Chapter VII

The Tebhaga Movement in the 24-Parganas after Independence

The account of the Tebhaga movement and the bhagchasis’ struggles has been extended to the post-Independence period to help us make certain comparisons and because in some districts the movement did not end with Independence in 1947. Rather, it continued with greater zeal in districts such as 24-Parganas and Mymensingh. Also, it was not until the 1950s that the Zamindari system was finally abolished and land tenancy relations fundamentally altered. Obviously, Independence was an important victory for the people of South Asia and their politicians, and the peoples had great expectations of the new Governments. However, there were many hurdles still to be overcome – the economic problems inherited from British rule and new difficulties that arose from the partition of Bengal into East Pakistan and West Bengal.

TEBHAGA MOVEMENT – OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1947

In the first week of October 1947, PC Joshi, General Secretary of the CPI, explained the party’s policy of supporting the Nehru Government. Bhabani Sen, Secretary of the Provincial Committee, appealed to the peasants not to launch direct action as they had done the previous harvesting season, and criticised the ‘Kholan Bhanga’ slogan. However, meetings demanding Tebhaga were held in 24-Parganas, Midnapore, Jalpaiguri, Malda and West Dinajpur.

Once the struggle resumed, the determination of the people was extraordinary. This is best exemplified by what happened in Kakdwip, an area where the peasants stubbornly refused to return the paddy they had captured. According to Gunadhara Maity, veteran Communist worker from Budhakhal, under Kakdwip PS, “They would rather let it rot in the field than return the paddy to the jotdars!” The villagers remained unshaken in their resolve even when top leaders of the Kisan Sabha went to Kakdwip to make them surrender their paddy. At a huge public rally these leaders, Krishna Binod Ray and Abani Lahiri, apparently failed to convince the people who had gathered. According to Peter Custers, “They subsequently returned to Calcutta and changed their resolution: those who have the strength can retain their paddy! They had understood the temper of the peasants in the Sundarban area: here peasants don’t surrender.”

Organisation and Propaganda

During September-October large rallies and numerous meetings were held throughout 24-Parganas demanding the abolition of Zamindari and in support of Tebhaga, even as sharecroppers remained firm in their determination not to fill the landlords’ khamar. Communist workers, including Jagannath Maity, Jatin Maity and Gunadhara Maity of Budhakhali, held several meetings at Namkhana, Dwariknagar and Layalganj, where they urged the peasants not to cooperate with the jotdars and zamindars, and to be prepared to launch a Tebhaga movement during the next harvest season in the Sundarban area. Dr Amar
Naskar of Bhojerhat called on bhagchasis of Bairampur and Bhatipota, PS Bhangar, to launch Tebhaga movements during the coming harvest as did Nirmal Sarkar of Kumarsham, Canning. However, according to Intelligence Bureau records, the leaders did not get any appreciable response from the cultivators.⁶

Under the auspices of the CPI, a meeting of about 600 people was held at Sankaripara, Naihati, on 2 November, with Suren Dhar Chaudhuri in the chair. Bhabani Sen, Nityananda Chaudhuri, Gopal Basu, Ramjan Shaikh and Sunil Chatterji among others addressed the meeting, emphasising the need for a thorough change of personnel in the police, military and other Government departments as the mentality inculcated in them by the British bureaucracy was likely to persist. They demanded the complete stoppage of exchange of population and suggested the retransfer of officers and men to their home provinces. They also suggested the dissolution of all Commissions because of the heavy expenditures these incurred and put forth the demand for the trial of officers and men guilty of excesses in matters political and the reappointment of those who were discharged for reasons to the contrary. They appealed for subscription to the Punjab Relief Fund and suggested the recruitment of Bengalis in the Army.⁷

The activities of these krishak agitators were at the time confined to the recruitment of members to the Krishak Samity and to preach the benefits of Tebhaga to the sharecroppers. This propaganda was generally carried out through meetings and propaganda squads. It is also learnt that handbills were distributed in Sagar Island. Two large meetings were held – one on 11 November at Gainpara (Sibrampur) and the other at Kakdwip on 13 November – which were addressed by Communist leaders from Calcutta such as Abdul Halim and Nityananda Chaudhuri. The speakers at these meetings generally impressed upon the people that Tebhaga was the legitimate right of bhagchasis, and they should, therefore, intensify the movement till it was passed into law. About 400 peasants assembled at the meeting in Sibrampur, which was presided over by Abdul Halim, and also addressed by Rash Bihari Ghosh, Jatin Maity among others. The speakers advised the gathering to store paddy in the panchayat khamar set up by zamindars and peasants in collaboration.⁸

Some bhagchasis in this area were supporters of the Congress. To win over this section, the Communist leaders stated that Mahatma Gandhi and all respected Congress leaders had expressed the view at some time that the bhagchasis’ Tebhaga claims were legitimate.

On 12 November Hemanta Ghoshal organised a meeting at Chimtey Primary School, Sandeshkhali, and again on 17 November, he and Nagendra Nath Banerji of the CPI organised two more meetings at Tushkhali and Durgamandap.⁹ The same day, a krishak meeting was organised by the CPI at Matherdighi in Canning, chaired by a local leader, Sahadat Shaikh. About 200 peasants attended the meeting, which was addressed by Sailendra Nath Ghosh, Lalit Singh, Pundari Singh and other workers of the CPI. They urged the audience to be ready for the coming Tebhaga movement and also to join the krishak rally on 21 November in Calcutta to present their views regarding Tebhaga and the abolition of the Zamindari system before Ministers near the Assembly Hall.¹⁰

As the campaign for Tebhaga intensified, so did police vigilance on the krishak agitators. Government intelligence bureau records mention that the Jatin Maity, Bihari Dakua, and others would lead a section of bhagchasis from the abad areas to Calcutta to join the Krishak rally on 21 November, which would petition the Ministers at the Council House to pass the Tebhaga law.¹¹ During the hearing of an appeal in the State vs Kansari Haldar case, the prosecution presented a report by Rabindra Nath Sarkar, second officer of Kakdwip, of a public meeting held on 13 November, i.e. prior to the period mentioned in the charge, at
the Kakdwip Dak Bungalow, which the officer had attended. According to this report, “[The meeting] was attended by 200 persons including Manik Hazra. One of the subjects of the meeting, as addressed by the speakers, was that if the Tebhaga Act was not passed, they would not vote for Charu Bhandari, a candidate for election.” The report also stated that slogans were raised in the meeting such as ‘Langal jar jami tar,’ and ‘Tebhaga ain pass karo.’

A report of the DIO dated 15 November 1947 on the Tebhaga movement in Kakdwip PS as well as in the neighbouring stations listed the names of organisers and the area they had been assigned to work. Some of these were:

1. Bihari Dakua – Union Nos. IV to VI, Kakdwip PS
2. Kansari Prasad Haldar & Jagannath Maity – Union Nos. VII to IX, Kakdwip PS
3. Gunadhar Maity – Kaimuri, Mathurapur PS
4. Rakhal Chandra Das & Nishikanta Jana – Gadamatuha J Plot etc.

The intelligence bureau files also mentioned one Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, ‘an ex convict,’ who visited Mollarhat on 29 November to organise the local peasants with a view to launching a Tebhaga movement in that area, and Dibakar Haldar, ex-security prisoner, RSPI, who held a krishak meeting on 2 December at Manmathanagar, Sandeshkhali PS, and exhorted the audience of about 150 peasants to take the crop grown by them to their own khamars. He criticised the present Government and condemned the police action on the krishak rally in front of the Assembly House on 21 November. Government reports also named Basanta Panda and several other CPI agitators who were campaigning in Deoli, Magrahat PS, with a view to launching a Tebhaga agitation in that area. Kesab Naskar and several other local CPI workers held a kisan meeting on 2 December at Baksahat, Bogra, which was attended by about 500 local peasants. The audience was exhorted to carry on the agitation for the introduction of the Tebhaga Bill and abolition of the Zamindari system.

Satya Dasgupta, Nityananda Chaudhuri and other CPI labour leaders held a meeting with local labourers on 5 December in the Union office of the ESD(M) Authpur, in collaboration with some ex-workers of the ESD(M). Resolutions were adopted protesting against the introduction of the Special Powers Ordinance and demanding withdrawal of the pending cases in connection with the Tebhaga movement and the ban on the CPI organ People's Age. Some local CPI members held a small meeting of about 50 people on 6 December at Harinavi, Sonarpur, to protest against the introduction of the Special Powers Ordinance and to demand the release of Soumyandra Tagore and other arrested persons.

The Government had given special attention to the continuing CPI campaign in the districts for Tebhaga, and the RCPI campaign in the form of the ‘Dash-Chay’ (Ten-Sixth) movement launched in Suryabarst, Amtali and other villages in Sandeshkhali PS, while in Bhangar PS, the CPI propaganda appeared stronger. Panchayat khamars for stocking the standing paddy were being organised in different villages and information revealed that the RCPI had recruited about 50 volunteers for guarding the paddy in these khamars. The RCPI, under the leadership of Makhanlal Pal, was trying to launch a ‘No-rent’ campaign at Gosaba and other places in Sandeshkhali PS and was inciting the local peasants. Prohibitory orders U/S 10(1) BSPO (Ordinance VI of 1945) had been promulgated in Sandeshkhali and Hasnabad police stations in Basirhat subdivision to restrict meetings and processions, etc. and some leaders from Calcutta had been warned by the District Magistrate as a first step towards Executive action.

Information on record shows that ‘Council of Action’ had been formed under the
leadership of Rash Bihari Ghosh, CPI leader of 24-Parganas, in Bowbazar Street, Calcutta, to work in selected areas of Kakdwip and Mathurapur. At a joint meeting of the Forward Bloc and the CPI on 12 December at Bichalihat, Bongong, Pratul Ray (FB), Ranjan Chakrabartty and Ajit Ganguli (CPI) and others spoke against the introduction of the Special Powers Bill and criticised the action of the police. At the instance of the local CPI leaders, 13 night schools had been started in Union No. VII, Dhabla, Sagar PS, by the local krishaks to organise the bhagchasis to carry on the Tebhaga movement in this area.

Under the orders of the District Magistrate, Subdivisional Bhagchasi Control Committees were formed at a meeting in Diamond Harbour on 10 December under the presidency of SDO Diamond Harbour to bring about settlement of disputes. The bhagchasis of Brahmanchak, Haroa, were determined to take the harvest to their own khamars without the consent of the zamindars. In order to effect a compromise between the bhagchasis and the zamindars, Prabhas Chandra Ray (CPI) visited the place on 22 December. He, along with the Naib of Kamarganti cutchary, approached the subdivisional officer, Basirhat, to settle the matter.

The officer-in-charge, Mathurapur police station, reported on 20 December that, under the influence of the CPI, some of the bhagchasis of Kaimuri had selected separate khamars by the side of the old khamars of the landlords for storing harvest in contravention of the orders issued in this connection by the Subdivisional Bhagchasi Control Committee. The matter had been referred to the control committee. The officer-in-charge, Sagar PS, reported that there was some disagreement between the bhagchasis and the landlords at Companichar, Mandirtola and Banstola in Sagar, over the question of stocking the harvest. The majority of the cases were referred to the subdiisional bhagchasi control committee for action.

The valiant struggle of the peasants who participated in the Tebhaga Movement was immortalised by Salil Choudhuri thus:

Mora tulbo na dhan parer golay
Morbo na ar khudhar jalay morbo na
Tar jomi je langol chalay
Dher soyechhi ar to mora soibona

(We will not take paddy to others’ granary
We will not die of starvation
He who owns the plough tills the land
Tolerated enough, we’ll tolerate no more)

Poet Sukanta Bhattacharya, who died on 13 May 1947 at the age of 20 and only witnessed the first stirrings of the movement, wrote the following lines in his poem Durmar:

Hoy dhan, noy pran
E sabde saradesh disahara
Ekbar more bhule gechhe aaj mrityur bhoy tara

(Either paddy or life
By these words the whole country overwhelmed
Dying once they’ve forgotten the fear of death)
As the movement intensified, so did the conflicts between the peasants and landlords. Some landlords like the Riababus of Ramnagar, Diamond Harbour Bhagchas Board, accepted the panchayat khamar while the issue was raised in Hatgachhi, Sarberia and Deulia in Sandeshkhali PS. The demand was refused by landlords in Layalganj, Budhakhalu, Rajnagar, Koymati, Durgapur mauza, Ramnagar mauza, Kakdwip PS, Deuli Ganthirara, Canning PS and Mathurapur PS. In Haroa there was a compromise, which the landlords violated and the sharecroppers retaliated with boycott. The landlords then looted the crops and filed criminal cases against the sharecroppers.

In the last phase of 1947, the jotdars of Layalganj – Ananda Das, Brindaban Das, Dhars of Rajnagar and Sens of Chandanpiri – came to a mutual understanding with the sharecroppers to give them 5-6 kathas of land per bigha through a deed of sale and a 60:40 share of 50 percent of paddy grown. This resolution of conflict through mutual understanding became quite popular and the Tebhaga movement, which had become almost a mass upsurge, began to slow down. However, a group of enthusiastic comrades from Lalganj, Shibrampur, Rajnagar, Radhanagar, Chandranagar and other villages continued the movement under the leadership of Gajen Mali. The party supplied arms – hand bomb, revolvers, pistol, stengun, brengun, cartridge, etc. The first training centre was opened in Umesh Pal’s house of Lalganj.

24 In this connection, the Minister concerned issued a statement:

As a precautionary measure armed forces have been deputed to the affected areas in Saneshkhali and Bhangar to cope with any eventuality leading to disturbances of peace and public order. The armed pickets deputed previously in other affected areas were still continuing. An order u/s 10(1) of the Bengal Special Powers Ordinance had also been promulgated in Sandeshkhali and Hasnabad police station areas, restricting meeting and processions.

As soon as the harvesting season of 1947 began, the notorious lotdars and jotdars of Kakdwip sought police help from the West Bengal Government and in doing so were earnestly backed by the local Congress leaders – Charu Bhandari, Paresh Das and Bhusan Pati. Charu Bhandari who was well known for his double-dealing, advised the peasants to make peace with the jotdars. He used to stay, “Zamindars and mahajans are your guardians, don’t quarrel with them.” But at the very bottom of his heart, he was a tout of the local landlords and moneylenders.

The bhagchas wanted to stock the paddy in the panchayat khamar or their own khamars. In 24-Parganas, where the official policy was by and large rejected, Tebhaga struggles were the most successful.

TEBHAGA MOVEMENT – 1948

Activities of the Communist Party of India assumed serious proportions during the year 1948. The focus of the CPI line from 1948 onwards was on intensive peasants’ struggle, taking the
poor peasants as its main force. Political movements leading to peasant insurrection started in rural West Bengal, particularly in 24-Parganas, Bankura, Hooghly, Midnapore, Burdwan and Howrah. The Kakdwip area in South 24-Parganas became a focal point of the struggle. At the end of 1947 the Communist Party withdrew from its former policy of supporting the Congress Government both at the Centre and provinces and decided to discredit it at every step to eventually replace it with a progressive people’s Government. The Party quickly developed its secret side called Technical Apparatus and started to collect firearms.

The Second Party Congress of the CPI was held from 28 February to 7 March in Calcutta, in which the party reiterated its anti-Government stand and decided on a more militant programme in opposition. PC Joshi, General Secretary of the All India Communist Party, had to go out in disgrace for his inclination to support the Nehru Government. BT Ranadive replaced PC Joshi and the Party accepted the ‘Ranadive Line.’ The leadership of the Party was assumed by a militant coterie bent upon exploiting every little grievance of the people to embarrass the Government. Representatives of Communist Parties of various foreign countries attended the Congress by invitation. The Congress was held at a time of increasing Governmental attacks on democratic movements in the just-liberated country. After independence, the Communist Party had decided to support and help the Government in principle, as its primary aim was to resist communal forces. But the experience of just a few months showed that the Government was striking at the struggle against feudalism and imperialism from behind. So the Party Congress issued a call for radical change of Government and the formation of a new front of the people. It stated that the activities of the Krishak front would be directed towards the abolition of landlordism without compensation, and giving the rights of the land to the sub-tenants and sharecroppers. The Party’s proposal stated that it would strengthen the various struggles – against eviction of peasants, for payment of taxes with money instead of paddy, and the demand for Tebhaga – and this partial fight would be turned into a fight for land. The proposal also stated that the main Krishak front would be formed with poor peasants and landless labourers. An important decision taken at the Congress was that middle peasants could be included in the main Krishak front but never the rich peasants.

