Chapter VI
The Tebhaga Movement in the 24-Parganas before Independence

First Phase

In the 24-Paraganas, the storm centre of the Tebhaga Movement, the oppressed peasants of Kakdwip, Haroa, Sandeshkhali, Canning, Bhangor, Hasnabad, Sonarpur and other areas displayed during a militancy, a vigour, a grim determination the like of which the people of Bengal had never seen before.1

The Tebhaga agitations of 1946-47 were most intense and widespread sharecroppers’ struggles of the period under review in Bengal. The tebhaga slogan was not new, sharecroppers had attempted to retain two-thirds of the crops instead of the customary one-half in previous struggles, too.2 The decision to start the Tebhaga Movement was taken in the conference at Mougbog in Khulna between 21 and 24 May, 1946.3 At the Bengal Provincial Kisan Council in September 1946, the decision was taken to launch a campaign on the issue of tebhaga based on a policy resolution taken at the Moughog conference of the BPKS.4

Preparation for the Tebhaga Movement

At the beginning, the preparation for the Tebhaga Movement continued through the formation of committees, volunteers, organisation of women workers, fundraising, legal aid committee and classes for political training.5 The following graph will show the organisational structure of the movement:6

Parallel structure of administration in the area of Tebhaga

Provincial Committee
   ↓
District Krishak Sabha / Communist Party
   ↓
Local Krishak Sabha (Tebhaga Committee)
   ↓
Organising Leadership of the peasants
   ↓
Volunteers  Volunteers  Volunteers
(Harvesting)  (Naribahini’s  (Armed forces)
   guard and
   resistance)

Communist organisers and medical teams coming from towns

Everywhere in Kakdwip, Krishn Samitis were formed on Union basis. At the bottom was the local committee. Each Union Kisan Samiti had a working committee consisting of 6/7
members. During Tebhaga, Tebhaga Committees were formed with the consent of common peasants in the village meetings.\(^7\)

The main activities of the Tebhaga Committee were:

a) To bring all the peasants who were under the influence of different political parties.

b) To obtain support of other democratic people in favour of the peasant movement.

c) To supervise pending cases of farmers who were engaged in the movement and to collect money to pay the expenses of the cases.

d) To cultivate the land, harvest and maintain the family of the peasants who were absconding or were in jail.

e) To make the arrangement of compromise to solve the enmity among the peasants.

f) To form campaigning squads.

g) To make the arrangements of training for the volunteers.\(^8\)

h) As elsewhere, the Tebhaga Committees functioned as courts, settling disputes, as well as bringing the landlords and their \textit{naibs} (managers) to trial for misdeeds.\(^9\)

i) Tebhaga Committees used to take all responsibilities to solve problems cropping up at the time of the movement. Disputes in the committees were referred to the General Assembly of the peasants.\(^10\)

A team of volunteers was under the Tebhaga Committee. The propaganda squad of the volunteer force usually tried to involve the middle class people, the students, peasants and women in the movement. All regular volunteers used to form a “bahini” under a captain in each Tebhaga Committee or Union Krishak Samiti. Out of every ten volunteers one would be known as ‘Nayak’, who would control the remaining nine under the overall direction of his Captain.

This army-like framework of the volunteer bahini became a very effective weapon for the struggle.\(^11\)

Gajen Mali, Aswini Das, Gajen Bhumiya, Nilkanta Samata, Suren Mandal, Sudhir Gorai, etc., of the Krishak Sabha and its volunteers worked at the lower level of the organisation. The middle peasants played an important role in the village Tebhaga Committees, but at the peak of the struggle they began to vacillate.\(^12\)

The volunteers’ work was to watch the activities of police, joteders and latdars, to collect news, to send the news to the proper place in time, to take preventive measures, guard the crops in the field, to bring the crops to the khamar from the field, to guard the khamar, etc.\(^13\)

Another group of volunteers was given the duty of keeping a watch on the arrival of the police force and the agents of the joteders. As soon as they noticed them, they began to ring bells (\textit{kansar ghanta}) and blow conch shells to alarm the peasants. The bravest and the strongest among the volunteers were assigned the task of fighting out the enemy force.\(^14\)

Volunteers of the Kisan Samitis were very much conscious of the increasing danger of communal riots.\(^15\) B.P.K.S. president Krishna Binode Roy and secretary Mansur Habib called for union-level propaganda against communal riots and organised peasant struggle for land and food.\(^16\) Hindu and Muslim peasants saw to it that communal riots did not spread in Kakdwip.\(^17\)
A special arrangement of training for the peasant activists of Sundarban area was taken in the training centre of Budhakhali. Hari Ghosh, Prabhas Roy, Sunil Chatterjee and other leaders would come to train the peasants and bargadars in secret to the house of Jatin Maity and Nilkantha Samanta.18

Those who led the peasant movement in Sonarpur were Haridhan Chakraborty, Khagen Roychowdhury, Kali Ghosh, Salil Chowdhury, Sontosh Dasgupta, Jagadananda Murkherjee, Shibdas Bhattacharya, etc. Though the movement started centering Sonarpur they worked in vast area of south 24-Parganas. Haridhan Chakraborty organised peasant movement in Joynagar, Mathurapur, Kakdwip and Canning. Raghu Chakraborty, Dasarathi Basu, Hrishikesh Chakraborty, etc., organised peasant movement in Rajpur municipal area, Panchghera, Bhabanipur etc. Salil Chowdhiry organised peasant movement in Kodalia Malancha, Mahinagar and other places and he composed many songs to encourage the peasants. Moreover, Santosh Dasgupta cooperated to organise peasant movement in Sandeshkhali.19

The BPKS. placed some demands to the government for the movement. The demands were:

(a) Bargadar Ain Sansodhon Karo (Correct the law for sharecroppers)
(b) Natun Bargadar Ain Pass Karo (Pass new bargadar law)
(c) Ei Fasalei Tebhaga Chai (We want 2/3rd from this crop)
(d) Baje Adai Bandho Karo (Stop all illegal exactions)
(e) Mithya Kaoala Bandho Karo (Stop false Kaoala)
(f) Bhagchasir Uchched Bandho Karo (stop the eviction of sharecroppers)
(g) Sarbotra Bhagchash Board Chalu Karo (Introduce Sharecropping Board everywhere)
(h) Bhagchasir Nij Khamare dhan Dhan tolar Adhikar Chai (we want the right to bring paddy to our own Khamar)20

The BPKS also declared, ‘Jotedar Khamare Noy, Panchayet Khamare Dhan Tolo (Not in the khamar of jotedar, paddy must be brought to the khamar of the panchayat).’21

The Krishak Sabha was coming out openly as the guiding force of the peasant movement as the constraints of the “Peoples War” phase were over and militant mass movements were perceived as being round the corner. Kisan Samitis in various villages were founded and they started to inspire peasants with slogans like

a) Lotdari Jamindari Uchhed Karo (Down with Lotdari and Zamindari System)
b) Langal Jar Jami Tar (Land to the tiller)
c) Beaini Abwab Bandho Karo (Stop all illegal exactions)
d) Jal Duba Nilami Dake Jami Firat Dite Hobe (All Bheris should be returned to tenants)

e) Bhagchasir Rasid Chai (Give receipts for sharecropped land)
f) Panch Serer Beshi Sud Nai (No interest above five ser per maund for paddy loan)
g) Jamin Theke Uchched Nai (No forcible eviction from land)
h) Nij Khamare Dhan Tolo (Take your harvest to your own khamar).
i) Jan dibo Tobu Dhan Dibo Na (We would sacrifice our lives but not our paddy)
j) Jamindarer Dalali Nai Majurra Ek Hao (Agricultural workers unite, don’t be the agents of the Zamindar)
k) *Majur Chasir Bived Nai, Majur, Bhag, Khajna Ek Larai* (There is no difference between agricultural workers and peasants as the battles for wages, share and rent are the same).

l) *Tebhagar Dabi Kaem Karo* (Implement the tebhaga demand)

m) *Chasir Hate Jami Chai* (Land for the tiller)

n) *Bastuvitar Adhikar Chai* (We want ownership for homestead land)

o) *Jamidari Julum Chalbe Na* (No excesses by the Zamindar)

p) *Krishak Samity Ki Jai* (Hail to the Krishak Samity)

q) *Communist Party Zindabad* (Hail to the Communist Party)

r) *Lal Jhanda Ki Jai* (Hail to the Red Flag)

22 The bargadars openly joined the movement by participating in *baithaks*, village *mandap* meetings and *hat* meetings. Middle and rich peasants also joined as their interests were also affected by the dangerous system of dykes being cut by lotdars for submerging land of the tenants. Local leaders of Kakdwip like Jatin Maity, Gajen Mali and Sujoy Banik came forward to spread the struggle which gradually took roots in Budhakhatli, Munsi’s Lot, Radhanagar, Durganagar, Chandanpiri, Layalganj, Haripur, Debnibas, Lakshmipur and Frazarganj. Peasants of Mathurapur and Sagar Island also came forward and joined the struggle almost spontaneously.

23 Kisan Samitis were formed in Unions, with five to six activists in each Samiti to guide the peasants. Tebhaga Committee were formed at the village level which became a part and parcel of the Kisan Samiti. Leaders like Mia Rasul and Kansari Haldar gave a lot of importance to this groundwork and gradually village after village was organised under BPKS leadership.

24 Separate organisation of land labourers was not built in the Sundarbans area till then (1946). Efforts were made to organise the women, but the organisation was not built. Krishak Samiti led the land labourer and the women through Tebhaga Committee.

**No Records of Sharecroppers’ Occupation Rights**

It was reported in the Communist Party paper *Swadhinata* on 6.12.1946 that to abolish the Zamindary system in Bengal the government would be undertaking a survey of the land in the Sundarbans.

The survey camps were set up in the cutchary of the Zamindars. The camp of the revenue officer was set up in the cutchary of a landlord in the Namkhana area under Kakdwip police station. The camps were set up in the cutchary at Layalganj, Ghughudanga, Mathurapur, Dwarinknagar, etc. After having lunch, the surveyors did not go out to survey the land. Whatever the *naib* said was written in the paper. So, all the land in the area was showed in the Zamindar’s name.

These who sharecropped in these areas should have a provisional record in their names at least, before getting the final *parcha*. But the officers neglected this demand of the sharecroppers. As a result, the rights of the sharecroppers were not recognised in these areas. Moreover, in some areas there was torture to impose the expenses of the officers on the share croppers.

As a result, there was doubt as well as agitation among the sharecroppers. On 3 December 1946, they met the settlement officer and lodged their complaints.

25
On 6 November 1946, Rashbehari Ghosh, the secretary of the Krisak Samiti in 24-Parganas, issued a statement saying that the government was not recording the names of sharecroppers.27

At the initial stage of the movement the Kakdwip peasants had to depend on the financial assistance given by the Communist Party. But with the passage of time the organisation earned self-sufficiency and the local peasants used to collect one to two seers of paddy per bigha as annual subscription for the Kisan Samiti.28

After the preparatory stage was completed the sharecroppers would go to the field. The instruction of the BPKS was that the sharecroppers would being paddy to their own khamar. But the poor sharecroppers of Sundarban had no khamar of their own. They had a little hut on a small piece land. Where would they get land for khamar? A few raiyat-sharecroppers had some land. Not only that, the huts of the sharecroppers were at different places, two to four sharecroppers lived on a plot at the end of 50-100 bighas of land. Though they could bring paddy to their own khamar, they could not save their crop from the inevitable attack of the latdar and chakdar with their individual effort. So the Krishak Samiti instructed to bring paddy to the panchyat khamar. Paddy of many sharecroppers would go to that khamar and the paddy would be kept in safety under the careful guard of the volunteers.29

The landlords were dead against this system. They wanted the intervention of the administration. The S.D.O. of Diamond Harbour offered a proposal for the resolution of the conflict. He suggested that the paddy would not go to the khamar of latdar-chakdar or the khamar of the sharecroppers or panchayat, but the sharecroppers would bring paddy to the ‘court khamar’. The Krishak Samiti did not agree to the proposal of the S.D.O. The landlords would maintain their influence in the cutchery khamar and the owners would be gainer. Moreover, not only harvesting and protection of crops, but the share distribution was essential for the sharecroppers. So the sharecroppers of Sundarban remained determined to bring paddy to the panchayat khamar (in one or two cases to their own khamar.30

**Rally of 7,000 Hindu-Muslim-Santhal Peasants in Sundarbans**

On 18 November 1946, a large rally of 7,000 Hindu, Muslim and Santhal peasants was held in the Dak Bungalow of Kakdwip. Revolutionary activist Sunil Chottopadhyay, recently released from jail, presided over the public meeting at Kakdwip. Two thousand lathi-weilding Hindu-Muslim peasant volunteers welcomed the released leader with hundreds of red flags in hands. From distant areas small groups of volunteers campaigning for the demands of the peasants in the villages joined the rally. Kansari Haldar, secretary of Diamond Harbour Subdivisional Krishak Samiti, peasant leaders Jatin Maity, Gunadhar Maity, Rajkrishna Mondal and Manik Hajra delivered lectures against the torture of the lotdars, zamindars and imperialism and called to be united in the Samiti. Demands for abolition of zamindari system without compensation, rights of raiyat for the sharecroppers and taking 10/16 of the paddy to the sharecroppers house were raised.31
On 27.11.1946, a meeting organised by the C.P.I. members of Budhakhali (P.S. Kakdwip) and attended by about 100 peasants was held at Aganstibazar under the presidency of Narendra Nath Das of Haripur. Speakers Jagannath Maity of Budhakhali, Kansari Haldar and Narendra Nath Das spoke at the meeting urging the peasants to start “Tebhaga Movement”.

