Chapter III

Private Ownership over Land or Crop Sharing: Impact of History

Forty years of Independence have not brought the promised conveyances to the lives of the most of villagers. Development has remained largely urban-centric. Village burns during drought, is awash during the flood; the city may at the must be singed or get a little wet; there is a difference between the two. It is to be hoped that peasants will write their own histories at some point in time; they will not become the object of the Other's History (Somnath Hoar, 1991:10; emphasis mine).

3.1 Introduction

The above mentioned paragraph somewhat metaphorically depicts the theoretical problem of Peasant Studies. Would the imagination of land relations attend to this (subjective) understanding? Or would it remain a top-down approach that does not take into consideration the subject; that continues to project subjects in terms of pre-given objective criterion; that reduces subject-subjectivity to mere to diagnostic markers; markers that reduces subjects into mere pre-capital subjects? How would Marxists attend to subjects? How would Communist Party attend to those (subjective) reasoning?

To initiate the present section/study an essay of Bandyopadhyay (2005) has provided the important guideline:

We have seen how, through opposite history, the santhal was turned into proletariat/haves not. S/he is not ready to occupy the place. S/he says,
what are you saying babu (my lord)! Rather you are a proletariat/haves not. I am attached with this jungle. I cannot be anything as that (2005: 29).

Why proletariat? Why this pressure of saying proletariat? Why cannot anything else be uttered? Why this uttering of a few words, words that only understood the private ownership over the land, words that did not try to set up an engagement with the fundamental mode of being of the santhal while attempting to understand land relations? Why this compulsion to use the term proletariat? To realize this complexity, it is necessary to rethink the history; yes history; history is too powerful. Our's 'we' gets created from History; gets created our self identity through History.

If we study the History of the peasant movement, we find a private ownership over the land is the organizing principle. Not only that; it has also been argued that the private ownership over the land is the organic demand of the peasant. The debate was, and is, regarding how to theorize the private ownership over the land. There has been no doubt that the private ownership over the land is the demand of the peasant class as a whole. It was given that the naturalized demand of the peasant is to attain the private ownership over land. But there lays a debate regarding how to theorize this organic demand of the peasant. There are two standpoints in this connection:

1) Private ownership over the land at the behest of the State or the Communist Party/Peasant Organization.

2) Struggle for the private ownership over the land under the leadership of the organic intellectual.

Peasant organization/Communist Party vs. Organic intellectual

This section is trying to understand the relation between the Peasant organization and the peasants. We would like to ask in this paper that the peasant organization is trying to understand the condition of the peasant from a certain epistemological position and
in doing so we ask: are they positioning themselves in the capitalocentric-orientalist structure? Could we say that the relation between the peasant organization and peasant is not the relation that accepts/acknowledges/respects the difference between the two? Rather is it understood from a particular relation; relation that subscribes the superiority of Capitalocentric-Orientalist position? Is it the relation of the One; One that legitimizes/valorizes only the History of the Capital/West? Put it differently; is it the Capitalocentric-Orientalist position that has been put forward by the peasant organization in the name of the peasant? Not only that we have never been asked ourselves why we came to believe that the private ownership over the land is the organic demand of the peasant? Is the demand of the private ownership over the land embedded in a particular history, culture and language of the West? We would also try to put down that the peasants, subaltern as peasant said something otherwise but it was always translated into the Capitalocentric-Orientalist epistemological settings.

We ask once again the oft-quoted question: Can the peasant as subaltern speak?

Tebhaga movement gave rise to the demand of the appropriation of the crops — two third should be with the direct producer; remaining one third of the share would go to the non-producer, usually known as the ‘jotedar’. But slowly raise the slogan of: land to the tiller — which gradually transformed into, got resolved in private ownership over the land. This research asks:

- Why the demand of the crop sharing is displaced into the private ownership over the land?
- Why the historiography of the peasant movement gets displaced into the private ownership over the land?
- Why the historians of the peasant movement invoke the subject of the peasant who desires the private ownership over the land?
- Does *Tebhaga* movement inaugurate the possibility of producing a new kind of subjectivity?
- Does it bring to the fore the importance of the Subject-Subjectivity that has long been unacknowledged in the party sponsored Marxism?

### 3.2 Permanent Settlement: New Order of Things

The idea of Permanent Settlement has come into existence as the consequence of a certain thought process of historiography. History is laden with theory. It has been shown by many (Chakrabarti and Cullenberg, 2003; Chatterjee, 2000) that History is not free from prejudice. The question is how otherness is measured by the History — History that ends journey in Capitalism? Again, critics (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009) have shown that *Otherness* is not acknowledged by Capitalism, though understood in a degraded sense; *otherness* is reduced to lacking other; *otherness* is measured in terms of the criterion (epistemological criterion) fixed by the Self.