A middle-class militant peasant leader of 24-Parganas (Haringhata-Amdanga area), Asoke Bose, was sent to Kakdwip in late 1947 to assist the local leaders. He was arrested, and following his release from Alipore Central jail, he was sent by the party to the Sundarban area (Kakdwip, Mathurapur, Kalpi, Rajnagar, Canning, Sandeshkhal, Habra, Patharpratima, Hasnabad) to organise the sharecroppers’ struggle with the help of Kansari Haldar. In the harvesting season of 1948 the movement again started and Asoke Bose became the most militant leader of the Tebhaga struggle in this phase. The Congress party went all out to support landowners. Faced with this new political and police onslaught, peasants could not protect their harvest in the 1948 season. Peasant-police clashes were so common that the West Bengal Government declared the whole area under Kakdwip and Sagar police stations as ‘disturbed area.’

The Tebhaga movement in this district was then in a moribund condition. The harvesting and stocking of paddy had been almost completed without any troubles. The District Kisan Committee was, however, trying to keep the movement alive and, with this objective in view, it was concentrating on meetings and distributing leaflets. It was also trying to mobilise public opinion in favour of the introduction of the Tebhaga Bill and abolition of the Zamindari system. In this connection, propaganda meetings were organised at Layalganj and Budhakhali on 8 and 9 February 1948 respectively and some other places in
In Layalganj and Budhakhali, threshing of paddy was being hampered due to the activities of CPI leaders like Rash Bihari Ghosh and Kansari Prasad Haldar. At their instance, the bhagchasis abided by the decision of the Subdivisional Bhagchas Control Committee when it suited them and went against the decision when it was contrary to their wishes.

Reports were received that certain zamindars of Kakdwip PS area were contemplating realisation of the area’s paddy dues for 1946 from the bhagchasis but this had been met with resentment. The bhagchasis had referred the matter to the Bhagchas Control Committee for decision. Armed police pickets posted in different parts of the district had been withdrawn as the situation was returning to normal.

In Sandeshkhali, the peasants decided to stock the harvested paddy in the panchayat khamar and not the jotdar’s khamar. For this purpose the peasant-volunteers guarded the harvest as the paddy was shifted in small bundles. One night when one of the volunteers, Sudhir Mondal, was alone standing guard, a group of men led by one Sarat Bhowmik attacked him. Sudhir Mondal was mercilessly beaten up and one of his ears cut off though he somehow managed to survive.

A prosecution witness in the State vs Kansari Haldar case, told the court that Kansari had addressed a public meeting at Haripur in Layalganj on 8 February and urged the peasants to take the entire produce to their own khamars, allowing the landlords only a third share of the crop. He called upon the audience to continue the Tebhaga movement till the Act was passed. The witness named Gajen Mali and Kshirode Bera besides Kansari Haldar.

The next public meeting took place the next day at Ukil Babu’s M E School in Budhakhali. The witness stated he had sent a joint report of the meetings on 8 and 9 February, and Kansari Haldar, Krishna Binod Roy, Abani Lahiri, Manik Hazra and others had addressed the Budhakhali meeting. Another witness, SI Dhirendra Nath Chakraborty, said the speakers besides speaking in favour of Tebhaga had asked the audience to unite under the Krishak Samity’s banner and follow the Communist Party of India to reach their goal. They had also criticised the Government and Congress leaders, declaring that the Cabinet was constituted of “members who were supporters of the Capitalists.” On February 13, another meeting was held, under the auspices of the CPI and attended by 200 people, Brahman Chak, Haroa, with Pravash Roy (CPI) in the chair.

In 1948, Mr Nripen Chakraborty, who later became Chief Minister of Tripura, was in charge of 24-Parganas. He was known as the pioneer of the ultra left line in the party. After Independence, particularly in 1948, the Tebhaga movement in Kakdwip began to take a different turn.

When Asoke Bose was sent to Kakdwip, the Tebhaga movement had already become more militant. He exhorted the peasants to takeover the entire harvest and not to give any paddy at all to the zamindar and jotdar. He would advise them to kill all kith and kin of the zamindar and jotdar, set fire their houses, their cutchary and school buildings; and to kill policemen and snatch their guns. Jatin Maity did not support these moves and that is why the party became dissatisfied with him.

During 1948-50, the Communist Party engaged a former Indian Army officer, Major Jaipal Singh to provide arms training to the peasants of Kakdwip. The idea was to train the of a guerrilla force of peasants. Lalbagan was selected as the training centre for its ideal location, surrounded as it was by jungle on all sides. Peasants from villages such as Chandanpiri and Radhanagar were inducted and given training in bomb-throwing, use of firearms, escaping encirclement by the police or military, and the like. Among those who
joined the guerrilla squad were Gajen Mali (commander), Bijoy Mondal, Kamdeb Ghorai, Bhim Ghorai, Sujoy Barik, Kshiroke Bera, Amulya Kamila, Bhusan Kamila, Khagen Das, Kader Gayen, Sudhir Karan of Haripur, Layalganj, Krittibas Das and a few others of Maharajganj, Ananta Ghorai and Manmatha Ghorai of Sibrampur, Sudhir Sahu and Tarani Sahu of Radhanagar, Bhupati Mondal, Rakhal Jana and Yusubkhan and Majhum Shaikh of Dakshin Chandanpuri. According to Kshiroke Bera of Haripur, as many 250-300 peasants of Frazerganj were inducted for the guerrilla training. The guerrilla struggle of the Kakdwip peasants from 1948 to 1950 was, therefore, a part of the plan of the CPI to seize state power in India. In 1948, the Communist Party captured the cutchary of jodar Dwarik Samanta of Layalganj and set up a guerrilla training centre and secret camp there. The guerrilla squad laid mines between Sibrampur and Layalganj in a bid to attack the police camp, where a military unit with two launchers was camping, and curfew had been imposed. The police succeeded in defeating the guerrillas because of their inexperience. Meanwhile the Government had issued identity cards to every man in Kakdwip. As the guerrillas did not have identity cards, they were compelled to take shelter in the forest and most of the time they could not eat properly; but they continued the movement. Many of the movement leaders, including Kansari Haldar and Jatin Maity, hid in the secret camps which were built up on the banks of the Saptamukhi river and in the jungle of Bakkhali. Prafulla Debata of Chandanpuri supplied them with food and secret information.

To counter the guerrillas, a temporary DM’s office was opened and a police camp set up in the cutchary of Hazra at Haripur, while other police camps were set up at Tekar Bazar, in the house of Bhusan Mondal of Radhanagar, near the cutchary of Agasti in South Chadranagar, at the cutchary of Atul Sasmal of Rajnagar, at the Primary School in Sibrampur, and in the market of Gayen. Zamindars supplied guns to members of the Sebadal of Kakdwip – Bhuban Mondal and Kokil Khan of Radhanagar; Achinta Barman of Rajnagar; Patil Kamila of Sibrampur; Radhagobinda Das, Banamali and Anil Chakraborty of Haripur; Santosh Hait, Swadesh Chaklader and Ranajit Sarkar of Rojarganj; Radhakanta Acharya of North Chandanpuri and others. In an interview, Gunadhar Maity had said: “24 February 1948 is a red-letter day in my life. I was convicted in the case of burning and looting of Rajani Prodhan’s house, but in spite of a warrant, the police could not arrest me. However, there were some differences within the party and I was instructed to surrender. I was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment and released on 26 January 1950.”

On 29 February, the SDO, Diamond Harbour, passed an order under Section 144 CrPC, banning public meetings in the Kakdwip area, as well as prohibiting Rash Bihari Ghosh, Manik Hazra and Kansari Haldar of the CPI from entering the area for two months. The police reported that this action proved effective and the situation tended to become normal. Earlier, on 15 January, Chief Minister PC Ghosh had got the Assembly to pass the West Bengal Security Bill. This Bill empowered the Government to prohibit, restrict or impose conditions upon processions, meetings, etc. and to detain persons without trial. The Government issued an order in a special issue of the Calcutta Gazette on 23 February, banning parades and drills of a military nature with or without arms by associations and organisations other than those formed by the instructions verbal or written of the police. On 26 March, the West Bengal Government, in pursuance of the power conferred upon it by the Public Security Act, declared the CPI and its frontal organisations illegal. The Calcutta Police, after raiding many places arrested Muzaffar Ahmed, Jyoti Basu, Biswanath
Mukherjee and some other leaders.  

The CPI had launched an armed struggle in accordance with the resolution adopted at its Second Party Congress: it chose Kakdwip as the centre of the struggle mainly because of the fact that the peasantry here showed the courage to accept any challenge. However, Kakdwip, surrounded on all sides by dense forest and rivers, was also an ideal place for retaliation by the landlords. The peasants became so aggrieved by this that they compelled the Krishak Samity to give a call for the boycott of law courts.  

The population in the entire Kakdwip area was divided into supporters of lotdars and the Congress Seva Dal and the supporters of CPI and Kishan Sabha. Kakdwip, Sagar, Mathurapur, Kalpi, Joynagar, Rakial, Sandeshkhali, Habra, Patharpratima, Hasnabad were brought under this militant struggle under the leadership of Asoke Bose. He became the most important leader after Kansari Haldar in this area. In the judgment in the Kansari Haldar vs the State of West Bengal case, Asoke Bose was mentioned as the number one leader of militant bargadars of this area and established leaders like Kansari Haldar were ranked second in revolutionary action. The same judgment said that K Haldar, A Bose and Gajen Mali had tried to establish Communist rule in the area by driving out the police and lotdars in 1948-49.  

The imposition of prohibitory orders in the Kakdwip area had proved effective and several CPI leaders were compelled to stay away. The bhagchasis of Budhakhali started threshing the paddy and dividing it as per the directive of the central committee, but the peasants of Kaimuri and Layalganj kept waiting for the CPI leaders to tell them what to do. On 1 March, a group of about 20 peasants led by Kristo Chandra Chakrabartti, Pulin Mondal and Jatin Maity of the Diamond Harbour subdivisional unit of the Krishak Samity 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 SDO and demanded immediate withdrawal of Section 144 from the Kakdwip area, but the SDO did not take any action.  

In order to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Bargadar’s Bill and abolition of the Zamindari system, Provash Roy visited Rai Baghir, PS Canning, on 6 March and took the initiative along with Hemanta Ghosal (CPI) to form two units of the Krishak Samity in Dadpur and Gubburia under Sandeshkhali PS. Several RSPI members including Arindam Nath, Samar Ray, Kalidas Mukherjee, Sevak Das and Gajen Maity were reported to have been secretly mobilising the krishaks of Gosaba and its adjoining areas under Sandeshkhali PS to take forcible possession of all khas lands and also to boycott all functions of the zamindars.  

On March 15, Nitai Mondal (CPI), Kalipada Pramanik and others of Khatura, PS Habra, were reported to have been fomenting agrarian unrest amongst the peasants in favour of the Tebhaga movement. The situation was under watch. The Ananda Bazar Patrika published a notice issued by the Government on 29.03.1948. It stated:  

The Communist Party of India has become so dangerous that the people of West Bengal can never ignore it. It is a call of duty for the common people of the country. The Communist Party of India has making attempts to destroy the well-being of the country by preaching violence and hatred for one another among the common people. We want to make you remember the duty of the Congress of Bengal in this case. Those who are with honour the representatives of the common people, they will campaign for peace and national ideals among the common people. This is our appeal.  

Relations were strained between landowners and bhagchasis in Sagar Island over the threshing and distribution of paddy. Actions taken in several cases by the Bhagchhas Control Committee and the Diamond Harbour Court had proved effective and the situation of the area.
was under control. Some Krishak Samity workers of Budhakhali and Layalganj visited Calcutta in the middle of March and held discussions with the leaders. The situation in Budhakhali was under control, but in Layalganj, the harvested paddy was still lying unthreshed. Gajen Maity (CPI) and others were guiding the bhagchasis of Kamargati and Brahmanchak, in Haroa PS, who were reported to be unwilling to take up the threshing of paddy stocked in the panchayat khamars in spite of the orders issued by the SDO Basirhat to do so. Some CPI leaders like Provash Roy, Hemanta Ghosal, Mahabubar Rahman and Radha Ballav Das visited Pathankhali, Surjyabera under Sandeshkhali PS and held meetings on different days to exhort the local peasants to carry on the movement for the abolition of Zamindari system; withdrawal of orders banning public meetings; and introduction of the Tebhaga Bill.

The peasants were also urged to boycott the zamindars socially and not to thresh paddy stocked in their khamars. These meetings were organised with the permission from the SDO Basirhat as prohibitory orders were in force. The District Magistrate had reportedly been told to inform the SDO, Basirhat to be strict while giving permission for such meetings and also to extend the period of enforcement of Sec.144. On 23 March a meeting was held at Uchildaha, PS Haroa, in which Hemanta Ghosal, Rash Bihari Ghosh, Nalini Probhas Ghosh, Abdur Rezzak and other CPI workers urged the audience to unite under the banner of the CPI for the success of the Tebhaga movement.  

Prosecution witnesses in the State vs Kansari Haldar case mentioned another public meeting was held on 7 April at Dakshin Chandanpuri chaired by Kansari Haldar where he told the chasis to take the entire produce to their khamars, if necessary by force, resisting the zamindars, jotdars as well as their lathials. They were also told to fight the police and military force. At Budhakhali Ukilerhat, a meeting was held on 8 April addressed by Kansari Haldar, Asoke Bose, Satish Shaw and Manik Hazra. Kansari Haldar reportedly told the audience Section 144 need not be obeyed, that, if necessary, officers and members of the military force would have to be killed, and that the womenfolk should be trained to use arms to protect their honour from the hands of the police and the military. A meeting was convened at the market of Gayen in Sibrampur, violating Sec. 144. Asoke Bose, who was addressing a meeting for the first time since he became a leader, was the main speaker. Around 6,000-7,000 people attended this meeting, carrying lathi, bow and arrows, tangi and lance. The comrades of the ‘Red Army’ were identified differently, as everybody was determined to keep the meeting a secret and protect the identities of the comrades. When jotdar Kunja Gantait’s sharecropper, Suren Das, displayed the wounds on his body caused by the jotdar’s torture, Comrade Asoke Bose lifted him on the table and issued a warning to the jotdar, proclaiming: “Kunja, you have seen broken teeth, not the extracting of the teeth; you have learnt to destroy eyes, you have not seen the extracting of eyes. You will suffer the result very soon.” The agitated crowed raised the slogan ‘May Kunja be ruined.’ Some days later, Kunja and his bodyguard were found dead at his residence, shot dead with a revolver.  