The same group held meetings at Haripur on 28.11 1946 and at Chandanpiri on 29.11.1946 within the jurisdiction of Kakdwip P.S and speakers Kansari Haldar and Jatin Maity delivered lectures urging the peasants to unite for starting the Tebhaga Movement.32

The Beginning of Tebhaga Movement

Part – I

Take the Paddy to the Sharecroppers’ Khamar or Panchayat Khamar

The movement started in 1946 in Kakdwip, Mathurapur and Sagar areas. The peasants of these areas were organised under the leadership of Jatin Maity, Hrishikesh Maity, Gunadhar Maity, etc. It was then the harvesting season in Kakdwip. The sharecroppers harvested the paddy and took away two-thirds, leaving one-third in the land of the Zamindars for them.33 In some places like Budhakhali, the demand for Choubhaga (or three-fourth share of produce to the tiller) was raised.34

In Kakdwip the Tebhaga Movement started from Budhakhali area in the month of September-October 1946 before starting to cut the crops. In the beginning lathials (men armed with wooden stricks) offered a stern obstacle to hold a meeting at Munsef Bazar near Budhakhali. The obstacle was overcome by the united peasants.35

In southern 24-Parganas Tebhaga Movement began in November after Kisan activists had held discussion and classes and distributed leaflets,36 when the new paddy was ripe for harvesting.

Sunil Chattopadhyay, a revolutionary nationalist turned communist, and just released from Andaman, wrote in an article in Swadhinata on 16 November 1946: “Having reached Kakdwip on 8 November, I went to the village of Budhakhali. The Red Flags are flying in the villages of Sundarbans area. I have got the news that the united peasants of Sundarbans have taken the oath under the Red Flag to fail the conspiracy of government, Zamindar and Mahajan. They have declared that they will not take the paddy to the Khamar of Zamindar. Zamindars will have to admit the condition of the sharecroppers. The peasants will get ten annas of the paddy and the Zamindars will get six annas.”38

Almost 2000 volunteers with lathis (wooden stricks) came marching from a distance of 20 to 30 miles with the slogans “We want Tebhaga”. The local Zamindar sent lathials to take away the crop of local kisan leader Jatin Maity on 16.11.1946 but these lathials, themselves Kisans, Saluted the red flag in Maity’s paddy field guarded by Kisan Samity volunteers and went away.39

Swadhinata of 29.11.1946 wrote: “A chakdar tried and took away a sharecropper to the cutchery as he took paddy to his own khamar according to the announcement of the Krishak Samity in Sibrampur Mauza of C-Plot in the Sundarbans. Learning this, peasant
volunteers surrounded the cutchery. The chakdar begged pardon and promised that he
would abide by the judgement of the Krishak Samity. Freeing the imprisoned person the
volunteers returned with pride.\textsuperscript{40}

Since Tebhaga was for the interest of sharecropping cultivators, the peasants of
Budhakhali of whom about 89 per cent were sharecroppers first responded to the call. Along with \textit{tebhaga}, other slogans were ‘\textit{Zamindari khatam karo}’ (abolish zamindari),
‘\textit{Nij khamare dhan tolo}’ (take the paddy to your own yard), \textit{Samasta zulum bandha karo}
(stop all oppression), \textit{Bhag jamir rasid chai} (give record of rights on rented land), etc. The Tebhaga slogan became so popular that the movement spread to all parts of the area. In Kakdwip, places where it became remarkably intensified were Munsif’s Lot, Fatikpur, Bamanagar, Bisalakshmipur Lot, Sibrampur Radhanagar, Durganagar, Chandanpuri, Layalganj, Haripur, Rajnagar, Debinibas and from Lakshmipur to Frazarganj. Everywhere the sharecropping cultivators were being organised almost spontaneously under the leadership of Kisan Samity. Inspired by Kakdwip, peasants of Mathurapur and Sagar Island started Tebhaga Movement spontaneously without the Samiti’s leadership. This was to indicate the popularity of the call.\textsuperscript{41}

Joteders and their workers had to flee from Kakdwip to Kolkata and Midnapore following the counterattack of the peasants.\textsuperscript{42}

In an intelligence report On 9.11.1946, we find that one Haridhan Chakrabarty of the CPI (kishan front) of Sonarpur was “inciting” the local peasants to resort to a no-tax campaign. Steps were being taken for his prosecution.\textsuperscript{42a}

A meeting of 1,500 peasants was held at Monpurhat of Haringhata on 25 November. Abdar Rajjak Khan, the president of 24-Parganas district Krishak Sabha, president over the meeting and Sunil Chatterjee, Nityananda Chowdhury (the secretary of the Communist Party in the 24-Parganas), etc., delivered speeches. Chatterjee called for getting compensation, land and paddy through united struggle. The Krishak associations of the adjoining Union promised to help in the struggle of the peasants.\textsuperscript{43}

There was a dispute over the land which the government acquired at Haringhata for an animal husbandry centre. Forty-five bighas of the land was allowed to be cultivated by local peasants in July-August 1946. But the subdivisional Hakim wanted to take away all the land. Both Hindu and Muslim farmers held a meeting protesting against this. The peasants decided to take away the paddy to their house. One thousand Hindu-Muslim peasant volunteers decided to start cutting paddy from 4 December.\textsuperscript{44}

During December, the \textit{tebhaga} demand was taken up in all areas of the district. In Diamond Harbour subdivision, an official observed that the bargadars had carried the entire produce to their own khamars and were offering one-third to the landlords who were not willing to accept it. Smaller landlords tended to agree to the \textit{tebhaga} division whilst the more powerful ones tried to take the paddy back by force, obtaining orders under 144 Cr.P.C.\textsuperscript{45} In Alipore S.D. there was extensive Tebhaga propaganda. In Canning P.S., some sharecroppers were able to take their two-thirds share of the crops, but many landlords were able to preempt others using notices obtained from the counts. Canning was a new area of Kisan activity and village committees were set up to organise the movement.\textsuperscript{46}

The sharecroppers in hundreds assembled in the harvesting field of those landowners who were unwilling to concede their demand. The peasants armed themselves with traditional weapons, such as \textit{lathi}, \textit{vali}, arrows, etc., while women
depended on *jhanta* (booms), *bonti* (sharp cutters), sand and chili powder. In the harvesting session of 1946 the peasants could seize paddy and stack them in their own khamar or panchayat khamar.\(^{47}\)

The sharecroppers of Budhakhali, Fatikpur, Visalakshi, Rajnagar, Ghughudanga, Durgapur, Radhanagar, Chandanpiri, Chandranagar, C-Plot, Haripur, Loyalganj and Shibrampur brought paddy to the panchayat khamar (in one or two cases to their own khamar).\(^{48}\)

Similar agitation was going on in Sandeshkhali and Canning P.S. areas but in a lesser degree and till the middle of December the dispute between the peasants and landlords was fundamentally economic. Efforts were made by the Magistracy to arrive at a compromise, but such attempts were all futile.

To generate support for the movement and to rouse consciousness of the peasants, residential meetings, public meetings and *hat sabhas* were regularly held. Tebhaga songs, *geets* and *tarja* (a type of rural song in which arguments are presented by two sides) were the main vehicles of propaganda.\(^{49}\) The campaign of cultural activists also helped to lift the spirit of the sharecroppers. Nani Ghorai of Shibrampur, Bihari Das of Rajnagar (C-Plot), Ghanteswar of Budhakhali and others sang in the fields, docks, meetings and gatherings:

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Shono shono sabe, shono dia mon
Sundarbane holo ebar krishak andolon
Samitir peye sara, bhagchasira natun andolone
Ghare ghare meeting tara kore ratri dine
Jotedargon shune bale, promad ghatale, bhagchasira mile
Zamidari uchchhed dore desh debe rosatale.
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*Ei bela daman karo.*

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Andolon daman karite police dilo thele
Ekmas dhone chasira bas karilo jele
Tabuo daman hoina
Tabuo daman hoina, katha sonena eki andolon
Tebhaga dhan bhag koria nilo chasigan.
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(Listen, listen ye all
Now there’s peasant movement in Sundarban.
Getting the Samiti’s response, sharecroppers launch a new movement
They hold meetings day and night in every house.
Hearing this, the jotedars say, the sharecroppers have brought a menace
Abolishing the *Zamindari* system the’ll ruin the country.

So crush them now.

To crush the movement the police were sent
The Sharecroppers spend a month in jail
And yet it’s not crushed.
And yet it’s not crushed, it refuses to listen
What a movement!
The sharecroppers take two-thirds of the paddy.)

The *tarja* song added a new dimension to the campaign and most of the sharecroppers gave up the idea of compromise.\(^{50}\)

Thus, the Kisan Sabha needed clever tactics to overcome the initial hesitance. In essence, it championed collective action. Groups of volunteers were formed everywhere to help individual sharecroppers with reaping the harvest. Armed with red flag and sickles, these volunteers would march to the plot of one tenant at a time, and join the first day of paddy cutting. As the tactic succeeded, the harvesting became an occasion for celebration: hundreds of peasant women together harvesting crops, singing songs and chanting slogans made a remarkable scene.\(^{51}\) It was decided that danger signal would be sounded with conch shell or *ghanta* (bell) so that the whole village could gather at the place of any incident immediately.\(^{52}\) Social pressures were used, the barber, the washerman, the coolie, the grocer – all stopped dealing with the landlords and their agents.\(^{53}\)

It is not that these were no resistance from the landlords. Taking the help of the police, they confronted the movement. Having overcome all the obstacles, the sharecroppers stored the paddy in the joint khamar.\(^{54}\)

The leading jotedars who opposed the movement in the Kakdwip area were Shachin Ghosal, Rasamay Hazra, Suresh Paramanik, Gadadhar Das, Annanda Das, Biresh Giri, Atul Santra, Kshirod Bera, Atulananda Shasmal, etc.\(^{55}\) They filed false cases against rebellious sharecroppers or tried to bribe the police into making arrests. Worst of all, both in the North and elsewhere, many jotedars attempted to foment communal hatred between Hindu and Muslim peasants.\(^{56}\) From the very beginning of the harvesting season of 1946, the British government mobilised a strong police force at Kakdwip.\(^{57}\)

The communists continued to be active in the districts, stimulating the Tebhaga Movement. In the Burdwan Division they had been active in the Midnapore district where the District Magistrate convened a conference of the Congress, the CPI, the bhagchasis and the jotedars, which, however, proved abortive as the communists did not accept a settlement and walked out. Tension was also reported from the 24-Parganas district and an order under Sec. 144 Cr.P.C. was issued in Diamond Harbour.\(^{58}\)

Emotion guided the sharecroppers in the first stage of the Tebhaga Movement in Kakdwip. They could not muster the readiness to prevent sudden attacks of the zamindars. Though the movement was unsuccessful in some cases for its organisational weakness or carelessness, it was successful in its first stage to bring crops to the sharecroppers’ own khamar or panchayat khamar.\(^{59}\)

On 17.12.1946, a kisan meeting organised by the CPI and attended by about 500 peasants of the neighbouring villages was held at Matherdighi, P.S. Canning, under the chairmanship of Chhadem Ali Halder of Jewlitda, P.S. Sandeshkhali, 24-Parganas. The speakers were Sunil Chatterjee, Hemanta Ghosal, Prabhas Chandra Ray, Jagadananda Mukherjee and others. About 500 Hindus and Muslims, mostly kisans, attended the meeting. Various speakers addressed the meeting advocating abolition of the zamindari system without paying any compensation.\(^{60}\) A group of peasants went in a procession to the Diamond Harbour court compound, carrying red flags and shouting slogans in favour of the Tebhaga Movement. They approached the S.D.O. and demanded immediate
withdrawal of orders under Section 144 Cr.P.C. from Kakdwip. The demand was, however, not met.\textsuperscript{61}

Communist chronicler Asoke Basu wrote in his report in \textit{Swadhinata} on 24.12. 1946: “The peasants and middle class people of Haringhata had tolerated exploitation and tyranny so far. They were not ready to tolerate it any more. Ignoring threats, about seven/eight hundred peasants took the paddy which they had planted to their houses.\textsuperscript{62}

On 28.12.1946 the superintendent of police reported that eight peasant leaders in the district had been prosecuted under section 107 Cr.P.C. on the complaints of some zamindars for forcibly reaping standing paddy crops from \textit{khas} lands.

Krishak Samiti meetings were organised at various places in the district where speakers advocated the non-payment of rents to zamindars. About 1,000 people including peasants, some zamindars and landlords attended a meeting held on 15 December 1946 at Kakdwip Bazar under the chairmanship of Charu Chandra Bhandari, Congress MLA. Speakers appealed to the peasants to end the Tebhaga Movement and to reach some amicable settlement with their landlords.\textsuperscript{63} Bhandari suggested a compromise formula as follows:

1. As there was no proper law of sharecropping, the traditional system of 50:50 should continue, though the \textit{bhagchasis}' demand for higher share was not unjust. But as a law was in the offing on sharing of paddy, peasants should wait till the law was passed.

2. The jotedar should not take \textit{kayali} (\textit{kayal is the paid agent of the jotedar to weigh paddy}) and the bargadar himself should weigh and divide paddy in front of the jotedar or his agent.