Permanent Settlement is a specific thought of land relation, derived from the idea of Philip Francis. He introduced this concept in 1776. He was an economist, belonging to the Physiocratic school of thought. This school envisaged that agriculture is (for that matter land relation) the source of wealth. On the other hand, Industry was more important in the Mercantilist school of thought. Ranjit Guha said:

> Dow Pattulo, Francis, Law and Cornwallis were thus its leading champions in the eighteenth century. In spite of their doctrinal differences they had between them some common area of agreement in two respects: first, in conceiving of the Permanent Settlement as a *clean break* with what was the basic agrarian policy of the company's government in Bengal upto 1785; and secondly in justifying their alternative as an indispensable measure to ensure the right of private property in land ... a policy which was based on what they
called 'the principle of property' ... In other words, Bengali society was to be fashioned after the image of Whig England (1981: 12 and 17; emphasis mine).

The last line of this above mentioned paragraph is as if written in connection with the Communist Manifesto. It reminds us of that part, where it was written, "they compel all the races to receive the bourgeois pattern of production, otherwise there is the fear of the associated race of being wiped off, compel to receive those matters, which they call as civilization - i.e. compel them to become bourgeois. In short, the bourgeois class builds the world in their own image" (1977 [1848]: 10).

Permanent Settlement was trying to establish the capitalist idea(l) over land relations. The debate was Industry vs. Agriculture — where the capitalism takes place, whether the capitalist transition will be first in Industry or in Agriculture. Since Bengal is primarily based on agriculture, that's why Francis, Cornwallis etc proposed that the transformation be first in agriculture. Though Cornwallis used to think that agriculture and commerce endorse each other but "in this country, he said, more than any other agriculture must flourish before its commerce can be extensive" (as quoted in Guha, 1981: 171). According to Ranjit Guha,"The declaration of permanent settlement ... would act as a radical incentive to agriculture ... the way in which the doctrine of permanent settlement shed all its earlier ambiguities and within fifteen years emerged as a clear definition of capitalist aims in agriculture" (1981: 171). It was Cornwallis's effort, shows Guha, "to reform the old Bengali Zamindar by depriving him of his feudal privileges and to convert him, by education and the gift of property, into an improving landlord after the contemporary English model" (1981:171). Cornwallis
wanted to make Bengal's Zamindars in the light of western model. In other words, he was trying to make investment oriented Zamindars. As Bengal's economy is premised on agriculture so capitalist transition must come first in aquaculture sector and in course of time it would facilitate to develop industry. The objective of this radical transition in agriculture is to "make the native landowners free agents in the development of agri-capitalism" (Spivak, 1999: 87). Cornwallis thought that the precondition of making free agents was to secure in their property rights they would have no hesitation in investing their wealth in land" (Guha, 1981: 171).

Unfortunately this zamindar class failed in performing historical duty. Rather it was seen, ““the newly created landlords proved a parasitic class, living off the fruits of their tenants' labor without generating any serious attempt at improvement in return for their rents and privileges, or because, as happened extensively in the fifteen years after 1793, they were unable to manage their estates profitably, became bankrupt and had to sell their land on to others even less inclined to invest in agrarian improvement" (Arnold, 2005: 506).” Just as the body becomes weak due to want of blood, in agriculture too, there was observed a lack of capital investment. It is unquestionable that there has to a capitalist transformation in agriculture. The question is as to how to invest capital in a productive manner. But what was anticipated did not turn out to be that way. History proves that. Since the mid nineteenth-century, “a completely new marketing condition for agro-based products

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1 In an interview, Dipesh Chakrabarty once remarked, "as a historian I started work on the jute mill workers. ... Though I started the research from a Marxist perspective but traditional/classical/orthodox Marxism did not convince me. It seemed as if the very known people were dressed by someone in hired costumes and placed on stage as hero-heroines of French revolution, Russian revolution or at least Chinese revolution" (1998: 57). Here too, the Zamindars, as if, appeared on stage with the make up of Western Zamindars.
What generally is called as commercializing of agriculture. More specifically it should be termed as the “commoditization of agro-based products” (Chatterjee, 1984: 106). This commercialization of agriculture is a stage that came post Permanent Settlement. Under Permanent Settlement, many Zamindaris got sold in auction due to non-payment of tax in due time. A new class engaged at this place who compelled the peasants to cultivate cash-crops. Many have identified these kinds of activities as a gamble. In this system, loan was given in advance and agriculture was done on contract. But, the surplus received from this commercialization of agriculture was not productively invested. The chief aim was maximum profit. The transformation process faced obstructions. Not much growth was achieved in productivity. The living condition of the peasants saw no change.

There would have been no problem had the Englishmen (Sahibs’) performed their historical duty. Problems arose because the objectives were not achieved. Abusers started spreading that it was the conspiracy of the ‘Sahibs’. They don’t want our development. Had they wanted, they won’t have depended on Zamindars. Might be that their objective was ideologically noble, but the error in praxis did not happen without their knowledge. That is, capital has to be invested in land, and personal legal bourgeois ownership is necessary in this regard, and, as a consequence, productivity of the land will increase; or, the reverse – capital is necessary for an increase in productivity and for capital investment is necessary individual free-agent, who has personal legal bourgeois ownership on proper. There is no contradiction over ideal. The problem is at the level of praxis.