In April 1948, at Layalganj, a meeting of Jotdar and Zamindar’s Association was held in the cutchary of jotdar Biren Geri. A guerrilla squad attacked the cutchary with firearms and bombs and set the place ablaze. The members of the organisation managed to save themselves by using wet quilts and so on. During the Tebhaga movement in Kakdwip, some leaders were given pseudonyms. Later they were identified by those names in the area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansari Haldar</td>
<td>Madhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asoke Bose</td>
<td>Bidyut &amp; Nikunja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogendra Nath Gunria</td>
<td>Jogin Gunria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haripada Sasmal</td>
<td>Gangadhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gajendra Nath Mali</td>
<td>Dasarath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bijoy Mondal</td>
<td>Sundar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haridhan Chakraborty</td>
<td>Jibanda.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activities of the CPI led to it being banned in West Bengal on 26 March and searches and arrests of CPI members throughout the Province followed. The police watched the developments closely. A police report listed the incidents “that will show how the CPI tried to bring about a state of disorder and confusion in the country to paralyse the administration.” A number of incidents of clashes, strikes and demonstrations were mentioned – “In March-April, CPI workers of Barakamalapur area of Hooghly district provoked a clash with the local zamindar and Congressmen. Under the instigation of CPI underground workers, dacoities, house-breaking and rioting with deadly weapons were committed by peasants in an organised manner. Police had to open fire to disperse them, killing two of the rioters and injuring several others.”

After mentioning a few other incidents, the report goes on to talk about the Kakdwip struggle. “In November a riotous mob of local peasants incited by some CPI members attacked a police party at Kakdwip in Sundarbans area of 24-Parganas and snatched away some prejudicial documents seized by the police. A search witness was kidnapped by the rioters and was believed to have been killed by them. Police had to open fire in self-defence killing some of the rioters…. The CPI underground workers including women, spread Party activities, particularly in the rural areas of 24-Parganas, Midnapore, Howrah and Hooghly and instigated kisans to resist zamindars, jotdars and police by all means and to collect all types of lethal weapons for the purpose.”

The turmoil in the area caused by banning the CPI was evident in a report filed by the District Intelligence Officer:

It is learnt from the secretary of the local Primary Congress which has practically no influence having only 15 members out of 1,200 men, that Bipin Mistri along with 3-4 others of Calcutta side used to visit the area for Communist propaganda. The first open meeting was organised by these Communists on or about 26.5.1948 when the Congress Government was bitterly condemned and was described as capitalist supporting zamindars. The local Congress Secretary who was present tried to speak in opposition, but he was not only howled down but was also threatened with violence. I have asked the Zonal DIO who is staying there to fix the identities of these 3-4 Communists who visited this area from Calcutta and see if they were identical with Sunil Chatterjee, Haridhan Chakraborty and Khagen Ray Chaudhuri.

Another report said that on 30 May evening Santi Sudha Banerjee (CPI), s/o Bibhuti Ranjan De (CPI), s/o Mati, both of Bongong, actually visited the village Chaygharia and organised a ‘baithak’ in the house of Jatadhar Mondal, s/o L Basudeb of Chaygharia, PS Bongong, which was attended by the following persons: Satish Chandra Mondal, Gahar Ali Mondal, Panchu She, Hazari Parui, Jayanta Mandal, Dr Abu Hosain and Saidul Haq. The organisers of the baithak discussed about the utility of peasant organisation and the deplorable food and cloth situation in Bongong subdivision. The baithak called on the people present to attend a meeting to be held at Bongong on 1 June in observance of ‘Swadhinata Divas.’
At Sibnagar a public meeting held on 10 June addressed by Asoke Bose and Manik Hazra. It was stated that chasis were instigated to use violence against police and military and also zamindars. Another public meeting took place on 12 June near Ukilbabu’s haat. About 200 people including Manik Hazra reportedly attended the meeting. Here the speakers exhorted the audience that a Tebhaga rule must be instituted at any cost and they must be prepared for bloodshed if the landlords did not resolve their grievances. They also asked the audience not to be afraid of bullets and bayonets of the police and to drive them out with lathis. One of the issues discussed was that if the Tebhaga Act was not passed, the people would not vote for Charu Bhandari.67

It is apparent from Government records that the police was keeping close watch on the Tebhaga agitators. It is also apparent from these same records that the police were working for the benefit of the jodars and zamindars. A report by the Superintendent of Police, 24-Parganas, on the death of three people in police firing at Dongajora, PS Jaynagar, on 30 June, giving the background of the incident states that local peasants had intercepted one of four boats loaded with paddy that was being ‘smuggled out’ by zamindar Benode Chakraborty of Kalikapur on 25 May. The villagers removed the paddy from the boat, stocked it in the local schoolhouse under guard and sent a telegram addressed to the District Magistrate alleging that they had seized 375 maunds of paddy, which was being smuggled out. However, the administration, ignoring the telegram took credence of the complaint lodged in court by the naib of the zamindar of the paddy having been looted by the peasants. Warrants of arrest were drawn up against 21 persons and a search warrant was issued for the seizure of the paddy.

When a heavily armed police team went to the schoolhouse to execute the warrants, several hundred villagers, including 40-50 women, gathered there to save the paddy. The police fired on the villagers killing three, and several people including policemen were injured. “The firing took place in front of a village schoolhouse and thick clots of blood were found where the dead bodies lay. Inside the schoolhouse paddy in bags, alleged to be 375 maunds, was found in one side. This paddy belonged to zamindar Benode Chakraborty of Kalikapur, PS Sonarpur and his cutchary is situated about 50 yards to the north of the schoolhouse.” Needless to say, no action was taken against the zamindar or his naib.68

The SDO Sadar, who held an executive enquiry into the incident, had this to say: “In my opinion the firing was fully justified. If no firing was resorted to, the entire police party would have been overpowered. Cautionary warnings were given repeatedly and the police showed commendable restraint. With 38 rounds being fired, one would naturally expect greater casualty, but this, however, did not result as the mob was too near the police party. It was wrong on the part of the OC to allow the mob to get so close to the police party, but he was very much handicapped by the presence of the women who were used as cover by the men.”69

The Deputy SP’s report on the incident had this to say: “The Communist activities [in Dongajora PS Jaynagar] are of recent growth and Bipin Mistri of Sukdewani, PS Sandeshkhali, who often visited his father-in-law’s house which is located here, is the chief organiser of the Communist cell formed about two months ago. The house of his uncle Uddhab Mistri of Tentulbari, a neighbouring village, is reported to be the meeting place Communist-minded peasants. … I also received information that Sunil Chatterjee (absconder) of Jaynagar, Haridhan Chakrabarty, Khagen Ray Chaudhuri @ Khepa both of Sonarpur and Bipin Mistri of Sukdewani, PS Sandeshkhali – important krishak agitators of the CPI – had visited Dongajora before the occurrence and incited the local peasants to resist
the taking away of paddy by police and others by violence. … On 5.7.48 I attended a joint
discussion with the SP and the DM about fighting the Communist menace in kisan area …the
DM has assured of setting anti-Communist propaganda machinery through official and non-
official agencies.”

It was thus the struggle for survival which brought the people to accept Asoke Bose and
Kansari Haldar as their leaders under the slogan: ‘Till your land by keeping it in your
possession.’ The sharecroppers organised and armed with lathis, bow and arrows, forcibly
tilled 7,000 acres of land in Kakdwip and almost an equal area in adjoining Sagar,
Mathurapur and few other places.71

G. Chakrabarty, in his book, Kakdwipe Tebhagar Ladai, lists the members of the
Sangram Committee in different villages:

Haripur-Layalganj: Gajen Mali, Vijay Mondal, Bhusan Kamila, Amulya Kamila, Shyam
Mondal, Atul Santra, Pasupati Santra, Dijen Dinda, Sujoy Barik, Kshirode Bera, Sunil
Dalapati, Bhupati Jana, Phani Haldar, Mongal Soren, Karu Soren, Bikram Sonamui, Khagen
Maity, Sudhir Mondal, Bhim Ghorai, Jatin Jana, Ananta Kuinty, Krittibas Das, Harekrishna
Shasmal.

Radhanagar: Bhaggadhar Maity, Jogen Guria, Keshab Das, Lakshmi Narayan Samanta,
Kartik Bera, Mini Mondal, Sk Taharath, Niyamath Khan, Radha Gobinda Paul, Kunja Bera,
Gopal Dinda, Bhaggadhar Das

Rajnagar (C Plot): Tarani Sahu, Sudhir Sahu, Bhaku Das, Iswar Kamila, Niranjan Paik,
Haripada Bhunia, Kishor Sahu, Murari Maity

Sibrampur: Nanilal Ghorai, Makhanlal Ghorai

Chandranagar: Haripada Sasmal, Ananta Panda, Srihari Mondal

Budhakhali: Satish Sahu, Kumud Sahu, Murari Maity

Chandanpuri: Bhupati Mondal, Anadi Das

Bishalakshipur: Amulya Raut, Jhatu Raut, Naren Mal, Dhiren Mal, Sanatan Nayak

Fatikpur: Sk Ibramhim, Sk Jaynal, Sk Mukosed.72

Congress supporters in 24-Parganas began to feel threatened by the growing influence of
the Communist Party in 1948. A letter to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee dated 22
July, signed simply by ‘A Congress Activist,’ expressed apprehension over the formation of
“a revolutionary party” in village Mayahowri under Jaynagar PS that was exciting the poor
villagers. The peasants were “being tempted by the propaganda of the Party” and being told
that neither the Congress nor the Government would benefit them as “those who have much
land belong to the Congress or the Government. … [The police] are taking a large amount of
money and supporting them.” The letter stated that the party was collecting arms and
threatening the Congress supporters who were becoming restless and fearing for their lives.
“If no step is taken against it immediately, their party will be very dangerous,” the letter
claimed.73

In a meeting held on 29 July in front of the Bongong Town Hall, speakers Santi Sudha
Banerjee, Sudhir Ranjan Chakrabortti and others criticised the cloth and food policy of the
Government and demanded its overthrow, alleging it to be inefficient and corrupt. Sudhi
Ranjan Chakrabortti said that as no solution to these problems was possible as the Government was capitalist, they would turn out the Government in the same way as they did the British. The meeting was organised by the Communist workers of Bongong town who then joined the Krishak Samity.74

The houses of all the persons at this meeting were searched the next day early morning with the help of the local police. Ranjan De and Santi Sudha Banerjee escaped by scaling the walls of their respective houses and could not be interrogated. The remaining were questioned and their statements recorded, but nothing incriminating was found in any of the places during the searches. Only one notebook belonging to Ranjan De was seized for scrutiny, but nothing incriminating was found.75

The Story of Burul

The story of Burul is very interesting because, here, what started as a mere students’ affair, soon flared up into a peasant movement. Most of the students in the local school in Burul were from the bargadar or khetmajur communities who did not have a cordial relationship with Chandi Ghosh, founder-president of the school and a Congress jotdar. As time passed, Chandi’s position in the village became weaker till one day he rushed to Writers’ Buildings to seek the help of Dr Bidhan Roy, then Chief Minister of West Bengal. He got a favourable response because Burul was one of the oldest strongholds of the Congress in the Parganas and most probably its birthplace. For about 70 days the people of Burul passed through a nightmare. On August 13 1948, veteran Congress leader Bijoy Singh Nahar, came to the village, ostensibly to organise the Independence day celebrations. In reality, he had been sent by Dr Roy to restore the influence of the Congress, a fact proved by the sight of military convoys plying along the village roads of Burul. However, the peasants who had by that time sided with the students came out in strength to oppose Mr Nahar who was addressing his local followers. He jumped off the dais with the case and vigour of a champion sportsman and fled through the backdoor. On August 15, the police showered bullets on the village killing and wounding many on the spot; yet the demonstrations did not stop. At last the killers retreated, Chandi Ghosh and his follower Murari Saran left Burul. In the evening under the red sky and in the presence of a red sun the people of Burul hoisted their dear Red flag at the local bazaar.76

At Sonarpur and Bhangar the landless peasants organised themselves against Bhupati Naskar, Hemchandra Naskar, Sricharan Napte and other jotdars and fierce pitched battles continued for several weeks.77

At Tiuri, Nayabad, Kheada and Shaheberabad, peasants occupied fisheries, attacked cutcharies, seized and distributed paddy among themselves. Everywhere peasant volunteers, armed with spears, bow and arrows fought with the police – who were well equipped with rifles, grenades and other weapons – and, in spite of heavy casualties came out victorious in almost all cases.78

Ultimately the state Government felt the gravity of the problem. In 1949 it passed an ordinance extending some concessions to the bargadars. The ordinance later became known as the Bargadar Act. This Act, however, did not provide the peasants with the Tebhaga or three-fourths of the crop for which they had borne so much hardship. It only arranged a 60-40 division, which soon proved vague and the Board of Arbitration for Sharecropping, which was born out of this Act, did not do away with the possibilities of eviction of the peasants from their lands. Their many other grievances remained unaddressed.79
Along with the granting of these small concessions the Bidhan Roy Ministry also resorted to repressive measures. Every day it arrested a large number of peasants in different parts of the state and threw them into jail. Dozens of police camps were set up in strategic areas and murder, arson loot and rape continued in the name of restoration of peace. Only a few leaders succeeded in remaining outside prison. Day by day the peasants lost their militant spirit and morale and finally yielded in utter frustration.\textsuperscript{89}

The movement itself suffered from some internal weaknesses. In its earlier period many middle peasants had joined the bargadars and khetmajurs. The BPKS leaders, who were well-aware of the opportunism of such people, still decided to use the middle peasants and their resources against the jotdars and for a while succeeded in doing so, because up to that time their only target of attack were the big landlords. But as the movement intensified and the bargadars raised many fresh demands including the requisition of khas lands, the middle peasants sought to change their side. In the Parganas Chandra Patra, Gadadhar Singh, Nagendranath Jagulia and many other middle peasants joined the Congress and became good friends of the big landlords. The same thing happened in other areas. The strategy of the BPKS thus failed.\textsuperscript{81}

On 5 November the Government of India, hoping that the Provincial Government would take every possible step to prevent the success of the Communist plan, suggested that special steps may be taken for the protection of vital installations particularly in the larger cities and in areas where Communist activities and influence had already been noticed in an appreciable measure.\textsuperscript{82}

Early in November 1948, Dwari Samanta, Srish Nandy, Kunja Ganta, Kangal Haldar, Gopi Giri and some other notorious jotdars of Layalganj imported hundreds of lathias from different places and set them upon the peasants. Meanwhile 500 armed police and many hired goondas of the Sevadal had encircled the entire area.\textsuperscript{83}

In a public meeting at Gainerhat on 3 November, attended by about 100 people, and addressed by Kansari Haldar, Manik Hazra, Chaitanya Das, Kumud Shaw and Sudhir Shaw, Kansari Haldar asked the chasis to take the entire paddy to their own khamar and to resist, if necessary without hesitation, the jotdars, zamindars and their lathials and also police and the military.\textsuperscript{84}

On 6 November, the police fired on a crowd of villagers in South Chandanpiri during a drive to arrest and detain CPI and Krishak leaders of the different areas in Kakdwip police station, killing eight persons, including four women, and injuring several. According to police records, the crowd had made three attempts to seize a search witness accompanying the police who was eventually snatched, and believed to have been murdered. A case was instituted and chargesheet filed in the incident. A report by the DIG stated that “Parties in opposition specially CPI and RCPI searched for occasions to create disturbances everywhere in the province and favoured strikes and agricultural trouble. The Tebhaga movement in the Sundarbans area of 24-Parganas district, the coolie strikes in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri and Communist disturbances in Hooghly were serious threats to law and order.” It pointed out that “soaring price of essential commodities, dearth of food and cloth and want of proper accommodation for refugees” afforded opportunities for anti-Government propaganda and “antisocial activities of Leftist parties” and that the villagers assembled at the soundings of conchshells.\textsuperscript{85}

Another version of the incident states that sharecroppers had gone to harvest the crop on the morning of 6 November, when the naib of the landlord along with lathials and policemen arrived. In the scuffle that followed the kisans beat up the lathials and policemen
and snatched a few of their weapons. The policemen and the lathials were allowed to leave the place but the naib was held hostage. A couple of hours later, police reinforcements marched out of the landlord’s cutchary and opened fire, killing four men and four women on the spot. Many people were wounded.\(^\text{86}\)