3. The interest of ‘\textit{karja beri}’ on paddy loan should be not more than 10 seers per maund, i.e., 25 per cent). No compound interest should be charged and the quality of paddy should be the same at the time of loan and return.

4. In the 1942 flood affected areas (of Sundarbans) where there was no harvest the jotedar should return the paddy he had taken from adhiar as ‘\textit{karja beri}’. Where there was only 50 per cent harvest he should return half of the ‘\textit{karja beri}’ to the bargadar.

5. For the 1943 paddy loan for which three of four maunds had to be returned for each maund of paddy, the jotedar/mahajan should deduct 10 seers per maund as ‘\textit{beri}’ or interest and no compound interest should be charged on the paddy loan.

6. \textit{Salami}, \textit{kayali}, \textit{tahoori} and all other types of \textit{abwabs} or illegal extractions should stop immediately.

7. The \textit{bhagchasi} having ‘\textit{dhal jami}’ or unproductive land should be helped with five seers of paddy per bigha as compensation.

8. Agricultural wage should be 12 annas with refreshment but it should be linked with the market rate. Irrigation facilities should be developed. Land should be saved from saline water.

9. Jotedar’s khamar should be constructed by the \textit{bhagchasi} of bargadar, but only the place needed for division of paddy should be done with bargadar’s labour and money.

10. Paddy should be taken to the jotedar’s khamar, which would not be far away from the fields, but because of the strained relations this year caused by the peasant movement the bargadars could take the paddy to a third party khamar of
panchayat khamar with the permission of the `jotedar’. In that case it would be obligatory for the bargadar to carry the jotedar’s share to his khamar.

11. The jotedar should not object to the recording of bargadars’s share with the proper authority.

12. The bhagchasi of bargadar should be given land for bastubhita (dwelling) and also his kitchen garden by the jotedar.

13. For every ‘lot’ of Sundarbans the representatives of the lotdar (jotedar or landowner) and bhagchasis should form ‘Sundarban Bhagchasi Hitaishi Samity’ (or Committee for the Well-being of the Sharecroppers of Sundarban) where the representation of bhagchasis should be double that of the lotdars. Moreover, the lotdars’ representation should be acceptable to the bhagchasis. All the disputes between the landowner and his sharecroppers should be decided by the committee by a majority vote. Their representatives (two from the owner’s side) from each such village committee should go as representatives to the Diamond Harbour Subdivisional Central Sundarbans Bhagchasi Hitiashi Samity. The president of the subdivisional Congress committee would be president of the welfare committee with powers to decide all problems of sharecroppers of the Sundarban area.

14. To make up for inflation and increasing cultivation cost, the bhagchasi should be given one maund of paddy as loan every year without any interest (or beri). The central committee should take a decision on this issue.64

It is evident from the compromise formula that the basic demand for tebhaga was not conceded and there were many clauses which went against the interest of the sharecroppers. So, the peasants of Sundarbans had other thoughts in their minds which was made clear in the post-Independence violent phase of the movement.

By the middle of December the movement had spread to 11 districts in Bengal and lakhs of bargadars had carried the crop to their khamar.65

In December 1946, Section 144 Cr.P.C. was promulgated all over Diamond Harbour subdivision. As the harvesting of paddy began, there was an apprehension of landlords’ attack. So, under the strict vigil of the volunteers, all the peasants stored paddy in the panchayat khamar unitedly. After threshing one peasant’s paddy and weighing it, the sharecropper took two shares of the paddy, one share remaining for the landlord. The latter had to take paddy by giving receipt. There was no kayal (weighman) of landlord’s choice for weighing paddy. The members of the Krishak Samity divided the paddy. The sharecroppers did not get half share of the paddy. They got two-thirds share. There was no abwab or selami. To the sharecroppers, it seemed like a dream. In Gunadhara Maity’s words, “The sharecroppers cannot weigh paddy for themselves, their hands and feet are trembling out of fear; at the beginning we had to put paddy on their heads after weighing it.” After passing through the initial hesitation, inertia and doubt, they did not need help from others, the sharecroppers understood about their own share.66
Part – 2

**Kholan Bhanga Movement**

The second phase of the Tebhaga Movement extended from January 1947 to March 1947. In this phase in some places the movement reached a high level. Sunil Sen writes on this phase, “In many villages the bargadars had stored the paddy in jotedar’s khamar, the kholan bhanga movement stared, as the bargadar thought it wise to remove the paddy stored in the jotedar’s stacks to their own khamar.” The kholan bhanga (removal of crop) was almost a spontaneous movement which spread in Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and 24-Parganas.

At the beginning of 1947 the movement in Kakdwip took a dramatic turn when the B.P.K.S. raised the new militant slogans “jotedarer kholan bhango” (Break the yards of the jotedar) and “Jan Debo Tobu Dhan Debo Na,” (We will give our lives, but not the paddy). Over these slogans, (particularly, the kholan bhango) there were considerable debates among the communists and members of the B.P.K.S. Whether the “kholan bhango” call was an act of “adventurism”, whether it would invite the government to take repressive measures and ultimately cripple the movement, or whether such a step would raise the movement to a new revolutionary stage by reflecting the mood of the peasant masses, were hotly debated questions. However, events proved later that the kholan bhango call which meant concerted attacks on the jotedar’s properties both exposed the movement to repressions by the police and elevated it to a phase of greater militancy.

In southern 24-Parganas the Tebhaga area extended over approximately 200 square miles. As elsewhere the Tebhaga committees functioned as courts, settling disputes, as well as bringing the landlords and their naibs to trial for their misdeeds.

Social boycott was used so effectively that even the all-powerful naib had to draw his own water, collect his own firewood and cook his own food.

New social values were encouraged. It was asserted that even drunkards had reformed and become Kisan volunteers, thefts were stopped and factional infighting ceased for the sake of the new order. In confrontations the peasants resisted the police and lathials (stick-wielding militiamen) of the landlords and gheraoed the cutcherys of the landlords.

In Budhakhali, the lathials of the landlord joined the peasants in class solidarity and on another occasion at Dwarik Nagar, the police forces were persuaded to retreat instead of making arrests.

Sharecroppers in Mathurapur and Sagar Island were inspired by the Kakdwip agitation and began to act to secure tebhaga without the B.P.K.S’ leadership.

A meeting of the peasants was held on 9.1.1947 at Fakirtaki, P.S. Canning, attended by about 500 people and presided over by Binati Mandal. Nakul Pramanick, Khagendra Nath Mondal, Hemanta Ghoshal and others spoke at the meeting. The discussion centred round the formation of Krishak Samity in every Union and realisation of two-thirds of the paddy produce by tenants.

To prepare for a greater struggle, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Council met at Calcutta from January 10 to 14, 1947. The Council admitted its failure to work out “the
forms of struggle” and to strengthen the volunteer troops; it decided to set up ‘councils of action’ in villages and to train volunteers.\textsuperscript{74}

On 4 January 1947, Fazlur Rahaman, Minister of land Revenue and Jails, announced at a public meeting at Sirajganj, Pabna district, that the Bengal government would bring at the next budget session of the provincial Assembly a Bill to prevent the eviction of bargadars and to make provision for them to get two-thirds of the crop, the jotedars getting one-third. He also said that the Bill for the abolition of the \textit{zamindari} system would also be brought at the next session of the Assembly.\textsuperscript{75}

The Bargadars Bill

The Government of Bengal published a Bill called ‘The Bengal Bargadars Temporary Regulation Bill’ in an extraordinary issue of the \textit{Calcutta Gazette} on 22 January 1947. The Bill was meant to regulate the cultivation of land by bargadars in Bengal. Its main provisions were as follows:

1. The bargadar will get a half share of the crop if the jotedar supplied cattle, implements and seeds, but his share will be raised to two-thirds if these are not supplied.
2. The bargadar will repay the seeds if it is supplied by the jotedar.
3. Eviction of the bargadar will be permitted if a) the jotedar desires to cultivate the land himself or with the aid of members of his family, b) if the land has been misused in any way, c) if the bargadar fails to cultivate the land properly, or d) if the bargadar fails to pay to the jotedar any share of the crop which he is bound to pay, according to any agreement with him.\textsuperscript{76}
4. The Bill was never debated in the Legislative Assembly because of internal opposition within the Muslim League, criticism from Congress and from the public. A Muslim League Working Committee meeting on February 9, 1947 decided to remain neutral on the issue so that members could oppose it.\textsuperscript{77}

Sunil Sen also correctly sums up the immediate effect of the Bill When he says that “the Bargadars Bill, with all its limitations, gave an impetus to the Tebhaga struggle. The jotedars could no longer say that the Tebhaga demand was illegal. The news spread that two-thirds share for the bargadar had been conceded by the Government. (...) The knowledge of the Bargadars Bill gave legal sanction to the Tebhaga demand and gave new heart to the vast number of Bargadars who had so long remained neutral, passive and hesitant. (...) one of the immediate effects of the Bargadars Bill was the swing of the Muslim peasants to the movement.”\textsuperscript{78}

The British Indian Association in its special general meeting of 10 February 1947, strongly protested against the Bill saying that “the proposed measure particularly militates against the upper class Hindus who are under \textit{shastric} injunctions forbidden to take to direct tilling of the soil themselves.”\textsuperscript{79}

Though the motive of the Bill was not clear, it gave an impetus to the Tebhaga struggle. The news of the Bill had tremendous effect of the bargadars. They believed that the government had recognised their demand. It helped a vast number of bargadars who had been vacillating to make up their mind. In all those regions where Krishak Sabha did not exist, bargadars spontaneously organised themselves and began to seize paddy from jotedars’ burn. A new phase of the movement began.\textsuperscript{80}
The Bill led the bargadars to think that they would be immune from eviction and a
determined struggle between landlords and the bargadars for possession of the land
cultivated last year may be expected.\textsuperscript{81}

Jyoti Basu, leader of the communist group in the Legislative Assembly,
condemned the Muslim League ministry and said, “Surprising though it may seem it was
accepted by the council of ministers when, in a moment of forgetfulness, in a mood of
playing up to the gallery, they introduced or drafted a Bill for giving two-third share to
the bargadars. But unfortunately now it has been shelved, and I imagine, for ever.”\textsuperscript{82}

In the Legislative Assembly of Bengal the MLAs from Congress gave 58
amendments to the Bargadars Bill. The Bill went to the select committee. It was rejected
in the long run.\textsuperscript{83}

There was no guarantee against eviction of Bargardars in this Bill, yet it brought a
complacency among some sharecroppers. Those who were against the movement began
to campaign that the demand of the Bargadars was going to get legal sanction, so there
was no need of the movement. The provincial Krishak Sabha also thought that the Bill
would be turned into Act. According to Abdulla Rasul, “The Krishak Sabha
congratulated this Bill because it was progressive; but criticised its faults and errors The
Sabha was sure that the Bill would come to the Legislative Assembly and it would be
passed. So there came some laxity about the movement.”\textsuperscript{84}

There was no laxity in the Tebhaga Movement in the Kakdwip area. Rather, it
became intense. Again in some areas where the movement could not be started, the
sharecroppers thought that as the government was going to accept the demand of tebhaga
(2/3\textsuperscript{rd}), they should raise the demand immediately. This happened in the Sagar P.S. area
of Sundarban.\textsuperscript{85}

On 25 January 1947, for the efficient prosecution of the Tebhaga Movement two Krishak
Samitis had been formed by the local people at Taranagore and Sreenarayanpur, P.S.
Mathurapur, at the instance of the CPI of the Kisan front members. The members of these
Krishak Samitis were “instigating” the peasants against the local zamindars and the
prevailing bhag system.\textsuperscript{86}

The president of No. 9 Union of Kakdwrip, jotedar Nishi Kanta Chakraborty,
along with other jotedars formed a ‘Jai Hind Bahini’. They hoped that if the police were
unable, the Bahini would snatch the paddy from the khamar (farm) of the Krishak
Samity.\textsuperscript{87}

The activities of the police increased in the Kakdwip P.S. area in the month of
January 1947. Communication between the sharecroppers of different areas became
difficult. Many of the local leaders went underground. Taking the advantage of the
situation the chakdar looted paddy by breaking the houses of 22 sharecroppers including
Gajen Mali, Kartik Mali, Atul Santra, Bishnu Sit, Amulya Kamila, Bhusan Kamila, etc.
Gajen Mali, Bhusan Kamila, Amulya Kamila and other activists of Samanta Gheri had
absconded themselves during that period. So, no resistance could be offered. However,
after the incident the sharecroppers became more alert and the chakdar-lotdars did not
dare to loot again. They took the help of the police and the court.\textsuperscript{88}

The fight of the second stage was to get two-thirds share (tebhaga) of the crop. In this
stage, many zamindars wanted to offer some facilities to divert the sharecroppers from
the movement. The proposals of the zamindars included:

i) The ‘selami’ would not be demanded.
ii) Unnecessary pressure of ‘abwab’ would be reduced.
iii) The rate of interests of paddy loan would be derabari (50 per cent interest in kind) in place of soabari (3/2).
iv) The sharecroppers would get the total pal (straw) and the total paddy threshed from the pal (about 5 seers per bigha)

In this way the zamindars tried to weaken the sharecroppers and to reduce the sharpness of the movement. However, events took a turn to the opposite direction.

Chakdar Rajani Pradhan of Koyamurhi in Mathurapur P.S. fired at Gunadhar Maity who had led the Tebhaga Movement. Sharecropper Jyotish Haldar died while trying to save him from the bullet and became a martyr to the peasants.