A few possibilities may be noted on basis of the aforesaid discussion:
(a) Had there been a direct agreement between the peasants and British, on one hand, the peasants would get private bourgeois ownership over the land, and they also sell
their produce directly to the British merchants, or, on basis of specific tax, could carry on their work of agriculture.

(b) There is no certainty from the Englishmen that whatever they will get as tax or the profit that they will earn by selling the crop will be re-invested in this country. In that case, the insufficiency of capital-investment in agriculture will increase.

(c) If the Zamindars and the Englishmen grow friendly terms amongst them, then the Zamindars can take this opportunity to deploy economy and illegal means to extract maximum rent from the peasants. One share of the rent, they will keep with themselves, and the remaining will be handed over to the British. This system means no possibility of any sort of loss/harm for either.

Most sociologists have expressed their views in favor of (c) and (b). They have shown that the peasants were losing everything and could not get back production-cost as they had to pay rent at high rate. This compelled them to take loans from Zamindars and “Mahajans” (money-lenders). This created a vicious circle. Englishmen-Zamindar-Mahajan – this three-faced attack compelled the peasants to leave agriculture and shift to other works, or commit suicide.

Partha Chatterjee (1984) show that the tax Act of 1858 and Right of Tenancy Act of 1885 brought this truth to surface that Bengali’s colonial State would give highest importance to keeping intact the main structure of small peasant-based agricultural system. Through this agricultural system is mainly developed in minimum necessary production, it got associated to the global market in the process of producing sufficient amount of cash-crop within the then limitations of production system. The Colonial State, hence, did not hesitate in curbing the unlimited power of Zamindari property in order to increase colonial exploitation in an age of ever-increasing international commerce. If peasants are evicted rapidly from land, grave problem will
then arise in law and order. With this fear in mind, the Colonial State has never attempted to bring about a huge capitalist shift in agricultural production system, especially the Pabna Rebellion of 1873 made it clear that any change in economic system compelled the Colonial State to record the legal rights of various small peasant classes more specifically … if can at least be said from Bengal’s instance that through the small peasants and share-peasants became victims in the Mahajan’s hands, their livelihood were only partially controlled by them. They were not fully driven by the Mahajans or Businessmen in their decisions regarding production.

Paraphrasing the argument would run as follows:

- Nature of Oriental Social-system characteristically agro-based/pre-capitalist/traditional.
- On the basis of Colonial employment, attempt to create liberal-capitalist chain.
- Failure of attempt, ominous nexus between feudalism and Colonial monopoly capital.
- Incomplete-partial capital development.

### 3.3 Marxist Evaluation

It is now important to know how Marxist philosophy has tried to understand partial capitalist development in an agro – based societies. I would like to draw attention to two words: agri-based country and incomplete (partial) capitalism. Besides, try to remembering Marx’s words in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. What he has said here about small peasants:

Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of the bringing them into mutual intercourse. … A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of villages make up department. In this way,
the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitude, such as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes (Marx, 1974 [1852]: 230-235).

