, badge and also carry a *lathi* (stick). They were well trained in using the *lathi* in their self defence. This new military-like framework proved as a strong weapon during the peasant struggle.

## Slogans in the Movement

Slogans always play a very crucial role in the spread of any movement. Similarly, certain slogans and propaganda played a very important role in the Tebhaga movement. A few of the slogans were (Majumdar 2011, 16 - 8):

- *Adhinai tebhaga chai* (No half share but 2/3 share demanded)
- *Bina raside bhagnai* (No share to be given without receipt)
- *Panch serer besi sud nai* (No interest above five seers per maund for paddy loan)
- *Baje adai nai* (No illegal extraction or *abwab*)
- *Jamin thake uchhad nai* (No forcible eviction from land)
- *Jamindarer dalal nai-majur ra ek hoi* (Agricultural workers unite; don't be the agents of the *zamindar*)
- *Nij ghantar beshi khatuni nai* (Maximum work eight hours a day)
- *Chasir hate jami chai* (Land for the tiller)
- *Jamindari julum chalbe na* (No excess by the *zamindar*)
- *Kamunist party zindabad* (Long live the Communist Party)
- *Dalalra hushiar mazur ho taiyar* (Agents be careful, workers be prepared)
- *Krishak Samity ki jai* (Long live Krishak Samity)
- *Lal jhandar bahire gram nai* (No village without red flag)

## Role of Women

The peasant movement under the Communist Party encouraged massive participation of women. The work of organizing women was started by the CP's women's association - Mahila Atma Raksha Samity (MARS) in 1942. Soon it spread to many districts and even reached to the villages as well. A committee of women was established to investigate the charges of rape against police officials and *jotedars*. Women were given training to defend themselves and to attack in case of attempted rape. Women performed several tasks during the Tebhaga movement - they participated in meetings, demonstrations, arranged shelters and food for their comrades. They were an active part of the communication system and did spy work (Peter 1986).

Due to their active participation, a large number of women died in police firings and armed attacks by *jotedars*. Women's participation reached to an unprecedented scale in the post-independence Tebhaga. Several women activists including Bimla Maji, Renu Chakraborty, Mani Kuntola Sen, Lakshmi Bewa, Burima, Sagari Barman, Bidy Barman Dispari, Rashmoni, Yasoda Kamarin and Kaushalya. Ila Mitra was one of the most prominent in this regard.

One of the most glaring cases of state repression and abuse of authority which came forward was of Ila Mitra. She was a graduate of Calcutta University and the member of an upper caste Hindu *zamindar* family. She joined the Communist Party and became part of the peasant movement under the influence of her husband Raman Mitra who had been working for CP for long. He motivated her to start working among the peasants. After partition, their family decided to stay back in East Pakistan and to continue their work among the peasants. She along with her husband started working in the most sensitive area of Nachol, Nawabganj district in East Pakistan. The level of peasant exploitation was at its peak in this area as compared to others. Due to its inaccessibility, *zamindars* and *jotedars* had a free ride and no presence of state writ could be observed in this most difficult area. Taking advantage of the situation, *zamindars* and *jotedars* of this region were getting a two-third share and peasants were getting only one-third instead of the existing practice of half prevailing in the rest of the districts of the province. Besides the women of low caste or tribal origin, the Santals were usually molested by upper caste Hindu-Muslim *jotedars*. In several cases, in some remote villages 'the first night's right' was also practised (Majumdar 2011, 224). She had to start her work under such odd circumstances. Ila made Chandipur village as her headquarter but most of the time she had to work underground. In spite of all difficulties, she extensively toured many villages and prepared the ground for the launching of a peasant movement in this difficult areas. With the support of BPKS, a trained peasant work force was prepared to repulse the attacks from Ansar, police or *jotedar's* men and to defend themselves (Roy 2002).