Within a short time bloody encounters stared between the peasants on one side and the lotdar and jotedar backed by the cadres of the Congress Seva Dal and the police on the other. At Loyalgunj, the police fired on unarmed peasants and killed 16 on the spot. At Chandanpuri, 36 Gurkhas attacked 15 peasant women. They did not spare even those who were pregnant.

Hasnabad, Haroa, Canning and Sandeshkhali

After the Tebhaga Movement was started at Kakdwip in 24-Parganas in 1946-47, a decision was taken to spread it in Sandeshkhali, Canning, Hasnabad and Haroa. Hemanta Ghoshal, the ‘commander’ of the Krishak Samiti who worked for a long time in those areas, was given the responsibility of coordinating the movement. The movement started from Matherdighi in these areas. “We,” writes Ghoshal, “discussed about the Tebhaga Movement in the campaigns but could not bring it in action. Here the demands of stopping illegal extortion (abwab) and eviction were in the forefront, but the demand of bringing paddy to the sharecroppers’ own khamar was not important in 1946-47 because the paddy was already taken to the khamar of the jotedars and landlords as the movement started late in these areas.”

He recollects, “We who organised the movement in the 24-Parganas district, decided that a second front was to be opened. The police and the military would not be allowed to be concentrated in a few points. They must be busy, puzzled and helpless. The police already organised attacks against us. Arrests were going on everywhere. So, I began to spread the movement keeping myself underground, making Matherdighi as the centre. Our centres were built at Matherdighi, Dighirpar, Laukhali, Patharghata, Rajbari, Boyesmari, Bermajur, Jelekhali, Kamrari, Bishpur, Bailani, Hatgachhi, Sarberia, Shakda, Uchilda, Bamunia and other villages.

After the initiation of the Tebhaga Movement in September 1946, a campaign drive was launched in the villages. It was said that to participate in Tebhaga Movement, three conditions were to be satisfied. Each family was to supply one young man, one rupee and one stick (lathi). There was a surprising response to it. Just in 20 days, 1,200 young men, 1,200 sticks and 1,200 rupees were collected. The village women came forward with an indomitable spirit. A bahini (team) of 1,500 women was organised with in 20 days. They put up organised resistance against the attack of the police and military. A central committee was formed to lead the movement. Hemanta Ghoshal was the ‘commander’ and Haridhan Chakraborty of Sonarpur was the ‘commandar-in-chief’. Barun Patra (Matherdighi), Altaf Molla, Ram Kamal Mondal, Pam Kamal Mondal, Prabir
Mondal (Rajbari), Gunadhar Jagulia, Sharat Halder, Sirish Mondal (Uchilda), Jatin Patra (Bamunia), Ram Bhuinya (Pathankhali), Lalit Singh, Madhu Mahato (Nalkora) and many other young activists of different villages were in the committee. Besides, the leaders of the Nari Bahini were in it.  

Most of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people of the Sundarbans were sharecroppers. They were exploited and deprived very much. So these communities jumped into the Tebhaga Movement.

**No stopping until the occupation of land**

On 31 January 1947, eight thousand peasants of the lot area of Hatgachhi Union under Sandeshkhali P.S. held a meeting over the demand for land. They declared that no torture or deception would be able to stop their movement. This area was known for tremendous zamindari exploitation. Out of a total of 22,000 bighas of land, 14,000 bighas had become khas land of the zamindar.

The distribution of paddy was started in the farm of the Samity. The sharecroppers took away paddy to the farm of Krishak Samity over a 250-square mile area. Then they divided the paddy and gave 1/3 rd to the zamindar taking receipt and enforced tebhaga. Many jotedars accepted tebhaga and gave receipts.

The zamindar and his officers declared a reward of Rs 2,000 on the head of peasant leader Hemanta Ghoshal.

On the same day, peasants forcibly removed the paddy from the zamindar’s farm at Sarberia village under Sandeshkhali P.S. A case was started against them and armed police force was posted there. Intelligence reported that a “prominent C.P.I. agitationist” was one of the accused in this case.

The strategy of kholan bhanga (breaking open the stores) was determined by circumstance, since harvesting had been completed and the paddy was awaiting threshing or division at the landlords’ homes. The BPKS was forced to sanction the strategy. In some places, the sharecroppers acted spontaneously.

In south 24-Parganas, the movement was spontaneous in Kakdwip and Mathurapur in the Sundarbans, where the landlords “took little interest in their tenant”. Here petty landlords discovering that discretion was the better part of valour, generally yielded to the demand of the bargadars while big landowners seemed to be determined to crush the movement which received an impetus from the publication of the Bargadars Bill. At Sandeshkhali in Basirhat subdivision, the movement started in early February 1947, which was wholly organised by “outside agitators”.

In February 1947, the Tebhaga Movement had been spreading in many villages under Kakdwip P.S. with its centre at Budhakhali. Jatindranath Maity, Jagadananda Mukherjee and other CPI workers had been taking a leading part in this movement.

The local Krishak Samity held a meeting at Khaturia (Habra) on 2.2.1947 under the chairmanship of Gobinda Chandra Pal. The speakers, Krishnapada Mukherjee, Nitai Mandal and other urged the abolition of the zamindary system.

Intelligence reported that some CPI members including Bipin Naskar and Bhabendu Nath Mandal were trying to organise the peasants of South Garia and Champahati (Baruipur) areas on the issue of re-excavation of the Piyali and Bidyadhari
rivers. The communists had been carrying on agitation in favour of the Tebhaga Movement in some villages in Canning and Sandeshkhali P.S. areas.\textsuperscript{104}

There had been some trouble in Lot No.16 Taranagore (Diamond Harbour subdivision) where the zamindars had already initiated proceedings against the Krishak Samity members. Five new cases had been filed between 22.1.47 and 6.2.1947 by the zamindars. These were: three cases against 50 persons for catching fish from a canal, one case against four persons for cultivating some land without the consent of the zamindars and another case against 34 persons.\textsuperscript{105}

One case against the zamindar’s men for cutting off the tail of a calf for damaging the stocked paddy in a zamindar’s farmyard was started by peasants. Both parties were trying to settle the cases amicably. Charu Chandra Bhandari, MLA, was requested by the SDO, Diamond Harbour, to look into the cases against the peasants.\textsuperscript{106}

CPI members were engaged in organising the Tebhaga Movement at Kalikatala and Matherdighi in the Canning P.S. area, and in the Sarberia-Rajbari area in the Sandeshkhali P.S. areas. Proceedings under sections 107 and 144 Cr.PC had been instituted against a number of them. A procession of about 2,000 persons from villages bordering the jurisdiction of Canning police station was organised at Sarberia. A case of looting was registered at Patharghata, police station Sandeshkhali, on 3 February. A union office under the auspices of the CPI had been started at Matherdighi.\textsuperscript{107}

On 3 February 1947, 10,000 peasants of Sarberia Union of 24-Parganas and its adjoining villages agitated against torture of the police. It was reported that the previous day, in the darkness of evening two officers and five armed policemen raided the village and arrested three peasants named Bedali Mistri, Moslim Gaji and Asulem Molla. The peasant women alerted everyone by blowing conch-shells and about 10,000 peasants gathered to demand their release. It was reported that the police released the peasants and left the village, but returned the following day and set up a camp there.\textsuperscript{108}

The RCPI organised two meetings: one on 8 February at Dakshin Mokamberia and the other on 9 February at Baikunthapur in the Canning P.S. area. Speakers criticised the zamindari system, the interim government and the “police of the Congress and the Muslim League”. They appealed for support for the panchayat system.\textsuperscript{109}

A peasant meeting attended by about 300 men and organised by the RCPI was held at Pathankhari, P.S. Sandeshkhali, on 10 February with Nilima Ray in the chair. Speakers Hatem Sardar, Dibakar Halder and others advocated tebhaga.\textsuperscript{110} The landlords of Budhakhal were already accepted the one-third share.\textsuperscript{111}

Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha observed Hasnabad Day all over Bengal on 12 February 1947. The unity of the Hindus and the Muslims in Hasnabad encouraged the leaders and workers of the Tebhaga Movement.\textsuperscript{112}

On 16.2.1947 the Krishak Samity workers held a meeting at Matherdighi with Lalit Mohan Sinha in the chair. The speakers Hemanta Ghoshal, Sailen Ghosh and others urged the audience (about 1000) to support the Tebhaga Movement.\textsuperscript{113}

On the same day, the manager and the superintendent of the local zamindar’s cutcheri held a meeting with the lotdars and formed a ‘Praja Mangal Samiti’ with a view to counteract the Tebhaga Movement.\textsuperscript{114}

Sudhanshu Kumar Dutta (BPI) wanted to launch Tebhaga Movement in Brahmanchowk and Kamargati under Haroa P.S. during the first week of February 1947,
but his attempts were foiled by the SDO Basirhat. The movement was also in progress in the Barasat subdivision.

About 1,000 persons led by local CPI members Jatin Maity, Gunadhar Maity and others looted the granary of a jotedar of Barar Lot in Kakdwip on 23 February. The same day, lotdar of Gobindarampur Prafulla Bera’s sharecroppers stopped threshing paddy of his farm raising the demand of tebhaga. Two of the sharecroppers were brought to the cutchery by the guards, beaten left outside the cutchery half dead. Hearing this news, the sharecroppers blew conch-shells and people from the neighbouring villages gathered at Gobindarampur. As no boat was available, the tribal peasants of Lot No. 14 jumped into the river of Banstala and reached Bera’s lot by swimming. Peasant leaders of Gangadharpur, Bhunath Pramanik and Kalipada Guria of Ramnagar came to Bera’s lot. Jyotish Roy of Budhakhali, who was busy discussing the situation of the movement with Gunadhar Maity and Jatin Maity, also got the news and came to Gobindarampur. Begging for his life, Prafulla Bera surrendered to Jyotish Roy. He proposed to give to the two tortured sharecroppers two bighas of land, all expenses of their treatment and to bear all their family expenses till recovered. He also accepted the demand of tebhaga. But agitated peasants refused to listen. Under the leadership of Kartick Khanra, some peasants set fire to the haystack and paddy in the farm. The guards of the cutchery fired, injuring nine persons.

The injured persons were taken to Diamond Harbour Hospital. Their list is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Class background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kartik Khanra</td>
<td>Gobindarampur</td>
<td>Member of land labour family, ex-serviceman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Nagendranath Dolui</td>
<td>Gobindarampur</td>
<td>Landless bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Upen Barik</td>
<td>Gobindarampur</td>
<td>Bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Bidur Kuila</td>
<td>Gobindarampur</td>
<td>Bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bijoy Jana</td>
<td>Budhakhali</td>
<td>Bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Bhagbat Samanta</td>
<td>Budhakhali</td>
<td>Bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Bhuban Middya</td>
<td>Bishalakshipur</td>
<td>Bargadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Bhutnath Bera</td>
<td>Bishalakshipur</td>
<td>Land labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Bijoy Seal</td>
<td>Rajnagar</td>
<td>Raiyat peasant (Ghughu Danga)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight of them came round. But Kartik Khanra died in jail.

The above incident illustrates the features of peasant movement of this area. The movement was not only of the sharecroppers who demanded two-thirds of the paddy, but land labourers and raiyat peasants also shed blood with the sharecroppers.

Though the lotdar and naib were also arrested, after two days they came back to the village on bail. A police camp was set up. The very next day, peasant activists Satish Das, Kartik Das, Khudiram Pradhan, Bhagyadhar Pradhan, Gyanendra Mistri, Chandra Maity, Kalipada Guria, etc., were arrested without resistance.