Marx is, as if, a believer in uniformity and homogenous concepts. The social reality of small peasants is weaved not in uniformity, but heterogeneity. Not meeting at some specific production system, the characteristic of life is as if in being distinct from others and being faithful and respectful towards diversity. This diverse ways of living, living with diversity is nothing more than ‘a sack of potatoes’ to Marx. Marx’s field of research consisted of arranging social reality, which includes Industry – Bourgeois – Proletariat, in a capitalist setting and in critiquing that setting. In this arrangement, differentiation between mode of production and direct producer is as if the pre-condition for construction of political entity, historically a-priori. [Kantian a-priori, via Hegel, attained historically in Marx]. Detachment, and not attachment, is the pre-condition for being politically conscious subject. There is want of this condition in agri-based social reality. Attached, and not detached, relations. Society is pre-capitalist, traditional. In this setting proletariat or working class is the revolutionary class, the chief instrument in social-revolution. Small peasants are pre-political. But the class analysis of agri-based social reality on basis of historical materialism has first been done by Lenin, and then by Mao. It is now possible to analyze possible/ Employment of capital(ism) with agri-based social reality created the scope of class analysis. This employment is a must – historically true. Capitalist transformation is the obvious fate agri-based social reality. Land-relations have to be directed in context of the capitalist features. History imparts this lesson. It now has to be seen whether our becoming is in accordance with the ideal, the reason (1) for the deviation, how this deviation, how this deviation can be overcame, etc. – a critical analysis can continue over these.
Lenin and Mao had mentioned about the conscious political role of peasant class which like working-class, includes the small-peasants, or landless peasants as well. Entry of capital in agri-based social reality continuously detaches the small-peasants, like factory-workers, from the modes of production. Landless peasants increase like the workers in industry; small peasants too face the problem of detachment. Besides, capitalist transformation in agriculture, creates conditions favourable for industry. Agriculture takes the role of assisting in industry development. The materialistic situation of workers, small peasants and landless peasants is very near to each other, almost in the same level. So, peasant class is no more a non-political entity, they are political- providing assistance to the working class. Marx, in Eighteen Br in context of historical materialism, did not consider small peasants as political class. Lenin and Mao have shown why, in context of colonial differences. Class category has to develop in agri-based social reality. The simple calculation of historical materialism of the West is not fit for application in colonial situation. There is partial development of capitalism in colony. The objective of the Communist Party: to overcome this partiality and reach completeness. In view of this, the task of the Communist Party has the concept of an idealized specific totality. But this totality is incomplete. The Communist Party has this totality as historically determined fate; hence incompleteness implies a negative. Positive step would be to overcome this incompleteness and be ‘complete’. [Peasant Rebellion compelled the colonial State to record down the various legal rights of peasants. According to him, “if the speed of capitalism in colonial India is said to be incomplete, the reason behind this incompleteness is not just colonial capital or the failure of indigenous capital dependent on others, its reason may also be traced into the historical resistance of the subjected classes.” (Chatterjee, 1984: 133). Hence too, there is an idea of totality. But
this totality is incomplete. This lacking totality is positive to Chatterjee. Not negative, as the Communist Party thinks. Peasant Rebellion succeeded in resisting capitalist development. Capitalist stage is not the ideal for Chatterjee. Consequently, the result of this resistance is the success of this Peasant Movement. Secondly, Chatterjee’s theoretical structure is divided into influential class and subjected class. Class has been defined in context of power relations. Bourgeois-proletariat relation is directed in accordance with the impersonal economic norms. Importance in question or property. But in imperial social layout, property relation is incomplete, tied within the ruler-ruled relation. “The bourgeois was not actually wholly dependent on legal rights. To a large extent it depended on … the techniques of ‘traditional’, cultural, repressive and physical oppression”. (Chatterjee 1984: 111). Power relation is the main element, and to a large extent, that depends on oppression-repression – dominance without hegemony. Though this relation between the Zamindar and peasant class is much like the bourgeois-proletariat relation, but they are quite the same. Zamindar is not capitalist landowner. He holds the incomplete identity and this incomplete distorted image is, to Chatterjee, the moment of resistance.

### 3.4 Violence of the Self and Erasure of Difference

The disaggregated social reality of village life of does not match with the features of Capitalism. It is different; a reality other than the western- capitalocentric thought considered as pathological. Since it is considered as a pathological, it requires the expert advice so that the pathological state of condition has come to an end. Here the solution was permanent settlement. The expert/Colonizer advised that the Capitalist transition in agriculture is the only solution. The question remains how the legitimacy and inevitability of Capitalism is framed? The question of HISTORY and Historiography play an important role over here. The specific method of history
writings "remaps horizontal differences and existing hierarchies-discriminations in the social on to a complex 'temporality-verticality' - where existing temporalities are reduced to a 'step ladder verticality of space' and existing verticalities are reduced to 'historical and evolutionist temporality' (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009: 21).

It is much like an aggressive and hegemonising moment over the exceptional existence of the other. Let us give a day-to-day example. Let us see what Marx says in *Chronological Notebook*:

Member of the family – father and sons, or brothers, or cousins – outline on two to ten acres of land…. A man, with the aid of his minor (not yet adult) son can culture three acres or a little more of land (if the heads are more, than in that ratio) with help of a plough and a pair of bullocks … a husking pedal in a room inside the courtyard or towards the outside. This husking pedal’s room. This husking pedal means a huge mortar and pestle with which the paddy is husked. The mortar is usually a pot cut from the stem of tree, fixed in earth. The pestle is like the head of a hammer at the end of a parallel piece of wood. It is attached to a low post. As one or two women presses the other end of the pestle with legs, it moves vertically. As it hits the rice in the mortar, it gets husked. The general custom among all classes of Bengali people is to live jointly and use the properties of the family jointly. … The head of the family is the one who performs the duty of looking after the total property. Usually he is the most aged person of the main branch of the family. As per the customers, he is hypothecated to all the members of the family who have share in the property …. Usually these members live in their parents’ home. They are satisfied in meeting various expenses from family income. Besides, they get a little amount of pocket money as well. If there remains any surplus money after meeting
family expenses, head of the family invests it to increase the joint
property. (Chatterjee, 2000; 100 and 118).