A new slogan of *Langal yar jami tar* (whoever possesses a plough, the land belongs to him) became most popular here. To set a precedence for others, the Mitra *zamindar* family themselves decided to implement the Tebhaga principle. Soon the peasants on their own started implementing

the Tebhaga policy with the support of BPKS. *Zamindars* and *jotedars* sought police help to stop the peasants from doing this. Cases were registered and hundreds of peasants were arrested. However, this harassment could not stop them from their mission.

The situation became worse on January 5 1950, when police officials of Nachol police station under the command of their officer in charge arrived in Chandipur to arrest Ila Mitra and other peasant movement leaders. Failing to find her and others, as they were out of the village, they arrested other activists and started torturing them to disclose the location of Ila Mitra and others.

On seeing police atrocities, some villagers called other colleagues. Within no time, hundreds of the villagers gathered and encircled the police team and demanded the release of arrested peasants and apologies for torturing their colleagues. Police officials started firing. Peasants also responded violently and all six police officials were killed. Peasants secretly buried the dead bodies of the police officials in their village. Several villagers started leaving their area after the incidence fearing police reaction against the killing of their colleagues (Umar 2007).

After two days, on January 7 1950, more than 2000 soldiers of Pakistan army and East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) arrived in the area to recover police officials and arrest the accused. They surrounded almost all the villages of Nachol. They set on fire 12 villages, tortured male members and sexually abused women. They were looking for Ila Mithra (titled by peasants as *Rani Ma* - Queen Mother - due to her contribution to the movement), her husband Raman Mitra, Brindaban Saha and others. The Tebhaga leaders decided to divide the peasants into groups for border crossing as soon as possible. Ramen Mitra succeeded in crossing the border along with his group but several other leaders including Azhar Hussain, Animesh Lahiri and Ila Mitra were arrested from a small bordering railway station - Rohanpur (Panjabi 2010).

After her arrest, police began torture of an inhuman level on her. She was treated worse than an animal (Roy 2002). In the police lockup she was stripped of clothing, raped by police officials, pressed her legs between bamboo sticks. They pushed a hot egg through her private parts (Umer 2007, 139 – 140).

## Phases of the Movement

This peasant movement of Bengal may be divided into four phases (Majumdar, 2011):

- (i) Start and initial days of the movement from October 1946 to January 1947.
- (ii) This phase started with the announcement of the Chief Minister about the Tebhaga Law in January 1947. It continued until February 1947 when the movement spread to many other areas which were out of the movement's influence till then.
- (iii) This phase started from the end of February 1947 till Independence. State and provincial governments used all repressive tactics against the movement.
- (iv) The last phase continued till mid-1950. The movement continued on both sides of the border.

## Spread of the Movement

There are different opinions about the extent of the movement and areas which came under its influence. One opinion says that it spread to at least 15 of the 26 districts of pre-partition Bengal (Rasool 1969, 142). Another opinion is that this movement spread to 19 districts of undivided Bengal (Sen 1982, 106). Mukherjee says that the movement affected 21 districts of the province (Mukherjee 1975, 14). Interestingly, secret reports of the police department reveal that out of 26 districts of Bengal, 24 districts were affected. Murshidabad and Burdwan were the only two districts which were not affected by this movement.

## Post-independence Period

The Communist Party of India had extended its support to the British government after the German attack on the Soviet Union as per party policy. Simultaneously, they supported the independence struggle as well. Lastly, they also agreed to the Muslim League's demand of partition. CP, immediately after independence, decided to call off the Tebhaga movement before the harvesting season of 1947-1948. The Party directed the peasants not to launch any new action for the time being and to give a chance to the governments newly installed in independent Pakistan

and India to fulfill their pledges to the people (Sen 1947). However, both the governments failed to fulfill their promises. To review the emerging situation, a meeting of Bengal's CP was held in October 1947 and decided to start a movement in 24 Paraganas and Midnapore in West Bengal and Rajshahi and Mymensingh in East Pakistan (Majmudar 2011). The reason behind this decision was that during the pause period, *jotedars*, with the support of Congress and Muslim League, started practising repressive tactics against the peasants. Thousands of cases were registered against them. Raids were carried out to arrest the peasant leadership.