One Gunadhar Barman lodged a case of compensation against Kankan Halder, Mannmatha Ghoroi, Upen Jana, Kartik Kundu, Chaitanya Das, etc., with the help of the jotedars. They did not appear at the court on the advice of the Krishak Samity. The Barmans won the case. The court announced a decree on the raiyati land of Mannmatha
Ghoroi, Upen Jana and Kartik Kundu. They were compelled to sell their raiyati land to pay compensation.\(^\text{123}\)

By the end of February 1947, Hindu and Muslim jotedars jointly pressed upon the Suhrawardy government to deal firmly with the situation of “disorder” and violence. Police camps were posted in the areas of the movement and the widest use was made of the preventive laws, such as section 144 and 107 of Cr.PC. Cases of rioting and looting against the agitators were instituted.\(^\text{124}\)

**The Tebhaga in Sandeshkhali**

The following is the history of events connected with the Tebhaga Movement in the Sandeshkhali police station area. The movement began in a number of villages in Unions II and VI early in February 1947. Sarberia Dighir Para and Patharghata were two notable villages. The first raid on a landlord’s farm was reported on 2 February. On 12 February, the circle inspector from Basirhat went to this area. The following day, he met a large number of bhagchasis with their leaders and tried to get the matter settled. He failed as the peasants stuck to their demands for two-thirds share of the crop and return of all lands made khas in the last 50 years. After this failure of talks, khamar looting began on a more extensive scale.\(^\text{125}\)

Prabhas Roy was one of those who led the movement. Hemanta Ghoshal was the ‘commander’ of the full team. The others were Prabir Mondal, Srishti Mondal, Altaf Molla, Sudhanshu Mondal, Mongal Sing, Dr. Kali Majhi, Abhoy Mistri, Fulmoni Mahato, Nalini Prova Ghosh, Abdul Halim, Shamsul Huda, etc.\(^\text{126}\)

Ghoshal later recounted in a speech: “The number of volunteers reached 10,000, and with the slogan ‘one rupee, one young man and one lathi’, I conducted their training. Comrade Sunil Chottopadhyay and Raghunath Bhattacharya helped to run the training. We started the operation. This team brought two-third amount of paddy from the zamindar’s khamars to the sharecroppers’ khamars according to the list and kept one-third in the zamindars’ and jotedars’ farms. The volunteers did not go home for a month. They worked as a mobile force in lot after lot and area after area.”\(^\text{127}\)

The sharecroppers snatched two-third amount of paddy from 450 zamindars’ farms one by one, including Minakhán’s zamindar, Port Canning’s zamindar, Sarberia’s zamindar Srinath Das, Bishpur’s zamindar Naren Dalal, Pathankhali’s zamindar, Shambhunagar’s zamindar, etc.\(^\text{128}\) Ananda Bazar Patrika of 4.3.1947 reported the looting of the farms of Kanai Molla, Bhaba Nath Basu and Bhaghabati Gope of Khariat village. On 26.2.1947, 3,000 armed peasants looted the khamar of Amulya Charan Gan. On 28.2.1947, the khamar of Surendranath Adak of the same village was looted. At a meeting on 27.2.1947, the CPI/BPKS activists decided to loot all the farms of lodtars in the area within a week.\(^\text{129}\)

In 1946-1947 the sharecroppers revolted under the leadership of Sevak Das, Gajen Maity and Arindam Nath in British zamindar Hamilton’s areas Satjelia, Gosaba and Rangabelia against putting signature in the agreement of cultivating wages though they cultivated the land in the system of 50 per cent share. The District Magistrate of 24-Parganas, B.P. Gupta, came for a settlement but as there were prohibitory orders under section 144 Cr.PC in the area, some persons did not attend the meeting. Makhanlal, Balaram Bera and Anjan Das were sent to the DM for talking. It was decided in the
discussion that the heaps of paddy in Hamilton’s farms would be threshed and the owner
would get two-thirds and the sharecroppers one-third with receipt. The sharecroppers
would be recognised as bargadars. Subsequently the government would grant them
*pattas* (deeds) against their receipts.\textsuperscript{130}

Brindaban Chandra Laha was the zamindar of Kelkhali near Ganti. The
sharecroppers and the local leaders went to break the heaps of paddy. The zamindar
proposed a dialogue, to which they agreed. But the zamindar brought the police secretly.
As the local leaders and sharecroppers came in a procession, the police shot one person.
The peasants ran away in fear. They held a meeting in the night and looted Laha’s
house.\textsuperscript{131}

Srinath Das, who was the zamindar of Sarberia was dead against the Tebhaga
Movement. He was socially boycotted. The servants, attendants of the palanquin, cooks,
washermen and barber of the zamindar participated in the boycott spontaneously.\textsuperscript{132}

The *tebhaga* demand also spread to others police station areas of the 24-
Parganas. One report said that CPI members were encouraging looting of paddy at various meetings
if *tebhaga* was not conceded peacefully. The *lotdars*’ appeals to the district magistrate
and the SP were proved fruitless. CPI and BPKS organised processions in villages to
scare the *lotdars*. The looting of paddy from their farms went on in the area up to March
1947.\textsuperscript{133}

Premier H.S. Suhrawardy said in the Legislative Assembly that the unrest had
also spread amongst the cultivators. In a few areas, it had taken the form of Tebhaga
Movement, while in others the issues were non-payment of *tanka* rent, catching fish
from *beels* without authorisation, non-payment of chowkidari tax or agricultural loans. In
some places such agitation was accompanied by violence.\textsuperscript{134}

On 28 February 1947, Suhrawardy made a statement in the Assembly, responding
to the motion of a Congress member concerning a recent firing. “No government,
however sympathetic it may be towards the reasonable demands of the people, can allow
lawlessness and defiance of authority nullify it. It was a matter of greatest regret to
government that innocent and law-abiding cultivators had fallen a pray to this agitation
and have resolved (…) as made it incumbent on our force of law and order to use force
against force.\textsuperscript{135}

To implement the court orders numerous police camps were posted in the villages
of south 24-Parganas. The basic objective of these police camps was to protect the
interest of the rich peasants and *lotdars* in the name of law and order.\textsuperscript{136} In the month of
May, police went to Hatgachhi Union (Sandeshkhali P.S.) to arrest Vijay Sardar and
raped his daughter Lakshmi Bewa.\textsuperscript{137} Police also arrested peasant activists Khorsheed Ali,
Altab Mollah, Ramkamal Mondal and Parameshwar Mondal from the same area.\textsuperscript{138}
Second Phase: Tebhaga Movement March 1947

In March 1947 some krishak agitators, including Dibakar Haldar, Satish Samanta and others of the RCPI group and Hemanta Ghoshal, Probhash Ray others of the CPI continued with the Tebhaga Movement in Canning and Sandeshkhali police stations.

On 6 March, a Krishak Samity meeting (CPI) attended by about 100 peasants was held at Bhojerhat, PS Bhangore with Amar Naskar in the chair. Two days later, the OC Habra PS reported that the Krishak Samity at Khatura had since launched a no-rent campaign amongst the local peasants. The movement was sponsored by the CPI, but it had failed to make any headway.\(^{139}\)

By the middle of March, repressive jotedars along with their agents came back to their respective homes in Kakdwip under police protection. Peasants battled hard for the defence of the panchayat khamars and for the retention of the paddy taken away from the jotedars’ kholans. They fought with their traditional weapons – *lathi*, *dao* (chopper), *sarki* (spear) and bows and arrows. Women fought with *jhanta* (broom) *bonti* (fish-cutting knife) and chilly powder. As soon as a police party arrived in a village, an alert was given by blowing conchshells and horns.\(^{140}\) The peasant women played a vital role in raising alarm and in gheraoing the police and the jotedars’ men.

No doubt the kisans had to suffer a lot but the enemy force had no easy sweep. It was in Budhakhali that the police had to save themselves by swimming across the canal; and in Layalganj they laid down their arms and begged for mercy. In Berarlal, while peasant squads resisted the enemy forces, hundreds of kisans RAIDed the cutchary house in the midst of indiscriminate firing from the enemy side.\(^{141}\) Despite the stubborn nature of their resistance, the Kakdwip rebels found it difficult to cope with the severity of police operations. The situation in the rest of Bengal from the standpoint of the Tebhaga agitators was certainly not favourable. Coincidentally, at this juncture, on 27 March communal riots broke out afresh in Calcutta and affected other parts of the province of Bengal. This led the provincial Communist leaders to apprehend that the continuation of any agitation in such a frenzied atmosphere was bound to take a communal turn. They were, therefore, in favour of suspending all agitations and concentrating their energies on controlling the riots, which had begun to spread to different parts of Calcutta and continued unabated till August 1947.\(^{142}\)

In the State vs Kangsari Haldar case, the prosecution alleged that on 6 March 1947 (long before the period of conspiracy mentioned) at about 10 am, Kangsari Haldar, Gopi Jana, Bhusan Pradhan and others held meeting in the ME School at Rajnagar and thereafter a large crowd surrounded the house of Gunadhar Burman – a prosecution witness (PW 24). Gunadhar Burman had refused to join the Tebhaga Movement and had taken the paddy crop for threshing to the khamar of jotedar Atulananda instead of his own against the diktat of the Krishak Samity or the Bhagchasis. Then Gunandhar’s hut was demolished along with that of Amulya Ratan Giri, headmaster of ME School.

According to Gunadhar Burman, Kangsari Haldar, who addressed the meeting, advocated that as Atulalnanda Sasmal was obstructing the Tebhaga Movement and
Gunadhar Burman was helping him, suitable punishment should be inflicted on the latter such as the demolition of his house. Then a crowd of about 200-250 people surrounded Gunadhar’s house. When Atulananda Sasmal, his father Priyanath and one Trilakshya Maity went to the spot, the crowd surrounded them and on Kangsari Haldar’s orders, the three were dragged some distance. The witness himself was assaulted with one or two lathi-blows and kept confined.\(^\text{143}\)

Atulananda Sasmal (PW 15) was a landlord and pleader. According to him, Kangsari took Gunadhar Burman to task for taking paddy to his khamar; the crowd assaulted him, his father, Trailakshya, Gunadhar and his brother Sudhir, and the headmaster. Sasmal was also Secretary of the Sundarban Raiyat Samity, which was a rival organisation to the Krishak Samity of the bhagchasis. A criminal case was reportedly started on the basis of the FIR filed on Atulananda Sasmal’s written ejahar under Sec.148/356/395/397 IPC. That case was withdrawn by the state on 20.11.1947 and the accused persons were discharged. Gunadhar subsequently obtained a decree for damages against 20 persons including Kangsari and Gajendra Mali.\(^\text{144}\)

**Bermajur**

On 4 March, the SP told the Circle Inspector of Basirhat to go to the Bermajur area. When the CI reached Bermajur on 7 March with an armed force, he arrested the 17 main accused in one of the paddy looting cases, while the police party was in a zamindar’s cutchary at Bermajur.\(^\text{145}\)

On 8 March, as the alarm was sounded from Bermajur with the blowing of conchshells and the clanging of metals, people in processions poured in from the neighbouring villages of Hatgachhi, Kanmari, Nalko, Rajbari, Patharghata, Matherdighi, Dighirpar, Jashore, Baunia, Aigara, Sarberia, Rampur, Kalikatala, etc. demanding the release of those arrested. These processions came out instantly and were organised without any collective decision. Hemanta Ghoshal and Barun Patra of Matherdighi, Madhu Mahato and Taslim Ali Molla of Nalkora, Gour Bisai of No.10 Kanmari, Jatin Patra of Baunia and Kamal Mondal of Ajgora led these processions.\(^\text{146}\)

About 3,000 krishaks, armed with bows and arrows, spears, lathi, dao and other weapons, surrounded the cutchary, raised slogans such as ‘Answer why our men are arrested,’\(^\text{147}\) and demanded their release.\(^\text{148}\)

“After some time guards and lathials of the zamindar fell upon us and we also obstructed them. The fighting with sticks was going from both sides.”\(^\text{149}\) The peasants later looted the Union Board office and the government Mobile Dispensary, set fire to number of huts, and assaulted some police officers.\(^\text{150}\)

The agitators demanded that the police release the arrested men, but the police refused to do so. Then the men of the Muslim community of Bermajur whose relatives were arrested started to throw bricks, stones and clods of earth at the police.\(^\text{151}\) “The police then opened fire from the cutchary. When we could not stand it any more we started to flee from there.”\(^\text{152}\)

At least 25 peasants died in the firing and 500 were wounded. Rabiram Sardar,
Paglu Sardar, Chamu Bisal of Rajbari, Ratiram Sardar of Chhoto Ajgora, Baira Sardar were martyred. “We managed to retrieve their bodies. The bodies of the remaining who died were thrown into the waters of the river Vidhyadhari by the police.”

Before drawing their last breath, Rabiram and Ratiram said, “Comrades, we are going but you who will remain. Don’t forget these enemies and raising your head you must go on with the movement nonstop.”

Hemanta Ghoshal was saved by chance when a bullet whizzed past his ear. Some constables were also injured. Among the seriously injured, Banku Roja, Batul Bisai and Nepal Mistri were taken to Canning Hospital while Md Taslim Ali Molla was admitted to Sambhunath Pandit Hospital. His was shot in the leg, which had to be amputated. Dr Naresh Banerjee sent from the People’s Relief Committee (PRC) treated the other wounded people secretly in a temple on the dighipar.

A day after the massacre, on 9 March, about 20-30 thousand peasants assembled near the cutchary of Bermajur from villages throughout Sandeshkhali PS to protest against the police firing.

Historians, the police and other observers differ over the number of people killed in the police firing at Bermajur on 8 March 1947. Historian Asoke Kumar Majumdar mentions the death of at least seven peasants at Bermajur in police firing in his book Peasant Protest in Indian Politics, while historian Rabindra Nath Mondal writes in The Tebhaga Movement in Kakdwip that six kisans were killed by police bullets in Bermajur when thousands of kisans, armed with their traditional weapons, attacked the zamindar’s cutchary khamars and brought the crop to their own khamars by driving away the policemen. In an account of the incident in his book Peasant Movement in Bengal and Bihar, historian Dipankar Bhattacharya states that 11 men were arrested at Bermajur in Sandeshkhali for forcibly taking paddy from different threshing floors. When a large crowd armed with brickbats gathered to rescue the arrested men, they clashed with the police. In the ensuing clash, the police fired several rounds, killing two peasants, while some constables were injured.

In Sharecropping and Sharecroppers’ Struggles in Bengal 1930-1950, historian Adrienne Cooper writes that in Basirhat, the subdivisional officer and police force were made to retreat by volunteers. At Bermajur in Sandeshkhali on 7 March, peasants were detained in a landlords’ cutchary for implementing Tebhaga and a police force was summoned to make arrests. When a crowd attempted to rescue the detained, it led to police firing in which seven peasants were killed and others wounded. Subsequently more armed forces were posted in the area, Congress volunteers went there to keep the peace and there were mass arrests.

The police report stated that the policy party had opened fire in self-defence, as a result of which two persons died. The mob then dispersed leaving behind numerous CPI leaflets and others weapons.