**List of dead and wounded in police firing in Chandanpiri village on 6 November 1948**\(^\text{87}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Husband/Father</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Zamindar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIST OF DEAD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ahalya Das</td>
<td>Jogen Das*</td>
<td>N Chandanpiri</td>
<td>Poor raiyat, sharecropper</td>
<td>Muran Maity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Batasi Singha</td>
<td>Suren Singha*</td>
<td>S Chandanpiri</td>
<td>Sharecropper</td>
<td>Iswar Dinda, Gopi Giri, Jogen Sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sarojini Das</td>
<td>Jiban Das</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Uttami Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Jiban Das</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Aswani Kumar Das</td>
<td>Jiban Das</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Deban Barman</td>
<td>Krishna Barman</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Radhagobinda Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Gajen Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Raghunath Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Iswar Dinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Adhar Das</td>
<td>Latu Das</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Basanta Mandal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>LIST OF WOUNDED</strong> | | | | |
| 1 Menoka Bar    | Sonatan Bar*       | South Chandanpiri | Raiyat, sharecropper      | Srinath Giri      |
| 2 Susila Maity  | Kritibas Maity     | Do               | Do                         | I Dinda           |
| 3 Sabitri Mondal | Kunja Mandal     | Do               | Sharecropper               | Jogen Sen         |
| 4 Lata Bala Das | Gopal Das*         | Do               | Raiyat, sharecropper       | I Dinda           |
| 5 Bimala Ojha   | Rupchand Ojha*     | Do               | Sharecropper               | J Sen             |
| 6 Kamini Maity  | Nilmoni Maity*     | Do               | Do                         | I Dinda           |
| 7 Subhasini Giri | Upen Giri         | Do               | Do                         | G Giri            |
| 8 Kamala Kanta Bhuiyan | Kaikash Bhuiyan | Do               | Do                         | J.Sen             |
| 9 Gopal Das     | Shibprosad Das     | Do               | Do                         | I Dinda           |
| 10 Anadi Das    | Jiban Das          | Do               | Do                         | Dinda, Giri, Sen  |
| 11 Anukul Das   | Do                 | Do               | Do                         | Do                |
| 12 Pulin Bera   | Mohendra Bera      | Do               | Do                         | I.Dinda           |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Father’s Name</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Landlord</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nilmoni Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Akhy Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Gunadhar Mandal</td>
<td>Nagen Mondal</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>J Sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Suren Bhuiyan</td>
<td>Kailash</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Raiyat, sharecropper</td>
<td>Dinda, Sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sudhir Maity</td>
<td>Kartick Maity</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>I.Dinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Chintamoni Singha</td>
<td>Kamal Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Sharecropper</td>
<td>G Giri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Suren Singha</td>
<td>Tarak Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Giri, Sen, Dinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sagar Bar</td>
<td>Kanai Bar</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Family member of Suren Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ratan Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Jiten Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Abinash Singha</td>
<td>Gopal Singha</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Raiyat, sharecropper</td>
<td>G Giri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Girish Gayen</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>S Giri</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sk Rustam</td>
<td>Sk Abdul</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>J Sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Eusuf Khan</td>
<td>Edu Khan</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sasadhar Das</td>
<td>Diben Das</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Land labour</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Jogendra Nath Das</td>
<td>Pritambar Das</td>
<td>North Chandanpuri</td>
<td>Poor raiyat, sharecropper</td>
<td>M Maity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The wounded were given medical treatment secretly by Dr Sinibus Dalapati (Haripur) and Bipin Prodhan (North Chandanpuri) in the forest.  

**The Martyrdom of Ahalya**

Ahalya Das was more than eight months pregnant and a leading figure in the village. After the firing, the police party could not take away the bodies of Ahalya and Batasi. The body of Ahalya was taken around the village in a funeral procession next morning before it was put on the pyre. From Chandanpuri the tale of Ahalya’s death travelled to near and distant villages of the Sundarbans. Overnight Ahalya became a legend and a symbol of both the heroic peasant resistance and of the brutality of police repression. The peasants of Chandanpuri could not be subdued even when the District Magistrate came the next day with 500 Gurkha soldiers, threatening destruction of the peasants. Harvesting and resistance continued side by side in Chandanpuri. The courage that the peasants of Chandanpuri showed became a shining example for villagers all around and peasants of Budhakhal, Haripur and Layalganj soon followed in their footsteps. Two persons, Paresh Das and Basanta, who had worked as police guides, were sentenced to death by a people’s court. A doctor, Purnendu Ghosh, sent by the CPI to the Kakdwip area gave medical training to local volunteers.
The movement began to spread to the adjoining areas of Sonarpur, Bhangar, Nayabadh, Saheberabad, Mathurapur, Jiplat, Dongajora, Bishnupur, Joynagar, Radhanagar, Durgamandap, Gabberia, Doudpur, Sukduani and Sandeshkhali.\textsuperscript{90}

A large number of places had been notified as ‘protected places’ under section 5A of the West Bengal Security Act and steps had been or were being taken to regulate the entry into these places by issue of permits. It was not, however, clear how important installations could be protected if attacked from inside by some of the employees themselves. To address this problem, the Home Secretary set up a conference with the IG Police Bengal and Commissioner of Police, Calcutta in his room at Writers’ Buildings on 24 November.\textsuperscript{91}

**Struggle in Budhakhali**

The CPI underground workers including women spread the party activities particularly in the rural areas of 24-Parganas, Midnapore, Howrah and Hooghly and instigated the kishans to resist zamindars, jotdars and the police by all means and to collect all kinds of lethal weapons for the purpose. Police repression continued and on 30 December, three persons were killed in police firing in Budhakhali. The police held the CPI responsible and instituted a case. The police report stated: “On 30.12.1948 a mob of some 300 men and women attacked a police party which was escorting an accused who was wanted in some criminal cases at Budhakhali, Kakdwip, 24-Parganas and succeeded in rescuing him. The mob which was armed with lathis, batons, bows and arrows assaulted the OC of the party and as the force was in danger of being overwhelmed, fire had to be resorted to disperse the mob resulting in the death of three persons. CPI is responsible in the rioting. A case had been instituted and is under investigation.”\textsuperscript{92}

Budhakhali was one of villages where the movement became militant. This was possible through the tireless efforts of leaders like Jatin Maity, Bihari Dakua, Raju Mondal, Manik Hazra and Nitya Jana, to raise the consciousness of the peasants from the very grassroots level. Group meetings, baithaks, haat meetings and processions with slogans were common methods to rouse the consciousness of the peasants. The peasants harvested paddy and took it to their common khalan for division in spite of the presence of the armed police. On 15 December, while such common harvesting was going on in the field of jotdar Madhav Ghorui, the armed police came to intervene as a result of which a serious clash took place between the kishans and the police over the possession of paddy. The police so mercilessly beat up a pregnant woman, Pakhibala Singha, wife of Amiya Singha, that she lost her child. On the same day, the police beat up peasant activists Nandapati, Gabua Haldar, Sibu Mandal and Harish Mandal and demolished their houses.

The peasants turned more militant after these police atrocities. On 22 December, the local leader of the Congress Seva Dal, an organisation to look after the interest of jotdars, was beaten up. When he brought the police to confront the peasants the police had to flee in the face of stiff resistance. On the night of 30 December nearly 60 volunteers went to harvest paddy. Pakhibala also went with them as her husband Amiya Singha was in police custody. The police did not dare to stop them. The next morning, a procession of about 200 volunteers and sharecroppers under the leadership of Jatin Maity, Bihari Dakua, Ram Mondal, Nagendra Barik, Murari Haldar, Manik Hazra, Dharani Maity, Kumud Sahu and Kausalya Bewa went to harvest the field of Bistu Mandal (a sharecropper). After harvesting they went to the nine-bigha field of Bihari Dakua, but 11 armed constables from the cutchary of the local lotdar came and asked them not to proceed and arrested Kumud Sahu. The peasants encircled the
Police opened fire and Nilkantha Samanta, Suren Mandal and Sudhir Gharui died. A number of other peasants were injured but the police could not arrest them and took away the three dead bodies. Dr Purnendu Ghosh, better known as Ranga Daktar, treated the injured peasants. According to Satish Sahu of Budhakhali, Suren Mandal was martyred by shooting of the police on 31 December in 1948, but Nilkantha Samanta and Sudhir Ghorai were shot dead by Bijoy Banerjee, nayeb of the zamindar of Budhakhali. By this time police repression in Budhakhali area reached its climax and gradually the resistance also intensified. Peasant volunteers killed a few police agents like Bihari Jana as revenge against police repression and atrocities on poor peasants. It was found that out of 70 families of Budhakhali women of 25 families took active part in the movement and developed leadership. The peasant militancy under the leadership of Asoke Bose became an important feature of this period. The peasants were not afraid to attack the police against heavy odds and the battle for the possession of crops went on the Kakdwip.

**Struggle in Layalganj**

The most remarkable area of peasant resistance in the history of the Kakdwip movement was Layalganj, which was declared Muktanchal (liberated zone) by the peasant revolutionaries and renamed ‘Lal (red) ganj.’ On 28 December, news spread in the Layalganj area that local lotdar Gopi Giri’s sons were organising 400 lathials and the Congress Seva Dal was going to be ready with 15 guns to stop the sharecroppers from harvesting their fields. Sachin Ghosh, manager of Maharaj Srish Nandy’s Hazra gheri, was also organising a resistance force with 40 guns to counter the sharecroppers. Following the news, a volunteer force of peasants, mainly Santals, marched to the fields with bows and arrows, and began harvesting, defying the landlords’ men. The peasants encircled the khamar of lotdar Gopi Giri and took away all his paddy; his lathials had fled pell-mell when they saw hundreds of organised peasants marching towards the khamar, carrying red flags, lathis, bows and arrows and shouting slogans. The peasants forcibly harvested and distributed the paddy growing on 700 bighas of lotdar Dwari Samanta’s land. The lotdars of Sibrampur, Kunja Ganta and Kangal Haldar tried to cut the paddy of sharecroppers by force but failed. This also happened to another important lotdar, Anil Sasmal. Everywhere resistance of the peasants was well organised and the lathials of the lotdars had to flee from the spot. By the end of the year, paddy was harvested from thousands of bighas of land in the area in spite of the peace propaganda by Congress volunteers and the presence of the police.

At the end of December 1948, more militant actions were sanctioned to include taking away the crops from the granaries of the landlords and taking revenge for the tortures inflicted by them. Cutcharies of the landlords were gheraoed by sharecroppers and poor peasants as others harvested the paddy or took away paddy that had been already harvested. In Sibrampur sharecroppers resisted lathials and forcibly harvested the crops; two peasants were killed and a landlord hit during the confrontation.

**TEBHAGA MOVEMENT – 1949**

During 1949, after successfully preventing the police and armed forces from entering certain areas of Kakdwip, liberated areas were established, similar to the Tebhaga elaka of the 1946-47 movement. The peasants in these areas extended their struggle, taking an unprecedented
Even as the peasants intensified their struggle, police vigilance increased and so did repression.

On 26 February, Special Branch reported that “absconders Khoka Ray, Indrajit Gupta and Dr Ranendra Sen” were putting up in the shelter of Dr Kali Ghosh who had his dispensary near Sonarpur Bazar in the district of 24-Parganas. According to Dr Ghosh, the party had taken up a programme of sabotage, etc. on a mass scale in the districts of West Bengal and Assam in view of the coming Postal and Railway strikes. Arrangement was being made to impart militant training to selected workers of the Kishan Sabha, Student Front and Trade Union. One Ranjit Guha, who recently returmed from Syria, Iraq and other places, had taken charge of a training centre in the Southern Section of the B&A Railway (Sonarpur – Jadavpur areas). Besides the use of arms, the members were being trained in the use of military hand-grenades for the destruction of telegraph wires, fishplates of Railways, Signal posts etc. The party was said to have procured a good number of military hand-grenades which were distributed to several units through an arrangement with Sunendra Datta of National Book Agency. Several countrymade bombs were also prepared for the purpose and according to information ingredients were procured through a chemical concern of the party styled as Ihothas Trading Co., situated somewhere on Netaji Subhas Road. A combined unit is said to have been opened in the districts of Howrah and Hooghly. Absconders Somnath Lahiri, Bhabani Sen and Ananda Bhattacharji had been placed in charge of that unit.

On 1 May at Rajnagar School ground 500-600 persons attended a meeting addressed by Gajen Mali, Taherat Hossain and Jogen Guria. In fact, the struggle intensified after May Day when the Sangram Committee declared that land would belong to the tiller. It also abolished the Zamindari system from the area, and said, “We have fought armed police and agents of landlords for the last three months and have succeeded in capturing four cucheries and 5,000 bighas of land. These confiscated goods are now public property and would be distributed according to the laws of the Sangram Committee among the needy peasants. In our areas there would be no bhachahi or agricultural labour, as everybody would be granted land to till to get 100% of the crop. Our legal system would be new and Sangram Committee in the people’s court would give judgment. This newly-liberated area would be known as Lalganj and be protected by our volunteer force and we should try to liberate other adjoining areas from the Congress rule.”

On 9 May, a Communist-led mob attacked a procession of Congressmen at Anadaha PS Baranagar, 24-Parganas with lathis, ironrods, etc. Eight persons were jailed. On 13 May ten CPI kisan workers of Bagbati, PS Bhangar, 24-Parganas, forcibly removed 2 maunds of rice from the house of one villager as he did not joint the Communist Party.

According to a DIO report, the police had received a letter from Chaitanya Bondyopadhyay, Secretary of the Beota Congress Committee apprehending disturbances during the proposed conference of the Congress Party in Beota, Bhangar on May 28-29 and sent reinforcements. The police learnt that a “CPI absconder,” Dr Amar Naskar had arranged a meeting on 25 May at Beota “as they thought that the Congress conference … would effect their influence in the locality.” Dr Amar Naskar took the leading part in this meeting attended by about 200 persons who are supporters of the Krishak Samity (CPI) and who were armed with “deadly weapons (lathis, spears, chowkis, etc.).” Dr Amar Naskar explained how the Communists had captured power in China and asked the people present to prepare themselves for a similar task in this country. They were further instigated to defy police and not to pay taxes to the Government. Couple of days later two Congress supporters Santosh Mandal and Umapati Banarjee were assaulted by Topen Mandal, Biren Sardar of Beota and others “being
instigated by Dr Amar Naskar.” On 28 May morning, when the police went to Beota to arrest Dr Naskar and Biren Sardar, the latter’s sister “blew crouching shell several times as a signal, in response to which several villagers appeared there with spears, lathis, chowkis etc. but fled at the sight of the armed police.” The report went on to add: “The local Congress has very little hold on the public as some them are edicted to drinking toddy. In order to undermine the influence of the Communist, it is suggested that some earnest Congress workers should move in the locality and hold time to time meetings explaining the work done by the Government as the CPI is exploiting the food and cloth position in the country amongst the illiterate mass.” The report concluded that the Congress Conference at Bhangar passed off smoothly and “there was no anti-demonstration.104

On 2-3 June, about 150 armed members of the Kishan Samity, simultaneously raided the cutcharybari of a zamindar and the house of a villager in Layalganj, PS Kakdwip, and kidnapped some people from the house. One of them was hit on the head with a scythe and dragged to the nearly jungle. He remained untraced and was believed to have been murdered. A police camp was attacked on 17 June and shots were exchanged. One case of kidnapping of a jotdari man was reported the next day. An armed constable was attacked with stengun on 26 June evening while he was escorting a medical unit.105

On 24 June, a Communist mob attacked a police party in Tahuria, PS Sonarpur, 24-Parganas, with guns, spears and other weapons and rescued an arrested person. Some members of the public and the police party and a chowkidar sustained injuries. The police had to open fire in self-defence. On 28 June, following a meeting of the workers of Alliance Jute Mill, Jagatdal, 24-Parganas as a protest against the retrenchment of some workers, the female workers of the mill, under the influence of the Communists, assaulted one INTUC leader when he tried to convince the workers about the circumstances leading to the retrenchment.