Let's see what information we now get from oral history, after the written history of
Marx. [During field-work in Barddhaman district we have noticed joint labour in
agricultural works. Ausaruddin’s short stories (2004) too provide numerous such
small moments]. Earlier, agriculture in Jalpaiguri district was carried on in Commune
system. Though the commune system of the past is barely in existence now. Still, a
kind of joint labour can be observed in the agricultural works of rural Bengal. But, for
now, we will return to the commune system of the past. Let’s see, how this commune
system was organized in Barddhaman district. Let’s consider, during one cultivation
season, a small peasant is failing to perform his works properly. In such a situation as
this, it was seen that other peasants helped him in his work. They did not demand on
his crops in return. They will help in each other’s work, but will never demand
anything in return – Commune system was organized on basis of this ethical attitude.
On various occasion it was seen that no one would go alone to the field with their
plough, five to ten heads would gather together. This five to ten people would plough
one’s field on one day and another’s on the other. But each had personal right over the
produce. Besides, here was an arrangement called dharma-gola (holy granary). Here
each would contribute a share of his produce. Crops from this dharma-gola (holy
granary) would be given on credit to those whose year’s crop-produce failed. They
had to pay that amount of crop the next year, plus the due share that they usually
contributed per year. There was no question of interest on this credit.

From the above mentioned fact, at least this much can be said that this is a different
system of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of material goods and
services. In case one failed in his cultivation in any year, others helped him without
any exception of return of any sort. This kind of sharing is not guided by the SIGN of MONEY. Not a relation based upon the equivalence of exchange value. The value of co-operation/sharing wasn’t determined by the logic of capitalist market. The social landscape was not driven by the money-based economy.

3.5 Peasants in Movement – Peasant Movement

The existence of share croppers and small peasants were continually being threatened by the circle of profit, competition, productivity, efficiency, market, product and asset. Add to this, the famines of 1933, 1943 and 1944 played an important role over the peasant life. They have lost the secured refuge of the community life. Neither was there any avenue that led them to earlier position. The share croppers hence rose in a revolt that yielded in the Tebhaga Movement. Neither the landless labourers nor the small peasants, the Tebhaga Movement was triggered by the share croppers. The usual equation to the historians is much like this:

Tebhaga Movement = Movement of the share croppers

This research ask: Was the Tebhaga Movement a movement, in the narrow sense, of the share croppers only? Or, was there the possibility of formation of a peasant class comprising of the share croppers, small peasants and landless peasants? However, this imagination of a peasant class is not from the classical orthodox Marxist point of view. Neither does this class imagination fall in sync with the tendency among Marxist historians to identify the Tebhaga Movement as the primary stage of a peasant class consciousness. For the Marxist historians, this movement was a struggle for share of crops, a struggle of the share croppers, and not a movement for property right over the land. They traced the seeds of the development of a class consciousness in the Tebhaga Movement. This research wants to question the tendency of
classifying consciousness into initial, middle and final phases. It also wants to enquire whether there was at all any possibility of conceiving a class processes (understood in terms of production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour) through the Tebhaga Movement. In case we find that there was this possibility, then we ask: Why could not that possibility be materialised? This particular understanding of class is not theorized with respect to the capital in agriculture. Neither is it conceived in terms of possession or non-possession of property right over the land. It is not a classification of class consciousness on basis of the gradual advancement of consciousness. It is not a classification of reality on basis of some preconceptions; neither is it a premeditated creation of the subject. It is an attempt to produce the subject on basis of materiality. It is an attempt to create a class understanding on basis of the tensions of everyday life, and not some preconceived notion. It is a thought regarding class based on the moment of performance, appropriation distribution and receipt of crop. We have seen these processes as the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. In his “Tebhagar Diary” (1991), Somnath Hoar often makes no distinction between the peasants and ‘adhiyar’ s (share croppers). We should remember that he has documented in his diary whatever he has seen at that point of time. It may be that he had some preconceived notions regarding class conception in his mind. But as I went through the pages of his Diary, I felt that it was not some preconceived notion but the tensions of everyday real life that made him use the term peasant.

The share cropper and landless labourers are not some homogenous entity. There is a certain degree of overlapping. Usually the fixed tenants or rayat and landless labourers were found in agricultural works in colonial Bengal. As per statistics, the number of landless labourers in East Bengal was less. The fixed tenants or rayat were
more in number. But many such fixed tenants or *rayats* leased their own lands among the landless peasants against fixed rent/revenue. At times they set up relations with landless peasants on basis of share cropping. In southern and western parts of Bengal, share cropping was the dominant mode. So, we have seen that the landless labourers used to work either as share croppers or paid fixed rent/revenue to the fixed tenants or *rayats* and tilted their land. The same person (man) was landless labourer at one point of time, and again he used to be a rent/revenue paying small peasant at some other time. The pre-given idea of the subject in connection to land is thus expanding.