The headquarters of the Communist Party announced that at least seven persons were killed in the police firing in Bermajur village of Sandeshkhali PS and three persons jumped into the river. A total of 18 persons were injured of whom the condition of five was serious.
In *Krishak Sabhar Itihas*, Md Abdullah Rasul named the five peasants killed in police firing at Bermajur as Rabiram, Paglu Sardar, Chamu Bishal, Baira Sardar and Ratiram Sardar. However, Hemanta Ghoshal and Comrade Shibdas Bhattacharya in his respective autobiographies (*smritikhatha*), as well as some members of the local Krishak Samity and sharecroppers who were engaged in the Tebhaga Movement and were present on 8 March during the firing by the police, affirmed in interviews that 20-25 peasants were killed but only five bodies were recovered those of the dead mentioned by Md Abdullah Rasul.

There were several reasons for the discrepancies in the number of dead. The first was that nobody dared to search for the dead bodies that were untraced out of fear of the police. The second reason was that those who died in the police firing might have been shot in the chest or the head, which is against police regulations. It is believed by many that in order to avoid an investigation into these allegations, the policemen themselves floated most of the bodies of the dead peasants in the Vidyadhari river after slitting their bellies.

The Addl SP, Mr Kabir, arrived at Bermajur with a further force on the morning of the 9 March. The SDO Basirhat joined him and on 12 and 13 March they went to the villages in Unions II and VI and made a number of arrests. They were unable to arrest all those on the wanted list because the bhagchasis’ organisation helped many men to escape by warning them of the approaching police parties. The Hindusthan Standard reported: “It is known from the statement of the 24-Parganas Krishak Samity that 200 armed policemen were deployed in Bermajur, Sarberia, Matherdighi and many other places (villages). Raids were being done from house to house and the villagers were being arrested.”

On 13 March an armed force went out to Pathankhali village in Union No.IX and left an armed detachment there because cases of khamar looting had been reported from that area. However, from 14-15 March no further reports of trouble were received. The District Magistrate, 24-Parganas, FO Bell stated, “I do not think the police can fairly be blamed for inactivity, throughout Feb 1947 the local police being ordered from district headquarters to go slowly were trying to get an agreed settlement between bhagchasis and jotedars. Not until the 4th of March did the SP tell the CI to go out and deal with khamar looting as an ordinary crime. Then the police was forced to arrest accused
Following the firing at Bermajur, the peasants of Sandeshkhali, Hasnabad, Hingalganj and Haroa became more determined to fight. The Tebhaga Movement in Bilani and Dhanikhali became stronger because the area was full of sharecroppers. Pachu Sarkar and Sanshi Mondal of Khajurberia, Indranarayan Haldar, Jogindra Mondal, Hazari Baydya, Jharu Gopa Haldar of South Bishpur, Naren Ghosh, Ganesh Basanta of Bishpur and Mongal Singh, Faku Sardar, Umesh Mahato of Bilani played an important role in the movement. Finally the zamindars of the area admitted Tebhaga’s claims.

Violence and disorder

The violent Manifestation of the Tebhaga Movement launched by the CPI was gradually dying out. Rasbehari Ghosh, Secretary, 24-Parganas District Krishak Samity, who was mentioned as an accused in the Sandeshkhali and Kakdwip PS cases (No.03 dated 6.3.1947 u/s 395/397/W36/448 IPC and No.9 dated 2.3.47 u/s 148/342/326/365 IPC), was arrested on 28 March with the help of the Calcutta Police when he went to meet the District Magistrate in connection with the alleged police excesses in the Sandeshkhali area. There were 55 cases against Hemanta Ghoshal and the police searched desperately for him. At last he was arrested from a village in Minakhan in May 1947. The Tebhaga Movement slowed down after the firing at Bermajur and with his arrest. In 1947 during the period of Tebhaga Movement Altab Molla who was a worker of the Krishak Sabha of Laukhali was killed by hooligans of the jotedars when he was praying namaz.

Features of the Tebhaga Movement in Sandeshkhali PS

1. Kholan bhanga: Breaking the heap of paddy into one share to the landlord or jotedars and two shares to the sharecroppers.
2. “The jotedars are bloodsuckers, loot all their belongings”, was the slogan through which the leaders of the Krishak Samity generated hatred against the jotedars.
3. Loot: The heaps of paddy and houses of the zamindar or jotedars who did not accept Tebhaga were looted.
4. Both men and women took part in the breaking of the heap of paddy.
5. Many sharecroppers after taking Tebhaga returned to the zamindar of jotedars secretly out of fear.

The effect of the Tebhaga Movement in Sandeshkhali PS

i) Zamindars and jotedars accepted Tebhaga.
ii) The civil judge (hakim) of the Bhagchas court – special court established at
Kalinagar in order to settle disputes amicably between the sharecroppers and zamindars and jotedars – accepted the Tebhaga. He held that one-third of the crops would be distributed in favour of zamindar or jotedars and two-thirds would go to the sharecroppers.\footnote{173}

iii) One of the leaders of the Sandeshkhali Tebhaga Movement, Hemanta Ghoshal is reported to have said that the moral achievements of the Sandeshkhali movement were greater than its material achievements. Agrarian disturbances born of peasant discontent added a new dimension to the political movement of the country.\footnote{174}

From the middle of February to end-March 1947 the peasants faced terrible repression. During this phase the armed police resorted to firing 22 times, in which about 70 peasants including 25 women were killed. In Dinajpur district alone about 40 peasants were killed, 1,500 were arrested and 1,000 wounded. Some 3,119 peasants and their leaders were arrested; several thousand cases were instituted against peasants, leaders and cadres. Women were raped in 24-Parganas, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Midnapur.\footnote{175}

A telling comment on the grave situation is found in the weekly notes published by Calcutta High Court: “Mr HS Suhrawardy cannot be permitted merely to defend his police force; when peasants die, men as well as women, braving police bullets, the matter concerns all who care for the province and its harassed people.”\footnote{176}

**Government Report: The Tebhaga Movement in the 24-Parganas**

The subdivisional officers of Basirhat, Diamond Harbour, Barasat, Alipore, Bongaon and Barrackpore sent confidential reports to the Bengal Government in the month of March 1947 on the Tebhaga Movement. Some parts of these reports are reproduced here.

**Basirhat:** “Communist agitators in certain parts of the subdivision have launched a Tebhaga Movement since the beginning of February 1947. Till now it is confined to a small area in Sandeshkhali PS. It was wholly organised by outside agitators but now it has got support of almost all the bargadars of the affected area…

“It is still confined to a very small area in Sandeshkhali PS. It has not yet got any response from the bargadars outside that area. It was not a spontaneous and general uprising. The whole movement is a got-up show of the Communist agitators. In course of visits to the affected area it was noticed that the general mass of bargadars had been cajoled to join this movement, in many cases under threat…

“In some cases the landlords have entered into a compromise with the bargadars in as much as they did not press for the return of the seed paddy advanced by them. A few of them even took only 6 annas share of the produce. But none of them did it voluntarily. They did it stave off a worse fate. But generally the bargadars outside the affected area did not press immediately for a larger share of the produce but agreed to the customary share, the landlords in their turn having promised to abide by the new law when it is enacted…

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“In almost every case the bargadars came along with the other agitators 2,000 to 3,000 strong and carried off almost the entire produce leaving not more than one-fourth share for the landlord. In some cases they carried off the entire produce disregarding the protests of the landlords. They threatened those who refused to join the movement with dire consequences and demanded of the landlords a receipt for one-third share of the produce and their consent to this change…

“It is apparent that the Communist agitators are out to exploit this movement for their own political ends. A policy of noninterference would bring about a general breakdown of law and order. In this subdivision the movement can still be checked if the ringleaders who come from Calcutta are arrested and armed forces sent down to the affected area.”

Diamond Harbour: The report observed that the bargadars had carried the entire produce to their own khamars and were offering one-third to the landlords who were not agreeing to accept it. Smaller landlords tended to agree to the Tebhaga division, whilst the more powerful ones tried to take the paddy back by force, obtaining orders under Sections 144 and 107 CrPC.

Barasat: “The Tebhaga Movement came to this area as a sort of overflow from the neighbouring subdivision and touched only the fringes of the subdivision but could not gain ground. The Communist and the krishak parties held some propaganda meetings in Maricha Union… [but] they do not think it necessary to undertake the hazard of a movement. Communist leaders, however, are always on the lookout for an excuse for agitation and sporadic trouble may arise here and there. Repercussion may also come from outside. But widespread Tebhaga Movement is not apprehended in this subdivision.”

Alipore: “The Tebhaga Movement was started about December 1946. Agitators from Calcutta helped by some local people organised the movement. The movement has met with partial success. It was mostly confined to Canning PS where there was a spontaneous and general uprising… In some cases the landlords entered into compromise with the bargadars and accepted one-third of the produce. But in most cases the landlords realised their usual half-share… At present the movement is confined only to Kalikapur Union and its adjoining villages in Canning PS. It will probably die out in two months’ time.”

Bongaon: (This subdivision was not part of 24-Parganas before independence. Later Bongaon, Gaighata and Bagda of Jessore district was included in 24-Parganas. This report relates to the Tebhaga Movement in Bongaon subdivision before independence.)

“The movement began about three months back and I believe there is still some Communist activity which is very slow. The local Communist leaders attempted to organise it. The movement was not effective… As the movement was slow and did not succeed there was no necessity on the part of the landlords to enter into any
compromise but I think the landlords here will rather acquiesce than oppose owing to abundance of land. Produce has been shared between the landlord and bargadars amicably according to the existing custom. This was partially due to the influence of the zamindars of Gobardanga. During the first week of February 1947, however, the Communists found a new venue of activity. They set up a Bazar Committee in the Khantura Bazar within Gobardanga Municipality to agitate against the system of realisation of tolls by lessees. For one week from 2.2.1947 to 9.2.1947 the Bazar committee prevented the lessees from realisation of tolls, which was collected by that committee. Since then the committee has given up collection but has prescribed some rates of tolls and a system of collection, which has been partially accepted and for the present there is no trouble. The movement has not yet spread out of that area. The following are the local leaders of Khantura: 1) Panchkari Choudhury 2) Nitai Mondal 3) Beni Teor.

“In Champatala Union PS Deganga there was really no movement but only a meeting on 18.12.1946 – which was more or less accidental. The meeting was to be held at Haroa in Basirhat subdivision but the SDO Basirhat issued an order u/s 144 CrPC prohibiting the meeting. To avoid this order the assembled people crossed over the boundary of the subdivision in the eleventh hour and held the meeting in the nearest village within this subdivision. Local people did not sympathise and there was no further activity. For the present there is a lull in the Tebhaga Movement, the main paddy crop being over. Moreover bargadars are generally peaceloving in this subdivision. …It was the outside agitators who tried to organise the movement with the help of a few local leaders. The modus operandi was to seize the opportunity of local party faction and pose as champion for the oppressed.

“In Maricha union PS Amdanga two movements started in July 1946. The ground of activity was supplied by party faction in village food committees, which were ultimately captured by the party under influence of the Communists. There was clash between the parties on one occasion resulting in rioting and criminal case is pending. Having captured the food committees the Communists tried to push on the Tebhaga Movement during November and December 1946 but the people who took advantage of the leadership of the Communists in capturing food committees did not respond to the Tebhaga Movement and ultimately there was no trouble between the landlord and the tenants is sharing the produce according to the exiting system of half and half. There was not a single instance of apprehension of breach of peace. The movement has not died out yet, but is now being directed against the union Board – particularly in view of the ensuing union Board election early April next.

“The movement is localised in the union. The leaders are: Rasbehari Ghosh of Barrackpore subdivision; Abdul Jalil and Habibulla of Urala PS Amdanga; and Nani Gopal Biswas and Satish Chandra Ghosh of Masunda P.S. Amdanga.

“In Gobardanga and Maslandpur area the krishak party has been active for over two years. It appears that the party gained in local influence by pleading for seed and cattle purchase loans and as a matter of fact most of the above loans in that area were given in consultation with them They gained further popularity by inciting loanees
not to repay the loans. From October 1946 onwards Communist leaders from Bongaon subdivision joined the krishak leaders of Gobardanga and tried to foment the Tebhaga Movement but did not succeed. …As the crop has been harvested the movement has stopped. But I think it is quite possible that the movement might again be started by parties which can made some capital out of it.”

Barrackpore: “There is no such movement to change the customary share of the harvest in the year of 1947, such as Tebhaga Movement, in the subdivision.”

In 24-Parganas district, Tebhaga was done in four ways:

1) Division of bundle of paddy in the field.
2) Division of bundle of paddy in the zamindar’s khamar.
3) Division of paddy after threshing in the khamars of the jotedars.
4) Division of paddy after threshing in the panchayat khamar.