The Communist Party of India, despite the ban on it, embarked on a “dangerous programme of violence” as a prelude to a mass revolution by the workers and peasants. The party members exerted themselves to develop the highest tempo of violent activities in certain inaccessible areas, particularly the Kakdwip areas in 24-Parganas, Domjur and Jagatballavpur in Howrah Barakamalapur and Chanditala area in Hooghly, Jaypur and Vishnupur area in Bankura and in Tamluk, Ghatal and Sadar subdivisions of Midnapore district.107

On the night of 28-29 July, a mob of about 30 Communists of Radhanagar, PS Kakdwip 24-Parganas and their supporters armed with all kinds of lethal weapons attacked the houses of two persons who had assisted the police in attaching properties of absconding Communists in that area. The raiders assaulted four of the inmates with lathis and sharp cutting weapons.108

The situation appeared grim enough for the Government to seek more information. The IB File of 1949 contains a handwritten note titled ‘A short note on the political situation in 24-Parganas and suggestions to tackle it.’ The note begins with the statement, “Of all the political parties functioning in the district of 24-Parganas the Communist Party is undoubtedly the strongest organisation. All other parties, namely Forward Bloc. RCPI (both Tagore group and Revolution group), RSPI, SP, etc. though have nuclei in the district are not strong enough to cause any major disturbance alone.” The note expresses concern over attempts by these parties to form a united front, “for effective implementation of their programme which is definitely anti-Congress and anti-Government.” On the 24-Parganas, the note states, “with its vast industrial Zone and farflung agricultural areas extending up to
Sundarban [24-Parganas] offers the Communists a good field for their activity."\textsuperscript{109}

The police and intelligence bureau went on compiling names of those suspected to be Communists and their frequent searches led to harassment of villagers. On 22 August Narendra Nath Chakraborty, of Mayapore village in 24-Parganas gave a written statement to the District Magistrate, 24-Parganas, complaining about the search of his house. The letter said: "In connection with the recent police search carried out in my house on 28 July 1949 by the CIDept of the Government of West Bengal, … I have gathered this search was carried out by the police at the instigation of some one who is prone to injure me.” The letter appeals to the District Magistrate to “take action so that I may not be a victim again and thus my prestige lowered down by such police searches in future.”\textsuperscript{110}

Another report stated: “According to secret information there are some Communist workers and Communist-sympathisers within Naihati and Bhatpara municipal areas. One Miss Bhattacharjee (2nd daughter of Sri Bishnupada Bhattacharjee BCS most probably attached at present to Government Cooperative Dept) who is now a second-year student of Rishi Bankim College, Kantalpara, is reliably reported to be a staunch Communist worker. She often distributes Communist leaflets and disseminates Communist propaganda. One man named as ‘Gournam Master’ of Bhatpara HE School is also reported to be a Communist worker. Miss Bhattacharjee, named above, is known to be a member of the organisation styled as ‘Friends of the Soviet Union,’ Bengal located at 46 Dhuramtalla Street. Some young students (male and female) of Kantalpara as also some young students of Bhatpara often assemble in the house of Mr Bhattacharjee and it is learnt that they hold meeting there in which criticisms are levelled against the present Congress Government.”\textsuperscript{111}

On 10 August 1949, the Sangram Committee formally changed the name of Layalganj to Lalgunj and established the administration of the Red Flag. The Freeland was established on an area of 5,000 acres. It was declared:

1. The land, paddy and other things that we got is common people’s property.
2. The Sangram Committee distributed the land and would distribute property.
3. There would no sharecropper or land labour in our area. We would live at our own house freely. We would cultivate and take the total (all) crops.
4. We would establish our new Court (Public Court) and law. The Sangram Committee would give verdict.”

This new freeland was Lalgunj.\textsuperscript{112} The freeland comprised the seven villages of Durgapur, Radhanagar, Rajnagar, Chandranagar, Sibrampur, Haripur and Layalganj.\textsuperscript{113} The public court was set up to try “unrepentant zamindars and old culprits.” Between 15-25 August 1949, 112 cases were heard and penalties ranging from humiliation and apology to confiscation of property were imposed. Major decisions were taken at public meetings and cooperative harvesting was organised.\textsuperscript{114}

Thus the historic concept of Mazdur-Chasi Raj or Workers-Peasants rule took roots in the Lalgunj area. Peasants were divided into various groups to cultivate different areas of land collectively. A new type of communal life started to develop in the villages. Peasants belonging to different communities – Hindu, Muslim, Scheduled Caste and Tribes – of Lalgunj and adjoining villages joined hands to fight against the police.

On 15 August 1949, the Council of Action declared that four cutcharies and 5,000 bighas of land had been seized and Lalgunj had become a liberated area. Trial courts were set up and land was distributed among the rural poor. A few landlords and their agents were killed.\textsuperscript{115}

On 18 August the news came through volunteers that the police and armed agents of
lotdars had attacked Radhanagar and unleashed a reign of terror. Nearly 150 volunteers from Lalganj ran five miles to reach Radhanagar. On the way volunteers from Rajnagar, Chandannagar, Sibrampur and other places joined them. After a fight the armed police was forced to leave Radhanagar. On 24 August the officers-in-charge of three police stations Mathurapur, Kakdwip and Sagar – started a virtual reign of terror with 65 armed constables and 200 Seva Dal workers. After terrorising the peasants of Radhanagar by demolishing their homes, beating them up for almost eight hours (midnight to 8 am) they went towards Rajnagar with the aim of attacking Lalganj. But a band of nearly 250 volunteers marched to Rajnagar and forced the police to withdraw from these villages of Kakdwip. This incident gave a new impetus to the movement. Now the poor peasants had a new compulsion to recognise the need for a strong organisation and united movement. Members of the Congress Seva Dal and agents of lotdars became panicky and wanted to join the Kisan Samity and work with the CPI.

The DIO, reporting on the simultaneous action taken against the Communist group at Bongong in the early morning of 25 August, stated that the houses of 13 persons were searched but nothing incriminating was found or seized. Listing the 13 names the report continued: “Of these nos. 1 to 3 have been arrested … and have been lodged in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta; nos. 4 to 9 were found at home and are being interrogated at Bongong; nos. 10 to 13 were not found at home.”

On 5 September, nearly 500 volunteers marched to Radhanagar from adjoining villages. Here some 100 agents of lotdars joined the Kisan Samity after taking the oath in front of the Red Flag swearing to work for the peasant struggle. After that their procession marched with the Red Flag towards Durgapur, but on the way police fired on them killing Nagen Dalui, a 45-year-old peasant activist and volunteer of Sibrampur village. The police firing took place at the instigation of local lotdar Kunja Ganta. On 16 September the peasant volunteers received a report that all the lotdars of Kakdwip police station area were going to have a meeting the next day to plan ways to subjugate the peasants of Lalganj. However, before the meeting on the 17th, the dead bodies of Kunja Ganta and his bodyguard were found floating in the river Saptamuki.

A team of IB officers conducted secret enquiries about the local situation at Basirhat regarding the apprehension of Communist trouble. In course of the enquiry, “it was ascertained that there is no CPI organisation at Basirhat town. There are some Kisan Samities under the control of CPI at Ketia under Baduria PS and Nishchintapur and Sreenathpur under Sarupnagar PS.” The team conducted secret enquiries but found nothing tangible to show that there might be any Communist trouble at present. The team also learnt that there were two students federation groups at Basirhat and Ketia under Baduria PS. Though the team did not apprehend any immediate trouble, it had identified the members and kept close watch on their movements. The report suggested that “the movements of some members are going to be restricted soon.” Enquiries were also made about the local Muslims “but their complicity with the CPI in creating troubles did not transpire.”

“In course of confidential enquiries in the Basirhat town it came to light that the general election in the Basirhat municipality is going to be held during the month of November 1949. The date has not yet been fixed nor published in the official gazette. In this connection it was learnt that there are two rival parties to contest this election. One is being led by the present chairman Sri Sudhirindra Mazumdar and the other by Sri Sarat Chandra Biswas. The majority of the local Muslims have long been supporting Sri Sarat Chandra Biswas who is ex-chairman of the municipality and it was learnt that they would support him in the ensuing
election. It also transpired that the following members of the SF at Basirhat viz. (1) Asim Mallik s/o Ajit Mallik (2) Anil Mukherjee s/o Bhupati Mukherjee (3) Miss Sheba Roy daughter of Benoy Roy and others are not in favour of Sri Sudhirindra Nath Mazumdar and his party. They want a radical change for the betterment and upliftment of the local municipality by removing this old group from the executive committee of the municipality and to replace the same by a better group of men for better administration in the town. They circulated some posters to this effect. Brisk canvassing from all parties are going on. It was revealed in enquiries that in view of the fact that the present office-bearers will have to face rigid and stiff opposition in the ensuing election and as there is every chance of their being defeated, they want to have the election stopped for the time being on various pretexts. The local public both the Hindus and the Muslims want a fresh election as they are not satisfied with the workings of the office-bearers of the municipality. In case the election is stopped, a sense of dissatisfaction will be marked amongst the public. At present there is no apprehension of any trouble either from the CPI or from the local Muslims.

“On receipt of this information of the apprehension of trouble by the CPI all precautionary steps were taken and the situation was carefully watched but no trouble was reported from any quarter.”

On 13 September the DIO reported that the whereabouts of 37 persons noted had been traced on secret enquiry and arrangements were being made to watch their movements.

On 14 September a police party was attacked by a “Communist mob” at Mallapara, PS Canning 24-Parganas while it was approaching the place where a meeting was being held. The police had to open fire in self-defence, but the bullets hit two “loyal” villagers who were trying to check the advance of the mob rushing on the police. The police party succeeded in rounding up 128 people including a Communist absconder and two other important workers.

On 26 September an organised gang of 81 lotdars’ agents went to Sibrampur village to create trouble but had to flee in front of stiff resistance from the volunteer bahini. The same thing happened in Haripur where peasants attacked the cutcharies of a lotdar. People from all communities joined hands to fight against the police and lotdars.

The SDO Barrackpore investigating the antecedents of two persons sent the following report to the DM, 24-Parganas on 5 October. “I have looked up the papers. Prosecutions are pending against Judhisthir Tripathi and Basanta Kahar for violation of 144 CrPC orders. I do not consider that these two are fit cases for application of Security Ordinance provisions. They are active no doubt but their activities so far as the undersigned knows are not yet so dangerous as to bring them within the pale of Security Ordinance etc. They are being watched and it is gathered that they are quiet for the time being.”

On 11 October a “Communists-inspired mob” armed with deadly weapons raided the cutchary of a zamindar of Layalganj PS Kakdwip 24-Parganas and looted paddy and other articles and kidnapped an employee of the zamindar whose dead body was found on 17 October at Tamluk char.

A report of a Special Branch Officer, Calcutta Police, on 23 October stated: “On enquiry one Pranab Kumar Basu son of Sri Probodh Kumar Basu has been traced. He is a clerk under controller of inspection at P18, Mission Row Extension. He is aged about 25 years. His country address is at village Majilpur, Ghoshpara PO Joynagar, Majilpara, district 24-Parganas. Nothing is known on secret enquiry as to whether he has got any other name as Chitta Basu @ Chini and nothing could be known as to his political activities from the office on secret enquiries.”
On 24 November it was decided to set up Anti-Communist Camps with one SI or ASI as OC and 1 HC and 10 constables of the Armed Police Force in the following places of 24-Parganas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police Station</th>
<th>Camp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jaynagore</td>
<td>Dongajora</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Canning</td>
<td>Matherdighi</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Haroa</td>
<td>Kamargati</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Bhangar</td>
<td>Bhojerhat</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Sonarpur</td>
<td>Mehuria</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Mathurapur</td>
<td>Patharpuratima</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Habra</td>
<td>Badekhatura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kakdwip</td>
<td>Sibrampur, Budhakhali, Layalganj, Radhanagar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sandeshkhali</td>
<td>Sarberia, Sukduari, Durgamandap, Kanmari, Rajbari</td>
</tr>
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In the State vs Kansari Haldar case the prosecution stated that the specific conspiracy to commit arson and murder as described in the charge, was first outlined in a secret meeting at Atul Santra’s house on 4 or 5 October 1949 at Layalganj. It was alleged that the second secret meeting was also held at Atul Santra’s house on 13.12.1949 and the third one at Kshirode Bera’s house at Layalganj the next day. Only two witnesses were prepared to speak of these – Sudhir Chandra Das and Satish Chandra Majhi. They were said to be accomplices. Sudhir claimed to have been a member of the Communist Party from 1353 BS. He did not pay any subscription for that year. He did not speak of any payment for 1354 BS. According to him, in 1355 BS he once paid subscription but he did not remember the amount. He had 10 bighas of rented land and 12 bighas of bhag lands. In 1356 BS, by the middle of Agrahayana, he began reaping his paddy and he stocked the paddy in the landlord’s khamar in violation of the party mandate.

Satish Chandra Majhi disclaimed all support to violence. He claimed to be a member of Krishak Samity from 1353 BS to 1356 BS. He had 5 bighas of rented land and 12-14 bighas of bhag land.

Sudhir Chandra Das stated that the first secret meeting was attended by 35-40 members including Asoke Bose, Kansari Haldar and others and was addressed by Asoke Bose. It was decided to form guerrilla units to remove the entire produce grown by the chasis to their own khamar, to take military training with arms, namely stenguns and revolvers, and to burn the houses of the jotdars and attack the police and other supporters of jotdars. Leaders were given new names such as Bidyut and Nikunja (Asoke) Madhu (Kansari), Dasarath (Gajen) and Sundar (Bijoy).

Sudhir Chandra Das spoke of a second meeting in the house of Atul Santra, which was attended by all members. Gajen Mali, Bhusan Kamila were there and also Bijoy Mondal and Amulya Mondal who each had a stengun. Asoke Bose showed the members how the weapons were to be loaded and used. It was decided that the houses of some opponents of the movement would be burnt down and those selected were the houses of Sachin Ghosh,
Gadadhar Das, Ananda Das, Biren Giri, Rasamoy Hazra, Kapil Roy, Souren Pramanik and Gobinda Giri, as also the schoolhouse. Satish Majhi concurred with this evidence.

The third meeting, according to the two, took place in the house of Kshirode Bera. In this meeting it was decided to burn down the cutchary of Sachin Ghose that very night along with schoolhouses.\textsuperscript{128}

The intensification of the movement could be judged easily by the increasing number of incidents of arson and attacks that took place in 1949-50. The following list has been drawn up from the prosecution records of the tribunal appointed for this purpose.\textsuperscript{129}

1. Arson in the cutchary of Rasamoy Hazra on 15.12.1949
2. Arson in cutchary of Agasti in mid-December in South Chandanpiri
3. Arson and firing in Biren Giri’s cutchary on 17.12.1949 in Layalganj
4. Exchange of fire in Layalganj police camp on 18.12.1949
5. Arson in Shibrampur school on 19.12.1949
6. Tolbabu’s and Haribabu’s cutcharies burnt on 19.12.1949 at Rajnagar
7. Arson and fire resulting in death of one and injury to another in Sachin Ghosh’s cutcharies on 20.12.1949
9. Cutcharies of Rabi Das and Dharani Das burnt on the night of 20.12.1949
10. Arson with murder at Sachin Ghosh’s cutchary at Layalganj on 20.12.1949
15. House of Ashutosh Manna burnt at Sibrampur on 21/22.12.1949
17. School building of Dakshin Chandanpiri burnt on 22.12.1949
18. Shop of Nalin Gharui burnt at Dakshin Chandranagar Haat
19. Shooting on medical unit on way to Layalganj on 27.12.1949
20. Arson in cutcharies of Ananda Das, Pulin Das and Ganendra Das on 27.12.1949
21. The cutchary of Munsif Babu burnt on 29.12.1949 in Fatikpur
22. Arson and firing in Suren Pramanik’s cutchary on 3.1.1950, two killed and two injured.
23. Arson at Gobinda Giri’s house, one killed on 3.1.1950

Thus the period December 1949-January 1950 was the most intense for the Tebhaga movement. Thereafter, repression by the police and paramilitary forces became common. Gradually the movement started to recede in the face of serious repression. Major Jaipal Singh had imparted some type of arms training to the nucleus of the guerrilla force of the peasants in Kakdwip. But against the highly-organised and heavily-armed paramilitary forces, this ill-equipped guerrilla force could not do much. Moreover, such an armed movement was unleashed only in Kakdwip and adjoining areas of Sundarbans and eventually it was easy for the Government to concentrate their firepower in a relatively small area and suppress the movement.\textsuperscript{130}

The Government officers sent to Kakdwip realised that the suppression of the guerrilla movement could not be an easy task for the police unless helped by the local people. The landlords, whose leader was Sachin Ghosh, with help of the Congress took the main initiative to form the village defence party. The functions of the village defence party were to accompany the armed forces, to help raid the village, to identify the guerrillas and their
supporters and keep watch at night. To strengthen the existing force in Kakdwip as many as 1,200 members of Eastern Frontier Rifles, a paramilitary force, were despatched to Kakdwip to start a mopping up operation. The force reached Layalganj on 22 December 1949. In number and resources the Haripur-Layalganj guerrillas were no match for the armed forces but such elaborate security arrangements made by the then Government undoubtedly revealed that guerrillas had wide local support. The Government gave all charge of the operation in this area to Major Chatterjee, Additional District Magistrate and an army officer. From 23 December 1949, the armed police and EFR, along with the village defence party started combing operations at Haripur. Owing to the intensity of the operation, the guerrillas could not stay in the southern part of Kakdwip. One group of guerrillas headed by Asoke Bose fled to northern part of the police station area.