In the same context, AIKS convened a special meeting of its central committee on 16 and January 17 1948, at Burdwan. The committee decided to have separate peasant organizations for India and Pakistan by naming them All India Kishan Seva and All Pakistan Kishan Seva respectively. Moni Singh was nominated as President and Mansur Habibullah as General Secretary of the Pakistani Chapter. It was considered that West Pakistan was not yet prepared for any such movement; hence, for the time being it may be organized only in East Pakistan and so was renamed as East Pakistan Kishan Seva (EPKS). A secret meeting of EPKS was convened at Lalmonirhat. Although there was no ban on CP and Kishan Seva due to the political influence of the *zamindars*, the arrest of peasant leadership continued. In its three days gathering, they reached to the conclusion that the Muslim League having the dominant presence of *nawabs* and *zamindars* was not serious in the abolishment of the *zamindari* system. For this purpose, peasants had to develop some pressure. Accordingly, a movement was started all over East Pakistan immediately (Gupta 1969, 11). Simultaneously, the Communist Party of India in its meeting held at Calcutta (February 27 to March 2, 1948) decided to approve the policy of armed struggle to overthrow the repressive governments in India and Pakistan in line with the B. T. Ranadive thesis.

Following this discussion, EPKS decided to start a new peasant uprising in East Pakistan. Beside the Tebhaga movement, a new movement was started in Nankar areas of Sylhet district. Soon, other communities including tribal, scheduled caste and Santal of Sylhet also joined this movement. Other districts like Mymensingh, Rajshahi also came under the influence of this movement (Umer, 2007, 113).

This movement was started by those peasants who were forced to work on the lands of *zamindars* in exchange for bread. The *zamindars* while

engaging these peasants used to give extra land to them. Peasants while working on the lands of *zamindars*, were expected to spend a part of their labor to produce their own food. They were not entitled to get any food from the *zamindar's* house despite working at their homes like slaves. They had no fixed working time. After spending several hours in the fields they had to look after the cattle and domestic work of the *zamindars*. Having no legal protection, they were one of the most oppressed section of Bengali peasantry (Bhattacharya, 1971, p.13).

The Nankar movement emerged in 1937 but after BPKS's active support it became an eminent movement. The partition of Bengal had no impact on the momentum of this struggle. Many leaders of this movement including Ajoy Bhattacharya, Joad Ali, Abdus Sobhan and others were arrested. After the beating up of a local *zamindar* by a *Nankar*, Mukhles Ali, a movement was also triggered in the Golapunj area. Getting encouraged from this incidence, other *Nankars* also started challenging *zamindars* and *jotedars* and it became even difficult for *zamindars* to move freely. Eventually, East Pakistan's provincial government constituted a tripartite committee (*Nankar* representative, government official and Muslim League representative) to find some settlement for this long outstanding issue. Finally, an agreement was reached between them. However, soon the agreement was violated with the arrests of prominent leaders of the peasant movement including Ismail Ali, Karam Ali and Ajoy Bhattacharya on January 1 1948. The next day, police arrived at Bahadurabad and committed acts of plunder, rape and mass beating (Bhattacharya 1971).

In April 1949, the government decided to establish police camps to counter peasant activities in the areas. However, the peasants found out other means to escape from police vigilance. A clash took place between the police and the peasants in Saneshwar area on August 18 1949. To arrest the peasants, a huge police contingent along with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP) arrived and gathered at the house of local Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) of Muslim League. The peasants got wind that police forces would attack their village after sunset with lethal weapons to burn down their houses. The peasants decided to march out of their houses and gathered about 250 feet away from the house where the police officials were staying. The District Magistrate inquired why the peasants were gathering.