Tortured, looted and destroyed by police and jotedars

The peasants whose houses were destroyed on 26 March were Atul Chandra Santra, Premchand Santra, Amulya Jana, Gopi Das, Jogi Das, Bhusan Maity and a few others. The police even looted the grains of peasants, mostly sharecroppers in March-April 1947. The details available in this regard are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name of peasant, sharecropper</th>
<th>Amount of looted property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.3.1947</td>
<td>Gunadhar Mali</td>
<td>All utensils, 450 mounds of paddy Rs400 and 10 cows and bullocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.3.1947</td>
<td>Balaram Sau</td>
<td>Utensils 113 maunds of paddy and 3 bullocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.3.1947</td>
<td>Atul Santra</td>
<td>125 maunds of paddy, women molested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.3.1947</td>
<td>Krishnapada Jana</td>
<td>Women molested and household goods broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.3.1947</td>
<td>Bamacharan Haldar</td>
<td>Haldar injured in police beating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.3.1947</td>
<td>Panchanan Mistry</td>
<td>Household goods broken women molested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.1947</td>
<td>Nirode Bera, Rajen Mondal</td>
<td>Home burnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.4.1947</td>
<td>Surat Haldar, Jyotish Haldar</td>
<td>Household goods destroyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus police attacks were becoming more and more severe and burning or looting of houses in villages like Layalganj, Rajnagar, etc. went on in April 1947. But more trouble for these peasants was still to come, as police atrocities were yet to reach its peak. When
the Tebhaga Movement was withdrawn in other parts of Bengal after Independence, the peasants in this area had the courage to fight on, but for that they had to pay very dearly.\textsuperscript{185}

Kakdwip (24-Parganas) 4 April 1947: Horrifying stories of torture by the police and the hooligans of the jotedars are coming in from Layalganj and Haripur of Sundarban area. The police were bringing out the women from their homes for not giving information about the leaders and the activists and making them stand for hours together under the sun completely naked while the police were enjoying the show. Janaki Devi and Tarini Dasi were stripped naked and beaten severely with canes. Both of them became senseless. Bhushan Maity’s wife was also tortured in this way. In some places the police raided at night and after stripping naked the wives of the cultivators, burnt their private parts to satisfy their perverted lust.\textsuperscript{186}

To curb the Tebhaga Movement the police and the jotedars looted paddy, beat the sharecroppers and tried to kill them. On April 7 at 2 am the jotedars locked Ratanbala Dasi’s house from outside and set fire to the house. Ratanbala woke up hearing the noise and began to shout for help. Then the villagers rescued her. On 10 April, one jotedar along with the police raided the house of a sharecropper named Rajen Mondal and looted 150 maunds of paddy.\textsuperscript{187}

In the month of April 50 armed policemen and a bahini of jotedars stopped all the ferry ways of Sandeshkhali and Pathankhali of 24-Parganas district for seven days and seized all the boats. This area, covering 14,000 bighas of land, was surrounded by rivers. As a result the village remained isolated for seven days when the police raided every house and beat the villagers mercilessly. It was alleged that a large amount of paddy was looted. The police arrested 60 persons from this area.\textsuperscript{188}

“Village after village has been burnt down in the new attack to deprive the sharecroppers of the land. News of paddy loot, confrontations, murderous raids and burning of houses are coming in every day as the time for planting is nearing. The jotedars are trying desperately not let the sharecroppers occupy the sharecropping land so that they can record the sharecropping land in their own names. The police are always accompanying the goondas of the jotedars.”\textsuperscript{189}

Interestingly, mention may be made of how some investigating groups saw the movement. A group of Muslim women from Park Circus after visiting Bermajur village of Sandeshkhali made the following comments: “On reading the newspaper about the oppression of peasant women by the police we became highly surprised. We left for Sandeshkhali on 5 April, as it was near to Calcutta, to ascertain the truth of such statements.” This shows that the investigating team was not aware either of the Tebhaga Movement or the oppression going on till as late as March 1947. Secondly, from their statement it appears that they went to Sandeshkhali only because of its proximity to Calcutta.\textsuperscript{190}

Gunadhar Maity said in his interview, “Fearing the lathials of the zamindars and police we lived in the jungle, ignoring the fear of snake and tiger and ate roasted crabs and the juice of leaves.”\textsuperscript{191}
Call of 24-Parganas Communist Party for Movement Against Dominion Rule (21 April-1 May 1947)

On behalf of 24-Parganas District Communist Party, Comrade Nityananda Chowdhury, Abdur Rajjak Khan, Sunil Chatterjee, Jagadananda Mukherjee, Chatur Ali and Probhas Chandra Roy made the following statements:

“During the last four months the police conducted (unleashed) inhuman torture on the innocent sharecroppers in the villages of 24-Parganas, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, etc. Widespread arrests, house-burning and brutal torture continued, looting of paddy has brought famine. The police arrested a delegation of students when it went to Sandeshkhali for investigation. The police arrested Rasbehari Ghosh, secretary of Krishak Samity, when he went to the Magistrate’s Bungalow to submit a memorandum regarding the torture of the police.

As the patriotic common people could not organise a strong movement against the police torture, the police has dared to start similar torture on the citizens of Calcutta, too. Personal freedom, sanctity of women, and food security for the common people – all are threatened. This situation should be changed.

To every section of people in 24-Parganas district our appeal is to stand up against all types of torture by the police.

Our District committee has decided to organise a 10-day movement from 21 April to 1 May 1947. Baithak after baithak and meeting after meeting will be organised against the torture of police. It is our earnest appeal to patriotic countrymen to join this movement, to send mass petitions and proposals to the magistrate and the ministry to stop the torture of police on all classes of people. Our appeal to the common people is to donate to the 24-Parganas District Krishak Samity’s Seva Fund situated at 249 Bahubazar to save and help the tortured peasants of 24-Parganas.”

Mass petitions and protest meetings against police atrocities on peasant women of Bengal by the Mahila Atma Raksha Samity, AIWC and women in general, even teachers, nurses etc. along with others took place in different districts of Bengal like Rangpur, Sherpur town, Dinajpur, Patuakhali, Narayanganj, Panjia, Chandpur, Tongie Bari Union, Badargajji, Dacca and Sandeshkhali.

When the Tebhaga Movement was suppressed by repression, the Suhrawardy ministry brought the state Acquisition and Tenancy Bill designed to abolish the Zamindari system. The Bill was published in an extraordinary issue of the Calcutta Gazette on 15 April 1947. On 21 April Fazlur Rahaman, Revenue minister, described the object of the bill in a long speech in the Assembly. Jyoti Basu, as the Communist leader in the Assembly, welcomed the general principles of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Bill, though it did not concede the Tebhaga demand and sought to maintain the jotedari system. There was no provision in the bill to protect the interest of the bargadar. The bill was finally shelved with the coming of independence and partition bringing end to the Tebhaga Movement.
Table 2: Peasants and activists killed by police and jotedars in the Tebhaga Movement in undivided Bengal (January-April 1947)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>How death occurred</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Samiruddin</td>
<td>Chirir Bandor</td>
<td>Dinajpur</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>Shot by police</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shibram Majhi</td>
<td>Chirir Bandor</td>
<td>Dinajpur</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>Shot by police</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Tatanarayan Burman</td>
<td>Dimla</td>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td>Shot by jotedar</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Panchu Turi</td>
<td>Domar</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Prankrishna Manna</td>
<td>Jamia</td>
<td>Howrah</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Dumuria</td>
<td>Khulna</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>Shot by police</td>
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<td>Rasmoni</td>
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<td>Etta Oraon</td>
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</table>
The list of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Tebhaga Movement of the pre-Independence period only is given here. Abdullah Rasul mentioned the names of 73 martyrs in his *Krishak Sabhar Itihas*. But recent research reveals that there were at least 86 martyrs, though the complete facts or documents have not yet been recovered.196

On 10 May the 24-Parganas district kisan conference was held at Bhojerhat village Bhangore PS, attended by nearly 10,000 peasants. The conference demanded Tebhaga and abolition of lotdari (Zamindari) system. Though the district secretary of the Kisan Samity, Rasbehari Ghosh, and a number of other peasant activists were underground at the time to avoid police arrest, the eagerness of the peasants for further struggle had not diminished. The president of the District Kisan Sabha, Abdur Razzak Khan, Provash Roy, Nityananda Choudhury and Asoke Bose spoke for Tebhaga. Meetings to organise peasants were going on in the villages of the Sundarbans. The speakers generally were Abdur Razzak, Probash Roy, Mahbur Rahaman Khan and Rasbehari Ghosh. In Kakdwip, bhagchasis were being arrested under section 144 CrPC and 107 CrPC.197

The police conducted a local enquiry and found that all the members of the Maricha UB, Amdanga, 24-Parganas belonged to the CPI. They were: Ward1: Biswesar Ghosh and Azager Ali Mondal; Ward 2: Abdul Jalil Mondal s/o Afladuddion of Urala, Sukumar Mondal s/o Kanai of Harpur and Nani Gopal Biswas of Masemda; Ward 3: Sayeluddin Mondal, Moula Bux Mondal, Meghlal Das and Atul Krishna Ghosh s/o Akshay of Dadpur. They also found that the CPI was active in the union and liked by the local people, which was the work of Abdul Jalil, “an ardent supporter of communism and the right hand man of Hemanta Ghoshal and Netai Mondal.198

The 9th session of the 24-Parganas District Annual Krishak conference, attended by about 500 people, was held at Bagbari, PS Bhangore, on the 9 and 10 May 1947 with Abdur Razzaque Khan in the chair. The speakers – Probhas Roy, Jagadananda Mukharji,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>District</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>74</td>
<td>Jitia Oraon</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Janaika peasant</td>
<td>Debiganj</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr.</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>Md. Afsar Mondal</td>
<td>Sahas Union</td>
<td>Khulna</td>
<td>15.04</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>Janaika peasant</td>
<td>Dinajpur jail</td>
<td>Dinajpur</td>
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<td>During judgment</td>
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<td>86</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Shot by jotedar</td>
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Khagendra Nath Ray Chaudhuri, Abdul Halim and others expressed their deep sympathy for the bereaved families of the krishak martyrs who had sacrificed their lives in the Tebhaga Movement in different parts of the district and condemned the police atrocities. The conference also adopted resolutions urging the government to dredge the Piyali and Bidhyadhari rivers within the year, and to fulfil the demands of primary schoolteachers.199

Salil Chaudhuri, s/o Janendra Bath of Kodalia, Sonarpur, 24-Parganas, had a manuscript of a play on the peasant movement in which the police was criticised. This play was staged by the party at Bagbari, PS Bhangore, on 9 May. In this connection the DIB searched Salil Chaudhuri’s house on 29 May, but nothing incriminating was found.200

On 13 May, the DIO reported that information published in Swadhinata was incorrect and the allegations therein made against the police were false. The fact was that the Pathankhali lot in Sandeshkhali PS was as island surrounded by rivers on all sides. The lot belonged to Port Canning Co. Ltd. The Port Canning Co. had arranged ferry service on all sides at their own cost. This ferry service managed by the zamindar was stopped for some time during the Tebhaga operations launched by the BPKS. The main objective of suspension of the ferry service was to save the life and property of the zamindars, Holdars and Chakdars’ men from the organised attacks of the Kisan Party which invited many hired volunteers from outside the lot to loot the paddy from the khamars of the Holdars and Chakdars and resorted to lawlessness throughout the area. There was no allegation at all here against the police force, which was duty-bound to search some of the houses and arrest accused persons in the course of investigation of the Tebhaga cases and “these were done in the course of lawful discharge of their duties.”201

Two days later, the DIO reported: “I made enquiries into the peasant movement at Layalganj, Haripur PS Kakdwip, 24-Parganas, as also the alleged atrocities printed in the Swadhinata concerning the police in this district. In transpired that lotdar Dwarik Nath Samanta of Layalganj with the help of his men forcibly wanted to oust the bhagchasis Gunadhar Maity and others.” The bhagchasis were living in his farmhouse with his permission, but as they took part in the Tebhaga Movement against the said lotdar he demolished a few mud houses and the raiders roughly handled the inmates of the house including children and women. The aggrieved persons lodged a direct case in the court of SDO, Diamond Harbour and prayer to take action against the zamindar and his men was also submitted. The matter was being enquired into by circle officer, the report stated.

“I examined Tarini Dasi w/o Krishna Pada Jana, Janaki Dasi w/o Panchanan Mistry and others. They stated that the allegation against the police as published in Swadhinata was false. The assaults were made by the zamindar and lotdar’s men and not by the police. The only occasion when the police was present was during the demolition of two mud built houses by the Zamindar’s men and the police took no action to prevent the demolition.”

The Tebhaga Movement in the area had subsided. The zamindars and the bhagchasis settled their dispute in a meeting held under the presidency of MILO on 30.4.1947. A committee had been formed with the representatives of the zamindars and
the peasants to come to an amicable settlement for the compensation for damage, loss of properties, etc.”

In his report of 20 May, the DIO satated that on enquiry he had learnt that in connection with the observance of Repression week (21 April-1 May), only resolutions condemning the police oppression and urging the government to withdraw the new Special Powers Ordinance of 1946 were adopted in the different party cells both in the labour and kisan fronts. No open-air meeting was held on this occasion. The report also said that a sum of Rs 2,50,100 had been collected from the krishak area of the district during the week for conducting the cases of the krishak leaders who had been arrested in connection with the Tebhaga Movement in the district.

The police raid the house of Salil Roy Choudhury, organiser of the ‘cultural front’ of 24-Parganas on 22 May in search of illegal leaflets, but nothing objectionable was found. As the police repression increased, the peasants took steps certain preventive steps like maintaining secrecy and discipline, taking out processions and gheraoing the police.