On the way, the guerrillas concentrated more on burning down cutcharies and houses than on killing the police. This was because of the fact that during the winter burning down of houses was much easier than attacking the armed forces. Most of the big landlords left their houses out of fear caused by guerrilla activities and some took shelter in the houses close to the police camps.

The police and the EFR, in order to suppress the movement, cordoned off more than 1,000 square miles to stop entry into and exit from the area. When the guerrillas found that it would be impossible for them to stay in the villages, they went into hiding in the forests, but when they came out in search of food they could not evade arrest. Some guerrillas including Asoke Bose, Gajen Mali, Bijoy Mandal, Sudhir Sahu and Bhusan Kamila left Kakdwip using the party boat some time in the month of January 1950. They had with them all the firearms. Kansari Haldar, Manik Hazra, Ananta Kuiti and Krittibas Das, were not on the boat. Asoke Bose left the boat and remained underground; Keshari Sahu, Tarani Sahu and Sudhir Sahu went to Midnapore where they were arrested. The boat in which Gajen Mali and Bijoy Mondal were sleeping lost its anchor and came floating to Bakkhali beach of Kakdwip where on 20 February 1950, after a gun duel, the special police officers along with VDP men arrested them with two revolvers, two stenguns and some Communist literature. Kshirode Bera, Sujoy Barik, Phani Haldar and Ananta Kuiti were arrested later. Kansari Haldar evaded arrest for a period of 12 years, and was elected a Member of Parliament in 1957 even while being an absconder and ultimately gave himself up to the Delhi Police outside Parliament House on 21 August 1957.

Thus, in the face of organised state repression the militant peasant movement in Kakdwip died down by the middle of 1950. Most leaders were arrested or forced to abscond and the movement lost its clear objectives. Police camps dotted the rural scene and the morale of the peasantry was at very low ebb. The Government of West Bengal meticulously planned the suppression of the Kakdwip struggle. HN Sarkar, DIG Intelligence Branch, was sent to make a detailed survey of the area to prepare a report on counter-insurgency. Then a committee headed by BC Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, made an elaborate plan and appointed a Major as the District Magistrate of 24-Parganas to carry it out. Troops were sent, curfew was imposed in sensitive areas, and a massive combing operation started in the Telengana style. The lotdars started to come back with police help and the Congress organised ‘peace’ marches in the area. The overall situation improved, in the opinion of Government, as the movement subsided by February 1950.

The Diamond Harbour Circle Inspector was visiting the Layalganj Armed Police Camp on 18 December 1949 when a group of about 15 men armed with bows and arrows were said
to have attacked the camp around 2.10am. The sentry on duty saw them approaching in the darkness and raised the alarm and “very quickly the whole guard turned out and took their post” under the charge of the CI. There was an exchange of fire following which the “miscreants melted into darkness and none could be apprehended.” In his report the CI stated: “The culprits are liable under section 148/447/307 IPC. Action may be taken against them accordingly,” adding that at the time of the incident, Shyamapada Shome of Basanti Rice Mill of Basanti, PS Canning, Sachindra Kumar Ghosh and Debendra Giri of Layalganj PS Kakdwip were in the camp.136

The Subdivisional Magistrate Diamond Harbour held an executive enquiry into the incident. In his report he stated: “… minor incidents between jotdars and non-Communist bhagchasis on the one hand and Communists on the other hand have been going on for some time past. Recently the Communist have been very active in the area and have followed up their declared programme of destroying the jotdars etc. by burning cutcharies from 15.12.49 onwards. There were also reports to the effects that they had declared it as a part of their campaign to attack police camps and cause loss of life to the police and Government officials and damage Govt properties. As such the probability of their attacking the Layalganj police camp at this juncture was very great indeed.”137


In the State vs Kansari Haldar case, the court was informed that under the Tribunals of Criminal at Jurisdiction Act 1952, the Government by a notification dated 12 September 1952, had declared the whole area within the jurisdiction of Kakdwip and Sagar police stations as disturbed area during the period 1 January 1948 to 31 March 1950. By another notification on 22 August 1952, a tribunal styled as the third Tribunal at Alipur was set up. The tribunal had taken cognisance previously of a case of criminal conspiracy against 36 persons of whom six were shown as absconders.139

The Kakdwip police station registered 36 cases during December 1949-January 1950 in connection with the Communist disturbances in the area, while the Sagar police station had registered one case. The Intelligence Branch of West Bengal took control of several cases arising out of the disturbances in the Kakdwip area:140

I Kakdwip PS Case No. 8 dated 22 12 49 u/s 120B/148/302/436/307/326 IPC Accused with particulars:
<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Father/Mother</th>
<th>Village/Gram Panchayat</th>
<th>Police Station</th>
<th>District</th>
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II Kakdwip PS Case No. 17 dated 26 12 49 u/s 436/109 IPC Accused with particulars
1 Srihari Mandal s/o Dinanath of Dakhin Chandranagar PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
2 Asoke Bose @ Bidyut @ Nikunja s/o Bishad of Bara, Jagulia, PS Haringhata Dist Nadia, Absconding
3 Gajen Mali @ Dasarathi s/o Siba Prasad of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested

III Kakdwip PS Case No. 27 dated 28 12 49, u/s 307/109 IPC Accused with particulars
1 Bijoy Mandal @ Sundar s/o Girish of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
2 Gajen Mali @ Dasarathi s/o Siba Prasad of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
3 Bhusan Kamila @ Paran s/o Upendra of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
4 Asoke Bose @ Bidyut @ Nikunja s/o Bishad of Bara, Jagulia, PS Haringhata Dist Nadia, Absconding
5 Mangal Sarang s/o Sidhu of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
6 Jogi Das s/o Mohendra of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested

IV Kakdwip PS Case No. 4 dated 5.1.50 u/s 148/302/307/436/326/109 IPC Accused with particulars
1 Gajen Mali @ Dasarathi s/o Siba Prasad of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
2 Tarani Shaw s/o Lakhikanta of Rajnagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
3 Bijoy Mandal @ Sundar s/o Girish of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
4 Asoke Bose @ Bidyut @ Nikunja s/o Bishad of Bara, Jagulia, PS Haringhata Dist Nadia, Absconding

V Kakdwip PS Case No. 5 dated 5.1.50 u/s 148/302/326/307/436/109 IPC Accused with particulars
1 Iswar Kamila s/o Sukri of Rajnagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Absconding
2 Haripada Sashmal s/o Nandaram of Dakhin Chandranagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Absconding
3 Sudhir Shaw s/o Akshoy of Rajnagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
4 Bghu Das s/o Gopal of Rajnagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Absconding
5 Gajen Mali @ Dasarathi s/o Siba Prasad of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
6 Asoke Bose @ Bidyut @ Nikunja s/o Bishad of Bara, Jagulia, PS Haringhata Dist Nadia, Absconding

VI Sagor PS Case 3 dated 14 2 50 u/s 396/397/412/109 IPC Accused with particulars
1 Gajen Mali @ Dasarathi s/o Siba Prasad of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
2 Haripada Sashmal s/o Nandaram of Dakhin Chandranagar, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
3 Bijoy Mandal @ Sundar s/o Girish of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
4 Bhusan Kamila @ Paran s/o Upendra of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
5 Bhupati Jana s/o Abhiram of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
6 Shyam Mandal s/o Girish of Layalganj, PS Kakdwip Dist 24-Parganas, Arrested
7 Asoke Bose @ Bidyut @ Nikunja s/o Bishad of Bara, Jagulia, PS Haringhata Dist Nadia, Absconding

Inspector HN Chanda of the CID West Bengal was put in charge of the investigation
into these cases and local thana officers were asked to assist him. The superintendent of
police, 24-Parganas, was requested to instruct the local officer concerned to forward all the
case diaries of these cases to the CID for perusal, and he was also requested to forward all
papers relating to the setting up of a special court for the trial of the cases.\textsuperscript{141}

The West Bengal Government started criminal conspiracy cases against 36 persons of
whom 30 were arrested. The six persons whom the Government failed to apprehend were
Kansari Haldar, Asoke Bose, Iswar Kamila, Gogendra Guria, Bhagyaadhar Das and Haripada
Sasmal. To deal with the accused with a heavy hand and for a speedier and convenient trial of
this class of offences the Governor promulgated the WB Ordinance No.1 of 1952-style
Tribunal of Criminal Jurisdiction Ordinance vide Notification No.2214/p/151/152 dated 7
April 1952. The Governor also declared the whole of the area within the Jurisdiction of
Kakdwip and Sagar PS as ‘Disturbed Area’ during the period 1 January 1948 to 31 March
1950 under section 2/3 of the said ordinance.

From the FIR submitted by Haripada Banerjee, special public prosecutor Alipore 24-
Parganas to MM Bhattacharya MA BL, Special Judge, Alipore, (Ref. Kakdwip PS case no.8,
dated 22.12.1949. state vs Amulya Chandra and 35 others, it is evident that the persons were
alleged to have been concerned in the commission of offences of criminal conspiracy to
commit arson, murder etc. under sections 120B/148/302/306/307/436 IPC. Out of the 30
accused the court released three during the trial because of insufficient evidence. On 11
December 1953, the court acquitted 18 and convicted nine accused persons who were
sentenced to imprisonment for life. Those transported for life were Gajendra Nath Mali,
Bijoy Krishna Mandal, Bhusan Chandra Kamila, Maniklal Hazra, Tarani Sahu, Bhim
Chandra Ghora, Dwijendra Nath Dinda, Kshirome Bera and Sujoy Chandra Barik.\textsuperscript{142}

On 26 October 1952 an organisation named Kakdwip Defence Committee was formed
in Kakdwip in defence of the accused. The committee’s office-bearers were Atul Gupta,
president, Satyapriya Banerjee, Satish Pakrashi, and Jyotish Roy. Dr Kalidas Mitra laboured
tirelessly in the Tribunal and later in the High Court during hearing of the appeal. The CPI
formed a Kakdwip Defence Fund on an all-India basis to finance the cases of undertrial
prisoners and to help the family members of the peasants.\textsuperscript{143}

The committee passed the following resolutions at its meetings on 20.3.1954 and
5.5.1954 at the Kakdwip dakbungalow and Haripur:
1 We protest against the conviction of the chasis – Gojen Mali, Bijoy Mondal and others –
who have been transported for life and demand their immediate release.
2 We demand the withdrawal of all warrants of arrest against Asoke Bose, Kansari Haldar
and other absconding krishak workers.
3 We demand the withdrawal of the police camps from the Sundarbans.
4 We demand withdrawal of all cases under section 107 CrPC against the chasis and their
supporters.\textsuperscript{144}

The Supreme Court released Kansari Haldar and Gojen Guria on 10 April 1962.
Along with them the nine other persons convicted for life were also acquitted. Thereafter the
Government withdrew all cases against the remaining four absconders, which was notified on
5 September 1962.\textsuperscript{145}

The Communist Party of India continued to carry on its “dangerous programme of
violence for creating chaos and confusion in the state and embarrassing the Government.” In
order to curb the activities of the party on all fronts seven of its allied organisations – Bengal
Provincial Students’ Federation, Chhatri Sangha, Mahila Atma Raksha Samity, Peoples’
Relief Committee, Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha, Kshet Mazdoor Samity and Mazdoor
Naojoan League were outlawed on 4 January 1950. Simultaneous searches and arrests followed the ban in Calcutta and in the districts and the offices of the above-mentioned organisations were sealed. At least 81 persons belonging to these organisations were arrested. Soon after the BPSF and MARS, however, came out to function under the new names of Democratic Students’ Union and Ganatantrik Mahila Sangha.

Even after the ban of these CPI organisations, the violent activities of the party went on unabated. There were incidents of widespread loot, arson, murder, bomb-throwing, clashes with the police, etc. in Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapore and 24-Parganas, notably in Kakdwip. The party declared ‘Anti Constitution week’ from 18 to 26 January 1950 but no largescale campaign could be organised in spite of an all-out effort by the party. The call for a general strike on 25 January 1950 found no response and the disturbances on 26 January was confined to a few small pockets.146

**24-Parganas along the Telengana way**

The fire of civil war spread not only in Kakdwip, but in every nook and corner of 24-Parganas.147

In 24-Parganas the movement to capture the landlords cutcharies continued from the end of 1949 to early 1950 and many were burnt down in Sandeshkhali, Canning, Kakdwip and Mathurapur PS where sharecroppers tried to retain possession of the land by forcible tilling. However, 2,000 armed police were posted to the area for combing operations and with the support of the Seva Dal and landlords’ lathials, they were increasingly successful in suppressing the agitation. The movement was apparently passive for several months. At the end of 1950 after the new policy had been adopted there was a change in target of attack from landlords to hoarders and Government procurement agents. There were several clashes between peasants and police of procurement parties.148

In the last phases of the year 1948 a conference of the All-Bengal Kshetmajur Sabha was held. On return from the conference, the representatives from Sandeshkhali spread themselves in every village. They shouted, “We are the Mukti Fouz,” the revolutionary slogan of the peasant movement. “We will free our area from Congress rule. We want to fill our stomachs and live like human beings. For this we shall go on fighting against the zamindar, jotedar and other enemies till the last drop of blood remains in our body.”149

At Sandeshkhali hundreds of land labourers attacked the cutcharies of Ramanath, jotedar, destroyed all documents and seized 500 maunds of paddy. Their next victim was Dwarik Sharma of Sukodoani. Within a few days of the first incident, peasants from Durgamandap, Gabbria, Daudpur, Sukodoani and other villages attacked the residence of Dwarik Sharma. His men were beaten black and blue and his granaries looted. In that 24-hour operation the peasants distributed amongst themselves 1,000 maunds of paddy, 800 pairs of dhotis and a huge quantity of kerosene, sugar and salt.150 After that 500 armed policemen came to stop the movement in Sandeshkhali. In three or four days, the police arrested about 350 land labourers. The police teams resorted to firing several times in a month and killed five persons. Many persons were injured. They destroyed the houses in the village. Thousands of men, women and children took shelter under the open sky. They began to spend days without food.151

The movement started to spread to the adjoining areas of Sonarpur, Bhangar, Nayabadh, Saheber Abad, Mathurapur, Jiplat, Dongajora, Bisnupur, Jaynagar, Radhanagar, Haroa, Canning, Duloarhat, Kultola (Jaynagar), Harcharkati (Basirhat), Mandirbazar, Tiuri,
Bural, Beota, Barabari, Banagram and Namkhana. Everywhere the barns of lotdars were looted and paddy was distributed. When challenged the peasants fought with spears and bows and arrows with the police who were armed with modern weapons like rifles and grenades. In 1949 the land labourers of Tiuri captured land and distributed among themselves. Congress minister Hem Naskar sent Bhupati Naskar and 25 policemen and caught their leader Bamacharan. Getting the news people came in groups and tried to snatch their leader from the police. The police fired by the command of Bhupati Naskar and Mani Dhara and Dashu were martyred. Bamacharan delivered a slap on the OC’s cheek and snatched his rifle, and along with the people drove the police away. Next day a 500-strong police force came to Tiuri and launched a torture campaign. Hundreds of policemen started torture in the area of Bhangar. They looted and smashed the houses of the common people. They also destroyed the sanctity of the women.