The peasants had assembled to resist the police entry to their village as the police officials always ransacked their houses, tortured them and even raped their women. The peasants suggested only the DC, SP and Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) may enter the village and inspect their houses. During this conversation, the peasants were asked to raise the slogan of Pakistan Zindabad if they recognized Pakistan as their homeland. The peasants said they wanted Pakistan and raised the slogan 'Poor People's Pakistan Zindabad' (Choudhry, 2013). The Deputy Commissioner got irritated from hearing this amended and communist slogan and ordered to open fire. This resulted in the killing of five peasants while dozens were injured but they refused to surrender. This clash continued into the next day as well. Due to this aggravating situation, East Pakistan Rifles were called in to control it.

Another incident took place at Harakunji village on August 24. Three days later, a clash took place at two more villages, Rangjhal and Anandapur. Attackers with the support of police looted and severely tortured the peasants who resisted them. This incident even came up for discussion in the provincial Legislative Assembly on November 18 1949. The Chief Minister of East Pakistan, Nurul Amin, accused communists and defended police action. Despite all these atrocities, peasants continued their struggle and eventually, East Bengal government had to enact a law abolishing the Nankar system in mid-1950 (Bhattacharya 1971).

Bengal's peasants in this duration also protested against another oppressive tradition of the Tonko System – an exploitative system imposed on the peasantry of Mymensingh. The anti-Tonko movement began in January 1949 from the Hajang areas. On January 8 1949, the local *zamindar's* men who were taking away a huge quantity of tonko paddy from a peasant's house in Chaitanyagarh, were intercepted by peasants and after snatching from them, the peasants handed over the produce to the peasant from whom it was taken away forcibly. This encouraged other peasants to resist any such activity in the future. Peasants resisted in the same manner when the *zamindar's* men took away tonko paddy from the peasants of Bot Talg village (Gupta, 1969, p.11). After this incident, on the *zamindar's* complaint the area police in charge reached the spot and tried to take away the paddy after beating up the peasants. Peasants put up a resistance to the police force who had to leave the area without the paddy.

After such successive resistance attempts, 5000 peasants gathered to hold a protest against the abolition of the *zamindari* without any companion on January 28 1949. The Hindu-Muslim peasants of different areas participated in this protest. Three days later, police killed two leading anti-Tonko movement leaders belonging to BPKS - Rashimoni and Surendra. This killing aggravated the situation. While a group of peasants was heading to participate in the funeral of their comrades, police tried to arrest them. One peasant snatched the gun from the policeman and opened fire, resulting in the killing of three policemen. Next day, a large contingent of police force attacked the village and after hours of fighting, they killed two peasants and arrested more than forty (Gupta, 1969, p.119).

To control the increasing influence of peasants, it was decided to establish police camps almost in all villages. Mongalchan, a leader of the peasant movement decided to make an urgent tour of villages to mobilize peasants against the government's plan to establish police camps. During one such visit, Mongakhan and Augendra were targeted by police and killed. This news spread like wild fire and within hours angry peasants surrounded the police camps from all sides. The police fire killed fifteen peasants including women. The peasants did not leave the area despite heavy casualties. At midnight, the police left the camp taking advantage of the darkness but they had to face peasant guerillas at some distance. During this attack, one policeman was killed and six wounded. Next day more than a hundred policemen were deployed at the camp and large numbers of peasants was arrested (Gupta, 1969, p. 12).

This clash of police and peasants became a regular feature. Now the police involved Ansars in their support as well. On the other hand, students and workers showed their support to the peasant struggle. On February 16 1949, a protest meeting of students was held at Dhaka University. As soon as the meeting started, Muslim League students with the support of provincial Muslim League's government started beating them.