On 31 May, the lotdars and jotedars of Sundarbans area issued about 1,500 registered notices through post offices informing bhagchasis that henceforth they would cultivate their own lands and not let them out to the bhagchasis. On 25 June, the DIO reported: “One Hemanta Dhali of Fatikpur, PS Kakdwip erected a mud-built house on the khas land of a zamindar without permission. He was a member of the Krishak Samity and joined the Tebhaga Movement.” Kalikumar Ghosh, naib of the Zamindar, told Hemanta Dhali on several occasions to demolish the house, but he did not pay heed and continued to live there with his family. On the night of 14 June, Kalikumar Ghosh accompanied by his men Taleb Baksh, Nalini Bera, Jhena Bera, Badal Bera and Naren Bera, and others surrounded the house and set fire to it. The house was reduced to ashes. When the villagers came to put out the fire, Kalikumar Ghosh fired several rounds, injuring one Jyoti Maity of Fatikpur. He was removed to Diamond Harbour Hospital for treatment.

With the coming of independence and partition on 15 August 1947, the BPKS faced new problems. Bengal was partitioned and the strong bases of the BPKS went to East Pakistan. In West Bengal the Congress party formed a ministry. When the harvesting season came the bargadars raised the Tebhaga demands but Krishak Sabha remained silent.

The question of leadership

Many district and local leaders, however, weakened by the party’s reformism, remained in the thick of the struggle up to the end – for instance in the Duars, in Mymensingh, in Narail and in the Sundarbans. They were caught between the spontaneous militancy of the people and the restrictions put by the party leadership, but stayed and gave guidance on the spot.

Unfortunately the leadership of the Communist Party had no vision in 1947. In spite of watching the spread of the movement and the revolutionary tide, the leadership
neglected the poorest sections. The leadership remained with the richer section and sometimes went to shameless opportunists. The peasants began to say, “The Party (CPI) tells us to keep our legs on the tail of the cobra but they do not allow us to kill the snake.”

The Tebhaga Movement in Kakdwip had so much support among the peasants that the decision to withdraw the movement was not easy on the leaders of Kakdwip. “Some of us wanted to go on with the movement but the leaders of Party headquarters and Kisan Sabha did not agree.” Though the movement was stopped for that period, an intensive class-consciousness was seen for the first time among the sharecroppers of Kakdwip.

The role of others except bargadars in the Tebhaga Movement in 24-Parganas

Kind behaviour of a few police personnel helped the peasants many times to avoid arrest or to save themselves unnecessary harassment. Samarendranath Basu or Samar Basu, the officer-in-charge of Kakdwip headed the list. He had sympathy for the farmers and the false allegations of the landlords never influenced him. The description of the real facts used to be in his inquiry report and the farmers would be the gainers. Sometimes he used to give the out information on the place, date and time of police raids. In spite of warrants of arrest many peasants were able to avoid arrest with the help of Samar Basu. He used to say, “How will the movement go on if the leaders are arrested?”

Ghughudanga Rajnagar’s chowkidar, Sarbeswar Das, came from a poor peasant family and he did not always obey the landlords. He was a friend of the peasants and would send prior information about police raids. Sometimes he would collect secret information from the lotdars, chakdars and send it to the peasants at the right moment. He would help the peasants to hide, and misguide the police during investigations and raids to waste time and give an opportunity to the peasant leaders to hide. The chowkidar of Budhakhali also helped the peasants in different ways.

The tide of the peasants’ movement also influenced one or two lotdars-chakdar’s workers. A minor incident of the day of the movement created hope in the minds of the leaders. The incident is given below.

Once Monmoth Goroi of Shibrampur was escorting Kangsari Haldar to Budhakhali from Kakdwip. The journey was fraught with dangers – Kangsari Haldar’s identity was kept secret and Monmoth Goroi would first check out the dangers before they moved ahead. Once when he found a boat ready to leave, he boarded the boat with Kangsari Haldar without thinking. But once on the boat, he realised from the talk among the boatmen that they were in great danger as the boat belonged to the chakdars of Layalganj and all the passengers were his employees, on their way to deliver ‘sweet’ water for the police from Kakdwip. By then the boat was in the middle of the river and there was no way of escaping. Monmoth Goroi tried to be friendly and even helped row the boat. Suddenly one of the boatmen said, “I know who you are!” Both Kangsari Haldar and Monmoth Goroi were taken by surprise when he went on, “You’re thinking we’ll hand you over to the police. You are getting frightened without any reason. You have
built an organisation for us, you are fighting for us, how can we do that?” It turned out that everyone on the boat including the cutchary employees came from peasant or wage labour families and many of them supported the Tebhaga Movement. The two were safely put on shore.214

One or two naibs were sympathetic to the Tebhaga Movement, at least in the first phase. Balaram Sahu of Layalgunj, Dharani Sasmal of C-plot Rajnagar, Manik Byaborta of Budhakhali, all helped the sharecroppers at certain times. The guard of Budhakhali cutchary Gangapada Mishra, also helped them in different ways.215

A large section of rich peasants of Sandeshkhali and Canning police stations joined the Tebhaga Movement. They were unhappy with the torture by the zamindars and the naibs for long time. Chandradkanta Patra was a rich peasant of Matherdighi, who owned about 200 bighas of land. He was president of the Matherdighi Krishak Samity. Khosdel Mistry had more than 150 bighas of land in Sarberia village. He was famous in the area as a Hakimi physician and very popular among the Muslim peasants. He led the sharecroppers against Srinath Das who was the zamindar in the Sarberia area. Gadadhar Singh was the leader of the Scheduled Tribe people. He owned about 300 bighas of land and was president of the Baermari Krishak Samity during the Tebhaga Movement.216

This is very significant in the history of Kakdwip movement for nowhere else in Bengal was land seizure ever attempted to satisfy the agricultural labour participants of the movement. It not only added a new radical dimension to the Kakdwip peasants’ struggle but also gave the sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers a common course of action. Consequently the alliance between the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers became very strong in Kakdwip, which made the peasants’ battle more persistent and uncompromising.217

And there were the ghatoal or boatmen and rowers. The boats used to take the passengers in Sundarbans from one village to another and from one island to the other. There was no alternative arrangement in that area. The lotdars used to appoint the boatmen and rowers who, after a hard days’ work would return home with just 4 annas after giving at least Rs10 to the ghatowners (lotdars). So these ghatoals were against the ghatowners or lotdars-chakdars. The ghatoals supported the sharecroppers in the days of the Tebhaga Movement. The ghatoals followed the news about the movements of the police detectives, the companions of the police and their talk and pass it on to the leaders of the sharecroppers at the right time.218

It should be mentioned here that is not all zamindars of 24-Parganas were bad. Some zamindars such as Daniel Hamilton, tried to uplift the tenants (peasants).

**Role of women in Tebhaga Movement**

In spite of their desire to do so, women could not play a leading role in the Tebhaga Movement. Most of them had to remain at home to look after the homefront and indirectly helped the movement. But a few women in the Sundarbans came forward to participate in the Tebhaga Movement – Tarubala Mondal of Jhupkhali, Fulbasi Mahato of Nalkora, Hajari Bala of Darijangal, Seba Dasi, Ratan Mani, Kiranbala Mondal, mother of
Madhab Das, wife of Binanda Kandar, wife of Kedar Das, wife of Kani Das, wife of Bipin Pramanik of Matherdighi, Bilasi Mali of no.10 Kanmari, Bilasi Mahato, Lalmoni Rai (husband – Ekadas Rai), Ahalya Mahato (husband – Dukhiram Mahato) and Ramani Sardar (husband – Kanglu Sardar) of North Kanmari, to name a few. The tribal women played main role in the Tebhaga Movement because they were tortured and exploited very much. They joined meetings and processions with the men, so the people of other castes laughed at them. These people conspired against the women to their husbands so that they could be separated from the movement. However, realising the true nature of these people of other castes, the husbands of the women helped them to stay on in the movement.219

*Alarm and siege*

A big contingent of policemen had arrested some male peasant cadres and wanted to take the arrested away in a truck. Suddenly, women of the Rajbari, PS Sandeshkhali, sounded the warning. The air reverberated with the noise and echoes of conchshells, horns, gongs and other instruments. Hearing this, hundreds of women – Hindus, Muslims and tribals alike – came out of their huts armed with brooms and kitchen knives and ran towards the truck in an attempt to set the men free. An unequal battle ensued in which the police got the better of the women by firing their rifles. But at no point of time did the women, who were all from poor families, lose courage. “When the firing began, the women became more daring!” Mass encirclement of police personnel in response to alarm signals given by women was a regular feature of Tebhaga in its militant phase.220

Armed with lathi, broom and knife, the women would stop the police from entering a village. Rajkumari Bag was a real fighter and she beat the police. From this her house (house of Gyanendranath Bag) was burnt down by the zamindar. That was done with the help of Taranisana Naib of Chunchura cutchary in Sandeshkhali police station.221

*New political morality erodes conservative social mores*

One of the most interesting narratives could be cited from the reminiscences of Hemanta Ghoshal, popularly known as ‘senapati,’ a peasant leader of the Tebhaga Movement, which talks about the erosion of social taboos constructed around the chastity of girls and women. “I am reminded of one incident in Matherdighi village. Perhaps a traitor informed the police about my shelter. The officer-in-charge surrounded the house where I was hiding with a huge police party. There was only the lady of the house, and her married daughter who had come on a visit a few days earlier. The mother put me inside the mosquito net with her married daughter and told me, ‘Do as I say. We shall be finished if you are arrested.’ She told her daughter that the ‘senapati’ was like her father. ‘Put his head on your lap and put a cold compress on his forehead.’ Then she opened the door. When she came back with the police, her attitude was totally different. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she said: ‘Look my son-in-law is ill;’ one or two policemen were peeping. The mother said: ‘Go in if you like, but it is small pox.’ The police party did not
wait long.”

Hemanta Ghoshal comments on the incident: “The risk cannot be easily comprehended. In such a feudal conservative village society, neither she nor her mother knew whether she would be debarred from living in her husband’s house for spending that night with another person. Did not she think about it? Certainly she did; but she rose above all such hesitations and accepted the challenge of saving senapati’s life. An act which would have thrown the girl’s chastity into question in normal times, was transformed into a revolutionary activity in that movement of political rupture.”

One day Bholanath Hazra, the naib of Bata Krishna Das, took up his gun to teach a lesson to his disobedient sharecroppers (Kumud Sahu, Dhananjoy Das, Padmalochan Sahu), but did not find the box of cartridges though he thoroughly searched the cutchary. That day the soil of Budhakhali was not soaked with blood for Brahmamoyee Mondal (w/o Mohendra Mondal), the maidservant of the cutchary, guessing the evil design of the naib, had hidden the box of cartridges.

In Layalganj and Haripur police and goondas of lotdars wanted to know the names and whereabouts of Tebhaga leaders from some local women, particularly Janaki Dasi and Tarini Dasi and when they refused to answer they were whipped and molested.

The leaders of the Communist Party used to hide themselves in the jungles out of fear of the lathials of the zamindar and the police. The wives of the peasants used to serve them water and food.

Women used to guard the villages. They looked after the comrades by giving food, clothes and information. There were terrible clashes between the police and the women in some places. Tarubala Mondal of Jhupkhali snatched the revolver of the OC in a clash at Kamarganti.

“We (Hemanta Ghoshal and others) took shelter daily in the nearby Tatda Mousal of Bhangore police station. At that time it often happened that we had nothing to eat for 3-4 days continuously, when the daughters and wives of the peasants laid out a bhuribhoj (grand feast) for us. They even guarded us for the whole night. They put up a bold defence against the police in the absence of the men at home.”

In Sandeshkhali in 24-Parganas, Renu Chakraborty and Gita Mukherjee carried out the important role of building the women’s organisation in the Tebhaga Movement.

One night in Matherdighi, Hemanta Ghoshal was sleeping under a mosquito net in the house of Niranjan’s mother. Around midnight he woke up on hearing a noise and by the light of his torch saw a big poisonous snake curled up on the roof of the net. He gave a fearful cry and fainted. Niranjan’s mother heard the shout and came running. When she saw the snake she called out to the villagers who came and killed it. Thus she saved Hemanta Ghoshal’s life.

Though the women perhaps did not read any political theory, and many of them were illiterate, they did not make any mistake in recognising their own class interests through the severe experience of life. They could easily understand who their friends were and who the enemies and played their particular role in history.
Attitude of different sections of the peasantry to the Tebhaga Movement

1. Apart from other considerations, a peasants’ movement that incorporates in its programme one main demand, which can benefit the largest number of a peasant society can ensure the largest participation (the case of involvement of the poor who formed the great bulk of Kakdwip population).

2. The rich peasants’ past grievances against the landlords was a factor in the extra bit of their support for the movement.

3. Another contributory factor determining an attitude of support was the sense of fellow feeling or community sentiment generated by the boisterous course of the agitation.

4. Apart from economic motivation, political belief of one brand or another was a factor that determined the attitude of a small section (not large in number) to the movement.

On the eve of Independence, then Chief Minister Suhrawardy withdrew almost all litigations against the peasant against the Tebhaga agitators, giving many persons who were forced underground to work again for the movement.

In the meantime the Tebhaga Movement ended in some parts of Bengal though the movement was formally withdrawn only in the month of September 1947. In some districts (specially in Dinajpur and 24-Parganas) the movement of the sharecroppers slowed down, but it never stopped. Because, though the movement was launched under the leadership of the Krishak Sabha and Communist Party, it gradually took root among the peasants and the initiative did not rest completely with the leaders.

The first phase of the Tebhaga Movement in 24-Parganas was a historical step. In 24-Parganas those who were exploited and oppressed the most, those who could not tell what their strength was, those who were always enslaved, they overcame that situation, raised their heads in an organised way and created a platform for a greater movement in future.

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