Hundreds of land labourers of Canning PS were spending their days by eating shaluk (waterlily). They went to the moneylender but he kicked them out. Ramanath Jotdar showed his lathiylals and gun. So there was a slogan in the villages ‘Capture the gola (store of paddy) and distribute paddy among all.’ The gola was captured and 200 maunds of paddy were distributed. The children were saved from starvation and death.

In 1949 the influence of Tebhaga movement spread all over Mathurapur PS in 24-Parganas. The landlords distributed paddy among the peasants and sent money to the Party fund. ‘G’ Plot’s peasants, land labourers, sharecroppers joined in the movement unitedly. The huge farmers of Dongajora, Bishnupur, Dhopdhopi, Joynagar, Basirhat and Bongong followed the same path.

In 1949, just when land labourers and sharecroppers of Kakdwip, Bhangar and Tiuri fought against the police, hundreds of land labourers and peasants of Sandeshkhali and Canning were calling strikes day after day. They discontinued working for the moneylender, jotdar and zamindar. Thousands of land labourers and poor peasants set up a joint Sangram Committee in the whole of 24-Parganas. They captured thousands of bighas of vested land, cutchary and property of zamindars and distributed it to the peasants.

In 1949 SDO of Basirhat himself called a meeting at Hatgechhi, ostensibly to distribute paddy. But the conspiracy was a failure and the peasants brought lathis (sticks) and sacks to capture the paddy. Capturing hundreds of maunds of paddy and rice, they distributed it at Agarati. On getting the news the Hakim sent a team of police but it had to retreat.

Kanailal Maity played an important role in the Tebhaga movement not only in the Sundarban but also in Sagar. He was familiar as ‘Lal Kanai’ in the area. In 1949 Probhas Roy was arrested in Canning with 129 peasants when he was leading Tebhaga movement.

At least 300 men and women had been arrested from Canning and Sandeshkhali police station areas, the police shooting twice within one month on fasting people. Many were wounded and two had been murdered. Police repression became a routine affair in the adjoining areas of Sonarpur and Bhangar.

In 1949 land labourers of Burul imposed Section 144 CrPC on Congress members. They had no permission to enter the area. They wanted to kill Murari Sharan and Chandi Ghosh, but they were afraid and escaped from the area. Finding no way out, Bidhan Roy sent a few hundred men of the Gurkha Army to that area for their protection. The Gurkha Armymen went on a destructive spree in the villages and destroyed this area completely within two months and 15 days. They arrested and imprisoned many people from the area. But they were unable to arrest the leaders. Led by the Communist leaders, a procession was organised in that area on 15 August 1949. Nearly 500-600 men and women took part in this
procession hoisting the ‘Red Flag.’ Rebati Dasi, the ‘Old Peasant Mother’, was in front of the procession. To stop the procession the police fired, they wounded a few people but could not stop the procession.¹⁶²

One 2 January 1950 some Communists threw bombs to the police pickets posted near Keshoram Cotton Mills area in Metiabruz (24-Parganas) but none was injured. On 8 January some CPI workers of Jadavpur area (PS Tollygunge, Bengal Police) 24-Parganas with the assistance of some local refugees pelted brickbats at the car of Dr BC Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, while he was passing through that area. The car was badly damaged.

On 25 January 1950 some miscreants suspected to be Communists removed the fish-plates from a portion of the railway line between Garia and Jadavpur stations in 24-Parganas, resulting in the derailment of a train. One passenger was seriously injured and some others received minor injuries. The next day, some CPI workers threw a bomb at the police camp at Burul, PS Budge Budge, 24-Parganas, but they did not explode. On searching the locality two acid bottles were recovered from a ration bag from the roadside. The same day, a Communist mob threw a cracker at the police Party at Mirabagan, Gouripore (PS Naihati), 24-Parganas. One ASI and three constables were slightly injured. The police fired two rounds teargas shells when another cracker was thrown by the mob.

January 27 to February 2 1950 passed off without any incident. The detenus in different jails, who were on hungerstrike since 16 December 1949, broke their fast on 8 February 1950. During the months of January and February 1950, 216 CPI and six RCPI members were arrested and 121 released, bringing the total under detention to 683.¹⁶³

The role of women

The role of the women in the 24-Parganas Tebhaga movement was a significant factor. The Tebhaga movement in the Sundarbans was an uprising of the rural poor living in backward social conditions, humiliated and sick with fear for decades. There was a significant change in the social status of the peasant women as they resisted the landlords who very often used them to fulfil their carnal desires. In Kakdwip the rural poor women worked in the field in the period of cultivation and at the time of harvesting and transporting paddy from the fields. It is undeniable that dauntless and clever leadership emerged from among these rural poor women who showed exemplary militancy in facing police repression. The “doubly oppressed” women on a widescale created their semi-militia the Nari Bahini, which confronted the state forces valiantly, fought against the oppression of the landlords and established their domination.¹⁶⁴

The agrarian movement in the 24-Parganas made the women conscious of their rights. In the Tebhaga-elaka, peasant courts were established and women raised the issues of discrimination, wife-beating and harassment.¹⁶⁵

Many members of the Nari Bahini used to work in the fields. Whether in Kakdwip, in Deviganj or elsewhere, rural women themselves were employed as tenant labourers and thus directly felt economic exploitation by the landlord class. It is involvement in field cultivation or in harvesting and transporting paddy from the field, which apparently explains why poor women in Tebhaga demonstrated a spirit of staunch independence.¹⁶⁶

The leading activists and martyrs were Pakhibala or Mandakini Sinha, Ahalya Das, Sarojini, Batasi, Mijida Khatun and Uttami. It fact, according to some reports, as much as one-third of the activists were women. One of the reasons of this significant role played by them might be that poor peasant women were never confined to their homes and had to work
with their menfolk for survival. Their attitude towards the struggle was positive. Many women also participated during the peak of the movement. A 19-year-old Muslim girl, Majida Khatun, led the women to fight back the armed agents of lotdars and the police at Chandanpiri. In another incident a woman activist Mallika attacked and injured a police agent when he was trying to molest another woman. Senior leaders like Kansari Haldar, Provash Roy, Gunadhara Maity, Jatin Maity, MA Rasul, held baithaks with women activists in villages like Lalganj, Haripur and Chandanpiri, to explain to them the aims and objectives of the struggle. The grassroots leadership of local activists played an important role in organising their womenfolk. A 19-year-old Muslim girl, Majida Khatun, led the women to fight back the armed agents of lotdars and the police at Chandanpiri. In another incident a woman activist Mallika attacked and injured a police agent when he was trying to molest another woman. Senior leaders like Kansari Haldar, Provash Roy, Gunadhara Maity, Jatin Maity, MA Rasul, held baithaks with women activists in villages like Lalganj, Haripur and Chandanpiri, to explain to them the aims and objectives of the struggle. The grassroots leadership of local activists played an important role in organising their womenfolk.167 Hindu-Muslim women organised gharoa (informal) meetings or baithaks and asked leaders to teach them the basic facts of the struggle. That was one of the reasons why no communal riot took place in Kakdwip area.168

In Kakdwip the peasant women were employed as tenants and labourers and thereby directly felt the economic exploitation by the landlord class. It was due to their involvement in the field of cultivation or in harvesting and transporting paddy from the field they gradually developed and demonstrated a spirit of staunch independence and when, during the course of the Tebhaga movement, paddy was stacked on their own threshing floor, peasant women bowed with folded hands in front of the paddy. They emotionally though that this stacking of grains was a revolution.169

In the Tebhaga movement in Kakdwip brave peasant women sacrificed their lives while fighting the police guns. Ahalya Das, wife of Jogen Das of Chandanpiri, took a leading part in the protest march on 6 November 1948 at Chandanpiri. On that fateful day she showed great courage to fight with the armed police forces and was the first one to be shot at pointblank range. Ahalya was then more than eight months’ pregnant. On the following day the body of Ahalya was taken round the village in a procession before it was put on the funeral pyre. From Chandanpiri the news of Ahalya’s death spread to the nearby and distant villages of the Sundarbans. Overnight Ahalya became a legend and a symbol of both the heroic resistance and the brutality of police repression.170

Folklore grew in the Sundarbans over the Ahalya legend and a popular song, Ahalya Ma Tomar Santan Janma Nilo Na (Mother Ahalya, your baby is yet unborn), made a profound impression on the minds of the people of the Sundarbans.171 After Ahalya, Batasi Sinha, wife of Surendranath Sinha, was shot by the police. A doctor from the People’s Relief Committee treated her at the house of the local leader Sudhir Maity, though in vain. The party doctor was deeply impressed by the strength of character and tolerance of pain of the dying woman. Sarojini Das and her brother Aswini Das, an activist of the Kisan Sabha were also killed in police firing. Uttami Das, a widow, took a leading part in the procession was shot in the head and died on the spot.

Suryamari Giri was wounded and taken to Diamond Harbour where her right hand had to be amputated.172 Another woman, Bimala Ojha, who was in the front of the procession, was shot in the left shoulder and arrested from hospital. She spent nine months in Hajipur jail with her eight-month-old son.173

Many members of the Nari Bahini were martyred in Kakdwip and other pockets as late as 1948 and 1949. In Chandanpiri village of 24-Parganas, seven peasant women and female labourers were murdered when they tried to save the stacked paddy shares and protested against police searches; one of them was the renowned woman leader Ahalya.174 Dr Ila Bose, then a medical student in Calcutta, along with her Medical College friend Purnendu Ghosh came to Kakdwip to treat the wounded activists and to organise peasant women in the village. The injured were taken to the Party office and the Party doctor tried to
give medical help to the injured. This idea of people’s medical relief, though very inadequate, added a new dimension to the peasant struggle. Dressed in widow’s weeds, Ila Bose entered the kitchen of the peasant women to talk to them about the struggle ahead and to form village squads of the peasant women.175

In Budhakhali, Pakhibala (Mandakini Sinha), daughter of Beharilal Dakua and wife of Amiya Sinha, was an activist of the Mahila Atma Raksha Samity and Kisan Sabha. Pakhibala was so brutally beaten by the police that she lost her unborn child. In spite of this Pakhibala continued to be more active in the militant struggle in Kakdwip.176

Another woman who took a leading part in the Tebhaga movement in Budhakhali village was Nityamayi Jana. She was the oldest woman activist and was popularly known as ‘Nityama.’ She might be compared with Rasmoni or Burima of Mymensingh and Jasoda of Dinajpur. Nityamayi took active part in signalling the arrival of police, in giving shelter to the local leaders, and in leading the peasant women to attack the police forces. As a leader of the women forces, Nityama went to harvest the paddy at the jote of jotdar Madhab Ghorai of Budhakhali on 15 December 1948 when Pakhibala was brutally beaten by the police and lost her unborn child.177

In Kakdwip the rural poor women belonging to the families of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers were those most oppressed in the agrarian society. They had suffered most miserably under the feudal patriarchal rule of absentee landlords and jotdars. The oppressed peasants women undertook primarily the task of defending villages and agricultural fields. Just like the militia in a fullfledged people’s war, though they were mostly untrained and did not know the tactics of guerrilla warfare. Armed with traditional weapons like jhanta (broomsticks) and bonti (sharp knife fixed to a wooden foot) the peasant women valiantly stood up against the police and military forces armed with firepower. The participation of the women in the political meetings and demonstrations was remarkably significant in Kakdwip. Women from different communities attended the meetings organised by the Kisan Sabha. Their participation undoubtedly increased their self-confidence, made them conscious of their position and taught them to resist sexual intimidation and harassment. Thanks to their resistance these practices had now become a story of the past. All types of torture and ill-treatment were done away with. Moreover, mobilisation to attack the cutcharies of the lotdars saw the peasants women’s militancy in the Kakdwip movement; even when firing took place the women became more daring. The solidarity and determination shown by the peasant women at the most critical movements of the movement is unforgettable. They continued to stand in the forefront of the movement even when its collapse became inevitable.178

Rajbala Barui, daughter of Gunadhar Barui of South Haripur, being a member of Mahila Samity worked as a messenger. A Government investigator wandered here and there disguised as a madman. Noticing especially that investigator, Rajbala was able to hand him over with his identity card and revolver to Communist Party office. He was sentenced to death by the People’s Court.179

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In the Kakdwip movement women had played a remarkable role. Their courage and sacrifice are worth mentioning. It was found that out of 70 families of Budhakhali, women of 25 families took active part in the movement and developed leadership.180

Around 500 policemen and the Gurkha soldiers started barbaric rule at Chandanpiri. They did not destroy the island with cannon-power, but they destroyed every home, every family. They caught every blind, strong, weak, person and detained him or her. The others were tortured mercilessly. The devils destroyed the houses of the peasants, raped many
women, set fire on many things and broke the utensils. In this way torture continued for ten days. But peace did not come to Chandanpiri. Only the women were in the village. This time they put up resistance against torture.

As all the men were arrested or in hiding, the women were confused to some extent. But within 8-10 days they controlled themselves. Taking all the women of the village they formed a few bahinis (teams), fixed signals and established communication with the leaders of the ‘free land,’ swimming across the river though there was careful vigil of the police. Food came for the starving and clothes came for those who had no clothes from Layalganj. They collected arms to prevent the torture of the policemen and the Gurkha soldiers. Da, bonti, axe, etc. were their arms.

One 19-year-old Muslim housewife was the leader of the ‘Nari Bahini’ of Chandanpiri. Her husband was absconding. Leaving her burka behind, she came forward to lead the fight to save the honour of the women.

The hooligans of the Congress used to go out at night in a team to maintain ‘peace.’ They would torture young girls whenever they got chance. A group of women killed two of them with a bonti to save the prestige of a young girl. They stopped their night vigil. The older women came forward on seeing the courage of the young girls and joined them. They said, “We shall go to the field together and bring at least one bundle of paddy from the field which was coloured with the blood of Aswini, Ahalya, Sarojini, Batasi and Uttami.”

Then one morning, 20 young girls went to the field, avoiding the police guards and Gurkha soldiers. The sickles glittered in the bright sunlight as the girls harvested the paddy. None of the policemen or the Gurkas dared to come towards them. Each of them brought home a bundle of paddy.

That year, the entire paddy went to the farmers’ houses. Everybody lifted bales of paddy on their heads and rejoiced. Their struggle, for which they sacrificed so much blood and so many lives, was successful. The girls sent news everywhere saying, “We have brought paddy to our homes and kept our promise. There will be no sorrow if we die in starvation.”

One day in 1949 the police arrested Kaushalya Mandal and sent her to Diamond Harbour Jail. The police arrested Nityabala Jana, too. There was more than one complaint against them, including assaulting the police on 31 December 1948. Protesting against her arrest, Kaushalya Mandal started a fast. The subdivisional officer’s threats and requests left her unmoved. Being compelled, the SDO sent her to Alipore. Budhakhali’s Nityabala Jana, one of the main organisers of Sibrampur village, Monmatha Ghorai’s mother Prativa, Sundari Ghorai, Layalganj’s Gajen Mali’s wife Tilottoma Mali, Renuka Mondal, Rajnagar’s Mokshoda Kamila and Taran Sahu’s mother and a few other women were with her in Alipore.