On February 16 1949, a heavy police contingent along with Ansar forces surrounded the movement's secret headquarter at Haldigram. The peasants upon finding this out decided to leave the village in groups instead of engaging the police in a fight. A large number of peasants successfully left the village but a few got injured in police firing. Lastly, the police burnt down the whole village and left the place. The next day,

the peasants attacked another police camp at Nonni. They destroyed a bridge, which was used by the police for their movement.

Faced with constant attacks by the police, Ansar and EPR, peasants had to change their tactics. They withdrew themselves from populated villages and fortified themselves at nine guerilla camps in the hilly areas of Ambuluka Berakhali, Meleng, Panihata and such others (Umer, 2007, p-134). Skirmishes and clashes continued between police and peasants from May to September 1949 from these guerilla camps. With the passage of time, police repression also increased. However, the level of peasants' resistance also reached to new zenith. To discourage villagers from extending support to movement leaders, the government decided to impose collective fines on those villages where movement leaders carried out attacks on *zamindars* and police. To get information about the activities of peasants, police hired local villagers as their agents and informers. The peasants also kept an eye on them and in several villages such agents were given death sentences and their properties were distributed among other peasants.

Several leading communists attached with the movement were arrested in Mymensingh in August 1949. This crackdown on the peasant movement slowed down but continued till the first quarter of 1950.

Beside other districts of Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rajshahi, another district of Khulna emerged as a strong center of the peasant movement during 1948-1950. An armed clash took place between police and peasants in Darubussia village of Khulna district on April 24, 1949. In this clash, three killings were reported and ten were injured. On December 20 1949, a police party came under attack. One constable was killed on the spot whereas other two police officials including an assistant sub-inspector were wounded. Since the police officials were Muslims whereas peasants were Hindus, it received a communal color. Governments of India and Pakistan gave it a communal color. Press in both countries published a distorted version of the incident. This situation created a conducive environment for one of the worst communal riots in East and West Bengal since independence. Communal tension resulted in a mass migration of population from both Bengals. This badly impacted the peasant movement in East Bengal.

The government of Pakistan and provincial government of East Pakistan were very determined to crush this Communist Party led peasant movement at all costs. The government of East Pakistan even circulated a leaflet in May 1949 condemning the activities of the Party and almost blamed communists as anti-state. In November 1949, they issued another directive according to which a police report would be required for getting any government job. The government was very worried about the increasing influence of communists on students, teachers and other groups. These peasant uprisings were also looked at in the same context. On one hand, when the government was trying to repress this movement with full force, communists also committed several blunders. Instead of demanding land reforms they decided to follow B. T. Ranadive's line of adventurism (Mukherjee 1975). He gave the policy of over throwing the governments in both countries. Muslims of Pakistan were not ready to overthrow the Pakistani government so early after achieving it. The government of Pakistan, taking advantage of the common Pakistani's sentiments, started a negative propaganda against the communists to malign them. Due to the repressive tactics of the government the peasant movement came to an end in early 1950 (Umer 2007, 146).

It is an interesting fact that during this peasant uprising, both governments of India and Pakistan remained in contact and supplemented with each other's actions to suppress this peasant movement. There was no difference between oppressive methods used by both states against the agitating peasants. Oppressive tactics introduced during the colonial period to tackle such uprisings were freely used by both states even after independence. There was no difference in the level of brutality and tactics earlier used by colonial rule and the new independent states.

## Endnotes

- 1 Tebhaga in Bengali means to divide in three parts.
- 2 *Jotedars* had direct lease of agricultural holding. They were also generally rich farmers.
- 3 *Hattola* was an amount recovered by the *zamindars* from the seller during weekly and biweekly markets known as *hats*. Sometimes this tax *tola* was fixed according to the wish of the *zamindar's* men.
- 4 Adhiar movement was aimed to reduce the interest on paddy loan.
- 5 Burdwan Canal Tax movement was launched in 1935 with the aim to demand a reduction of canal tax imposed by the government in Burdwan district to recover a part of the capital expenditure for the project.

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