Binoybhushan Chowdhury mentioned that the landless labourers would not get profit if the demands of Tebhaga would be met (1997). This statement, first, accepts that the share croppers, landless labourers and fixed tenants or *rayats* are all separate entities. Besides, it has also been thought that the property right over the land is the original demand of the peasants. The pre-condition for class formation is the possession or non-possession of property right over the land. Just as it has been mentioned in the Communist Manifesto:

> By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live (1994:21).

The arrival of capital in agriculture in the British Colony and, in consequence, in agriculture has seen the creation of landless labourers in agriculture just as the proletariats in factories. Like the working class, these landless labourers too have no say over the means of production. As per this definition, the condition of the share croppers is not akin to that of the proletariats. They receive a particular share of the
agricultural produce. It was this share of crop centering which inaugurated the Tebhaga Movement. Binoybhushan Chowdhury, thus, is wholly justified in commenting that the demand for share of crop cannot be the demand of the landless labourers. Unlike the West, capitalism did not see a natural unfolding in this part of the globe. An unholy nexus has been created between feudalism and capitalism. This nexus has deprived the landless labourers of their appropriate daily wages and the share croppers too are not receiving their due share of crop. This semi-feudal system is also capable of ousting the share croppers from the land at will. So, it is quite obvious that these peasants too will want to have right over the land. Even if this is not possible at this point of time, they will at least demand that this process of ousting them from the land be stopped immediately. In this system, the small peasants or small scale fixed tenants will be compelled to get ousted from the land and thus it will be possible to form a ‘peasant class’ with these landless labourers, share croppers, small peasants and fixed tenants or ‘rayat’ s. It will be the foremost demand of this ‘peasant class’ to claim property right over the land.

*Right to land is the demand of the peasant*

But it is already observed that the landless peasants used to work either as share croppers or they used to take some land from the fixed tenants against fixed rent/revenue. Again that share cropper could later also be found to be working as landless labourer. The same person (man) was landless labourer at one point of time, and again he used to be a rent/revenue paying small tenant at some other time. The landless labourers too worked as share croppers. A question then arises as to why instead of demanding right over land the share croppers demanded right over the
share of crop? As they used to work as land labourers for the most part of the year, it would be much natural for them to demand their right over land.

Why did they raise the unnatural demand over crop share?

If we consider the landless labourers, share croppers and small peasants as totally separate categories, even then it would be natural for the share croppers to raise demand over land. Instead, they demanded their claim over crop share. Why so? One answer can be that they were not entirely conscious about their own demands. It was the duty of the Communist Party to make them aware of their rights and demands. But, in the absence of the necessary conditions, the Party could not properly air the right to land and, in consequence, the class unity\(^2\) of the land labourers too could not be realized.

Generally it is known as *Tebhaga* is the movement of the share croppers; it is the movement of the share croppers against the landowner or *jotedar*. This is what we usually learn from our history books. The question is: Who do we call as *jotedar*? We know that the owning acres of land are called as *jotedar*. But, as we find, the *jotedar*  

\(^2\) We are talking about the peasant class. We are trying to re-view the peasant class in context of crop share. We are attempting to see this moment of crop sharing on basis of production, appropriation, distribution and reception of surplus labour. On the other hand, the Social Darwinist Marxist stance has tried to understand the peasant class on basis of Capital(ism). The possession or non-possession of property has hence been seen as a necessary condition in their discussions (just remember Engel’s footnote in the *Communist Manifesto*). In this conception, the condition of the land labourers or share croppers is much like that of the proletariats (the development of capitalism has been understood in terms of colonial difference). These two are contradictory theoretical stances. The first one never defines the peasant class in terms of the European scheme of social evolution where capital(ism) is idealized. Diction of the movement has not been analyzed under the western-capitalocentric lens. The second theoretical stance has unabashedly held confidence in western-capitalocentric class conception and maintained that this is the only way to understand class.
was not only owner of large amount of lands, they were simultaneously money lender, seller of crops and even hoarder of crops. Why, then, the existing literature on production relations does not throw much light on the combined relationships between land, labor and credit relations?³ (Chattopadhyay, 1996)

To us, the term *jotedar* means owner of large piece of land. Andre Beteille (1995) has shown that this term *jotedar* has different bearings in northern and southern Bengal. In the districts of Barddhaman and Birbhum, the *jotedar* are never owners of land, leave alone big ownerships. They are rather a class that lies between landless labourers and share croppers. A reading of two anthropologists, mentions Beteille (1995), who have worked on basis of the surveys in Barddhaman district will further clarify our understanding of this class of *jotedar*. According to these anthropologists, even some time back most of the land was tilted by share croppers and the actual owner of the land had very little relation with the entire process of farming. The share croppers were known by the name of *jotedar*. Based on the information that we get from Abdul Rasul’s book (1989) *Krishak Sabhar Itihasa* (“A History of the All India Kisan Sabha”), it can be said that the term *jotedar* spread in Bengal after the Tebhaga Movement; Noting about the *jotedar* was mentioned in the book on Peasants’ movements (the one which was published in the year 1939 [Krishak Andolan [‘Peasants’ Movement’] M Ahmed edited]). (Beteille, 1995). We thus notice that the term *jotedar* connotes to something related to a large *jotes* (lands). This connotation comes from the definition of bourgeois in the Communist Manifesto, under the