In the different atmosphere in Alipore, Kaushalya Mandal continued her movement. A few days passed in this way. Kaushalya did not break her fast. The authorities, not knowing what to do, proposed to her that she would be released unconditionally. In response, Kaushalya Mondal informed that she would break her fast only if they released Prativa, Tilottoma, Mokshoda, Renuka and the other women. The administration was defeated by the steadfastness of Kaushalya. She broke her fast after the unconditional release of all women activists of Sundarbans.

Features of the Nari Bahini
Though the names of the women’s ‘armies’ varied from region to region like ‘Jhanta (broom) Bahini,’ ‘Pratirodha (resistance) Bahini,’ ‘Nari Bahini,’ etc., they shared common features.

Firstly, the Nari Bahinis had its own clearcut social base. While the Krishak Sabha and Mahila Atma Raksha Samity were mass organisations uniting people from all peasant classes in the villages, the Nari Bahinis were the specific organs of poor women and had as members not only women from scheduled caste Hindu and tribal communities, but Muslim women as well.

Secondly, the Nari Bahini was semi-militia, locally based with their main duties being the task of defending villages and agricultural fields. Unlike the regular militia, the Nari Bahinis were largely untrained.\(^{185}\)

Thirdly, the weapons they used were their own – the sickle, the broom, chilli powder, ‘\textit{gaen},’ etc. The peasant women guarded their paddy with all these weapons in their hands against seizure by the police who were armed with guns and bayonets. But that did not matter; the police trembled in front of the new motherhood and passed orders under section 144 CrPC against the carrying of broomsticks.\(^{186}\)

Fourthly, they sounded conchshells, warning their men of the advance of the enemy, communicated with the leaders who were underground and fought directly with the police. They jumped in to save their harvest set on fire by the police, were beaten and tortured, yet hit back with whatever they could get hold of. They faced any amount of personal persecution, yet continued to protect their leaders. Here only one instance out of many is cited. Hemanta Ghoshal the Tebhaga leader popularly known as Senapati, narrated the story which goes like this: “I took shelter in Matherdighi when we learnt that police had surrounded the village. But before that, the menfolk had already left the village. I was alone in one house. The police also watched the field where people went for their morning toilet. Early in the morning the women members of that house where I took shelter, started abusing the police, accusing them of spying on the women while they were doing their morning ablutions. The embarrassed police officer withdrew his force from the field. I wore a red sari and went to the field with other women. From there I covered about 5 miles and reached Bargar in Haroa PS.”\(^{187}\)

Fifthly, was the women’s participation in the campaign for the demand of Tebhaga. And, finally, the women’s active participation in harvesting paddy.\(^{188}\)

List of the women organisers of some villages:\(^{189}\)

**Budhakhali**

1. Nityabala Jana – Daughter of Basanta
2. Kousalya Mondal – Wife of Trailakya
3. Basanta Mondal – Wife of Basanta
4. Kananbala – Wife of Duryadhan
5. Mandakini (Pakhi) Sinha – Wife of Amiya
6. Tulsibala Santa – Wife of Purnachandra
7. Saraswati Samanta – Wife of Nirapada
8. Lakshmibala Samanta – Wife of Banamali
9. Dakshabala Naskar – Wife of Gosla
10. Kusum Bera – Wife of Sagar
11. Nirada Bera – Wife of Bihari
12  Kiran bala Maity – Wife of Dharani
13  Menakabla Maity – Wife of Jagannath
14  Binodini Parua – Wife of Sarbeswar
15  Gyanada Manna – Wife of Rakhal
16  Hemangini Jauliya – Wife of Bhusan
17  Sita Jauliya – Wife of Janardhan
18  Satadal Niyogi – Wife of Suren
19  Bimala Guhait – Wife of Suren
20  Bishnubala Ghorai – Wife of Rajani
21  Kananbala Ghorai – Wife of Mangobinda
22  Yasoda Mirdha – Wife of Bhagyadha
23  Bhadra Khanra

**Rajnagar (C Plot)**
1  Dharani Pradhan – Wife of Bhusan
2  Sumitra Sahu – Wife of Duryadhan
3  Kusum Sahu – Wife of Mahendra
4  Gundhari Sahu
5  Mokshoda Kamila – Daughter of Iswar
6  Menoka Kamila
7  Giribala Maity – Wife of Murari
8  Bimala Das – Wife of Bijoy
9  Sindhubala
10  Tilottoma Patra – Wife of Karna

**Durgapur (S)**
1  Janila Begum

**Sibrampur**
1  Pratiba Sundri Ghorai
2  Subodhbala Das
3  Surabala Das

**Haripur (Layalganj)**
1  Partibala Santra – Daughter of Atul
2  Tilottoma Mali – Wife of Gajen
3  Khandibala – Wife of Kartik.
4  Renuka Mondal – Daughter of Bijoy
5  Durgabala Pal – Wife of Umesh
6  Kadasmini Kamila – Daughter of Bhushan
7  Hasi Dolui Mother-in-law of Bhuli
8  Kadambini Sarkar – Wife of Arun
9 Sarada Das – Wife of Yogi
10 Tulsi Das – Wife of Krittibas
11 Charu Sasmal – Wife of Harekrishna
12 Saila Dinda – Wife of Dwijen
13 Chintamani Bera – Wife of Kshirod
14 Sukhada Mondal – Wife of Niranjan
15 Janaki Mistri – Wife of Panchanan
16 Radhika Das – Wife of Radhanath
17 Sushila Santra – Wife of Atul
18 Kamila Pramanik – Wife of Anil
19 Mohini Pramanik – Wife of Ranjan
20 Santibala Mondal – Wife of Sarbeswar
21 Rajbala Baruri – Sister of Bipin
22 Dhirbala Barui – Wife of Sujoy
23 Satyabati Guruya – Wife of Sudhi
24 Saraswati Guruia – Wife of Ananta
25 Janaki Guruia – Wife of Amulya
26 Annada Jana – Wife of Bhupati
27 Indubala Shee – Wife of Binod
28 Bistarini Sonamui – Wife of Bikram
29 Sita Saren
30 Parbati Hansda.
31 Duli Kisku
32 Phulmani Kisku and her Mother
33 Majhiya Majhi’s mother
34 Kani Haldar
35 Bilasini Haldar
36 Mandakini Sardar
37 Maharani Sardar
38 Nanda Rani Haldar
39 Shaktibala Barui
40 Champabala
41 Matangini Barui

Chandanpiri
1 Ahalya Das – Wife of Jogen
2 Sarojini Das – Wife of Giban
3 Uttami Das
4 Batasi Singha – Wife of Suren
5 Menakabar – Wife of Sanatan
6 Sushil Maity – Wife of Krittibas
7 Muktakeshi Maity – Wife of Achinta
The peasant and Communist leader Moni Singh wrote: “One incident is flashing in my vision. The police arrested Nityananda Chowdhury. In spite of being poor, Muslim women were behind the curtain. We were ignorant about their mental condition. We could not imagine that they could be so agitated over the cow-whipping of Nityananda Chowdhury. During this period two armed policemen were resting under a tree in a poor peasant’s house after having stomped around. Two young Muslim housewives came out and forgetting social customs began to speak in loud voices in their own language. “Oh! Maidervant’s sons, why do you beat our leader? We shall slay you with this kathari.” Seeing the militant attitude of the two young women and the kathari, the policemen ran off in different directions swiftly. The young women were not ready for this situation; being confused they just stood there.

The most suppressed, downtrodden, backward and illiterate peasant women played a glorious role in saving paddy, keeping the prestige of their houses and protecting the bloodied flag (red flag).

Result of the Tebhaga movement

The Congress government of West Bengal took some time to understand the gravity of the situation and passed an ordinance in 1949. This ordinance was a stopgap arrangement to pacify the bargadars. It later became the Bargadars Act of 1950 and gave 60:40 share to the sharecropper and jotdar (or lotdar). But even after such a prolonged movement, the demand of Tebhaga was not conceded legally. Estate Acquisition Act was passed in April 1953 by the Dr BC Roy’s Ministry to abolish permanently the Zamindari system. It also stuck to a 50:50 share and as jotdars were generally out of its purview, eviction also went on as usual.

In 1954 the Government, faced with peasant unrest, passed an ordinance banning illegal eviction. Then came the Land Revenue Reforms Act, 1955 which received the assent of the President in March 1956. The Land Reforms Act of 1956 decreased the share of jotdar to 40 percent and paddy was to be stored at a mutually agreed place for the division to be legal. Though eviction could not be completely stopped, all these concessions were clearly the product of Tebhaga struggle. Moreover all types of torture, ill treatment, excessive interest on paddy loan (like derabari or duno-bari) and illegal exactions (abwabs) were done away with.

Some defects of Tebhaga movement of 24-Parganas

The struggle of South Bengal was the struggle for getting two-thirds part of the crop. So this struggle was mainly a financial struggle. This struggle was not organised with the aim of uprooting different feudal systems of exploitation such as the systems of Zamindari, jotdari and moneylending, etc.

The sharecroppers and the land labourers took paddy to their house and looted paddy from the granary of the jotdars and zamindars by the force of lathi; that means they thought that their purpose was fulfilled after collecting food for a time. As a result, there was little firmness in the efforts of the sharecroppers to increase their strength and organisational
arrangements.

They could not adopt the tactics of people’s war. As the enemies were educated, armed with firearms and the common people uneducated, unorganised and without arms, people’s war would have been the only policy.

Kakdwip was a small area. For want of well-organised political awareness, there was no facility for the sharecropper volunteers to retreat necessarily or to disperse to different sides as the movement was limited to that area. Besides, it can be also said that there was no facility of getting united. So it was possible for the enemies to destroy the movement of Kakdwip by integrating and applying all military power. If the movement could have spread towards the south and north of Kakdwip at the time, it would not have been possible for the enemies to apply military power on the only movement centre unitedly. As a result it would have been possible for the divided groups of the sharecroppers to conduct the movement for a long time.198

Thus the unity of the peasants broke though the movement became more militant in the 1949-50 phase.199

The Kakdwip struggle was a partial struggle, which remained confined to a small area.200 From the very beginning of 1948 there was inner conflict regarding the partyline. For different reasons the conflict rose to climax in the last phase of 1949. The party was divided into some parts – sectarian, reformist, ultra Left and so on. The effect was felt in the movement of Kakdwip as Kansari Haldar was called ‘Reformist’ because he was doubtful about this new line. Asoke Bose was the spokesman of the ‘ultra Left.’ Nripen Chakraborty extended support to him. As the movement turned on the basis of new line in Kakdwip, Kansari Haldar warned the Central leadership. But the warning did not get any importance because of the situation within the party.201

Kansari Haldar said about Asoke Bose, “From 15 to 30 December 1949 he set fire on 14-15 cutcharies, police camps and police shelters in school and fled to Calcutta and his comrade fellow activists, Gajen Mali, Bejoy Mondal, etc. took shelter in seacoast areas and they were arrested. He not only destroyed a movement but also made the arrangement of sending the comrade leaders to jail for a long period.”202 “If the movement could continue, it would succeed in the land of West Bengal and could give the whole India a new direction.”203

Critical analysis of the Tebhaga movement

Two points of view have prevailed among historians concerning the role of the Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha for the demand of two-third (Tebhaga) of the crop for the sharecropper. Gyanabrata Bhattacharya, Sugata Basu, Andre Beteille etc. have held that the Krishak Sabha imposed the movement on the sharecroppers without any preparation. During that period there was no real background to organise such a movement in Bengal. Again, some researchers like Peter Custers have claimed that the Tebhaga movement was mainly an autonomous movement of the sharecroppers in which the role of the central leadership of the Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha was absent.204 The ex-secretary of the Land Revenue Department of the West Bengal Government, Debabrata Bandyapadhyay, in his recently-published article in the Economic and Political Weekly, has tried to show that in 1939 a memorandum was submitted on behalf of BPKS to the Land Revenue Commission (usually known as the Floud Commission) and the Floud Commission registered the interviews of Bankim Mukherjee, Rebati Burman, Abdullah Rasul and Bhabani Sen but they had not demanded Tebhaga. So he holds that the Krishak Sabha can claim no credit for Tebhaga.205
Bhabani Sen, Sudhi Pradhan, as well as Dr Sinil Sen, who had been a peasant movement activist before he became a scholar, all admitted that there had been hesitation on the part of the Kisan Sabha leaders in the matter of launching their movement.206

It is often alleged that the CPI imposed the movement on an unprepared peasantry. This allegation was strengthened when Abdullah Rasul himself wrote in his history of the Krishak Sabha that the Sabha took the decision somewhat suddenly.207 Beteille said that as the leaders of the CPI came from the middle class the movement could not become sufficiently militant.208

The formal launching of the movement was on 29 September 1946 at the state council meeting of the Krishak Sabha; why this timing was chosen has been the subject of much dispute. Amal Sen, Abani Lahiri and Hemanta Ghosal have all opined that a key factor was the need to combat communalism.209

The question of who led the movement is much debated. Some scholars have called it a spontaneous movement. BB Chawdhury has rejected both those who exaggerate and those who reject the role of the Communist leadership.210

The movement collapsed, taking the Province as a whole after April 1947. What role was played in this retreat by the state and the central leadership of the CPI is again a matter of much debate.211 Asoke Bose held that the CPI leadership had no clear perspective. They had ignored the poorest layers. Manikrishna Sen wrote in his memoirs that the movement was not spontaneous, but a planned movement led by the CPI and the BPKS.212

Kunal Chattopadhyay and Susnata Das have debated the role of the CPI. Chattopadhyay holds that the role of Jyoti Basu in the state Assembly, welcoming the state Acquisition and Tenancy Bill, despite its biased attitude against the rights of sharecroppers, shows the poverty of CPI politics. Das says that by contrast it shows the perspicacity of the CPI leadership.213

Adrienne Cooper has also criticised the leadership for organisational failure, tactical mistakes, as well as theoretical errors.214

Jayanta Bhattacharyya argues that the failure of the movement stems from the silence of the middle class, a lack of proletarian support, the reformist nature of the Party leadership, a lack of planning, adventurism, and a failure to link up with the anti-imperialist struggles.215

The Tebhaga movement was organised in the second phase in 1948-50 after Independence and forced the Government to pass the Bargadar Act of 1950. It was the development of the movement’s initial stage though it was organised with the wrong aim of the workers’ and peasants’ revolutionary attempt for capturing power.216

The Tebhaga movement was the first milestone in the history of Bengal’s united movement.217 The movement hit acutely the base of casteism. It also broke the unbreakable social differences among farmers – Muslim, Namasundra, Rajbansi, Mahishya, Poundra Kshariya, Tribes etc.218 Though apparently the Tebhaga movement was a movement for two-third division of paddy or a movement for financial demand, it got political importance in the prevailing situation. It helped to strengthen the freedom movement. A large number of the peasants raised their heads against the system of feudalism. As a result they were connected with the united freedom movement. The countrymen realised that freedom could not be meaningful without radical change of the land system.219

Gunadhar Maity said in his interview, “The poisonous teeth of the zamindars and jotedars could be uprooted.”220

The Tebhaga movement in the 24-Parganas opened a new chapter in the history of the peasant movement in Bengal. It exposed the real class base of the Muslim League and the
Congress Government and threw a challenge to all vested interests. It glorified the part played by the Krishak Sabha led by the CPI, and the valiant role of the peasants, both men and women. The movement of 24-Parganas had torn the chain of feudal exploitation and the possession of the bargadars had been established over land. The movement of 24-Parganas had shown how to snatch by fighting the honour and dignity of living like human beings, more than the division of paddy and it also made the peasants interested in the movement.

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