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³ It might be recalled in this context that this *interlinkage* was discussed by Ashok Rudra (1985) in his work. But he too had, in the same manner, analyzed this reality on basis of the western-capitalocentric stance. This particular instance has been discussed in detail in Chakraborty and Cullenberg’s (2003) book.
influence of which the Krishak Sabha and Communist Party sees the *jotedar* as just property owner on basis of historical materialism. An understanding of the *jotedar* in context of the lived reality has never appeared to them as a theoretical problem because they are used to a pre-given and pre-conceived theoretical framework.

We can also notice difference between the Communist Party’s theoretical statements and its actual working strategies/mechanisms in context of the famines of 1933 and 1944, the latter being considered by historians as the foundation ground for the Tebhaga Movement. The stance adopted by the Communist Party during the famines has so been seen by Binoybhushan Chowdhury (1997) that apart from distribution of relief, the CPI had also carried on some political activities; the little supply of food grains that was still intact was under strict vigil of the Krishak Sabha so that it did not fall in the wrong hands... not all the stock holders were from outside. Many of them were local *jotedars* who, by virtue of the system of share farming, had maintained their control over vast stretches even during normal period; it is possible to increase income by creating artificial shortage of food though holding of food crops – in context of such a possibility, it was profitable for the rich to opt for agreement of crop sharing with the poor share croppers... a new ambience of resistance saw them get so brave that they forcibly snatched the crops piled in the stores of the *jotedars* Party workers realized the de facto expanse of the term *jotedar* from the day to day events.

The *jotedar* was not just the owner of properties. Workers of the party and Krishak Sabha had realized that those who appropriated the surplus labour would have right over its distribution. As the same person (man) was the crop seller and *jotedars*, so he would aim for maximizing his appropriation of surplus labour. As crop traders, their attempt was to maintain the supply of crops at a low price. For this same reason, the crop traders saw share cropping as a very profitable system. During famine, the crop...
traders (who were also *jotedars*) profited a lot. For this reason, the party workers realized from daily activities that the *jotedar* (who is also crop trader) will appropriate the surplus labour and distribute it in such a manner – such as creating crisis by minimizing the supply in black market or open markets – so that they can maximize their own profit. Needs of the greater community, the condition created by the famine, would bear no significance to them. The share croppers could not stand the fact that non-producers would sideline the actual producers and appropriate the surplus labour. Hence they looted the crop stocks of the *jotedars*. The Party was beside them. Second, the Party as well as the workers of the Krishak Sabha had realized that there was a certain difference between appropriation of surplus labour by the direct producers and that by the non-producers. There can be positive effect of distribution of the surplus labour appropriated by the direct producers in context of the greater community; not so in case of the non-producers. The latter’s distribution will be aimed at maximizing profit. There was as if no relation between the day-to-day realizations and theoretical frame. This movement for share of crops in line with the theoretical stance of the Party was just the primary step. In the final count, the fight for right to land was the most important aim. The question of appropriation of surplus labour, hence, never turned out to be a political issue.

Kunal Chattopadhyay (2006) mentions that during the winter night, about 500 peasants went to the field and started cutting crops with burning torches. He also sites such instances from the leaflets of that period, cut paddy in groups, raise volunteer teams (as above). In order to explain the difference between the pre- and post movement conditions, Parthasarathy Bandyopadhyay and Dayabati Roy (2005) comment that prior to the movement, the paddy would be stocked at the Zamindar’s place and they would be distributed at will by the people of the Zamindar. After
organizing, the first thing that the peasants did was to break this custom. Neither the Zamindar’s stock, nor that of any individual peasant, the crop would be stocked in some third place. This stocking place would be in the midst of the field. Peasants stocked the crop there and asked the jotedars to come and take his share of crop. This instance proves to us that the share croppers in Tebhaga Movement had created collective stocks.

Consideration of the Orientalist-Capitalocentric ideal as the pre-condition for analyses brings to fore the issue as to how deviated the social reality is from the idealized capitalist model. Following this model, several questions come up – such as, why the jotedars is not performed as a capitalist farmer, and so on. In other words, the peasant society is considered as the underdeveloped society as it lacks the features of Capitalism. That means, this society acts as a barrier to the development of the capitalist consciousness. It also poses a problem for social transition.

The struggle of the peasants in the Tebhaga Movement has been discussed in context of the (in)completeness of capitalist transformation. Each among the share croppers, small peasants and land labourers has been discussed. What remained from being discussed is their method of work. Costing of their method of work has been fixed from Orientalist-Capitalist viewpoint. Hence, the resistance of the share croppers, small peasants and land labourers did not receive any extra-capitalist language. Subalternity is what Spivak calls this namelessness. According to Spivak, “Subalternity became imbricated with the idea of non-recognition of agency” (Spivak, 2005:477). It does not imply that the subaltern is voiceless. For us, Subalternity is the foreclosure of some primary signifiers of language. Spivak does not do away with the possibility of the subaltern speaking. To her, subaltern agency is rather significant. But she has grave problem with an easy sketch of the subaltern agency. For Spivak,
subalternity of the peasants lies in their methodological perspective. The collective farming that was based on the ideal of sharing and the possibility of the creation of an ethical narrative centering this ideal from a Marxist perspective was foreclosed and unrecognized in context of the hegemonic symbolic (Orientalist-Capitalocentric) discipline. Hegemony of the hegemonic symbolic structure has never ever been secured. It is produced through the constant refusal of some internal nodal signifier; in this case – the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. The meaning generated through the signifiers such as profit, competition, productivity, efficiency, market, private property, etc. in context of the anchoring signifier named capitalism renders another signifier – collective farming – as nothing more than a primary moment of the erasure of semi-feudal remnants. As a result of this (Orientalist-Capitalocentric) understanding and in context of the perspectival experience of the movement for crop sharing, it became impossible to assign any other sign than capitalism to another nodal signifier – the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. Assigning this meaning is, in context of Orientalist-Capitalocentrism, actually a form of denial. Hence Spivak asks – Can the subaltern speak? Can the foreclosed figure of the peasant-class speak? To bring back the refused, denied moment which is foreclosed in Orientalist-Capitalocentric narrative, is a more difficult task of counter-hegemonic ideological production.

Analysis of the demands of Tebhaga Movement in terms of the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour could have opened up yet geography of reality. It could have brought in the realization of a possibility of the idea of non-exploitative society. Exploitation is that social relation where the direct producer is cut off from the process of appropriation and distribution of surplus labour, the latter being sole rights of the non-producers. In non-exploitative social
relation, such processes will be controlled by the direct producers, or they may also involve non-producers in these processes on basis of their joint decisions. The non-exploitative social reality is based on the ethical principle of sharing. The social entity formed on basis of the ideal of private property (one among the many features of capitalism) renders exploitation-based society valid. But here, such a non-capitalist social relation could not be conceived which would render non-exploitative social reality valid. Incapability of denying the demand of a capitalist symbolic discipline at the very level of concept has compelled us to read the extra-capitalist social relations in terms of capitalism. It would be pertinent to remember Marx at this juncture: “Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts (here, read Orientalist-Capitalocentric thoughts). Let us teach men [sic.], says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man [sic.]: says second, to take up a critical attitude to them; says the third, to knock them out of their heads; and existing reality will collapse” (1968: 23).

3.6 Conclusion

Let us recapitulate our story in a nutshell. Land relation has been seen in traditional Marxism as a feature of pre-capitalist oriental society. The capitalist temporal imagination sees the pre-capitalist as way behind the capitalist moment. In other words, it is understood as the lacking other of capitalism. It is as if a hierarchical relation with capitalism on top and pre-capital moment at the bottom. For the pre-capitalist moment to be considered developed, the only pre-destined way is to follow the capitalist model. England is an Ideal capitalist industrial society. The oriental society is pre-capitalist. Hence the white people of England took this responsibility on their shoulders (White man’s burden thesis) of civilizing and developing those who were lagging behind. This process is called as ‘civilizing mission. We got converted
into a British colony. One special moment in this process is the attempt to usher in a
capitalist transformation in land relations and bestowing the Zamindars with private
bourgeois legal rights over the land.

On the other hand, the stance based on the production, appropriation, distribution and
receipt of surplus labour nullifies this historicization. Several non-capitalist class
processes open up methods of production and distribution other than capitalism as
well. These are to be found dispersed in several exploitative as well as non-
exploitative class processes. Non-capitalist class processes can be exploitative in
some instances, but that is never tantamount to capitalist exploitation. What is
significant is the fact that a perspective/standpoint based upon the production,
appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour opens up the possibility of a
non-exploitative system beyond the exploitative and unequal distribution system of
capitalism.

Capitalism historicizes the production and distribution of non-capitalist goods and
services, and thus is created a pre-capitalist identity. This historicization produces and
reproduces the internal as external. Tebhaga Movement was seen as a primary
moment in the transformation process from the pre-capitalist to the capitalist system.
Hence were foreclosed some radical moments. This movement had created non-
exploitative, non-capitalist communist class system (third collective farm yard)
which, denied of any extra-capitalist language, lay abandoned at the level of method;
external despite being internal – it is inside yet outside. A ceaseless effort to keep it
outside only because it was inside. Once accommodated or included as inside, the
internal would no longer remain internal. Not just keeping aside the intolerable; it is
doing away with the intolerable.
This chapter was titled “private ownership over the land or crop sharing: Impact of History”. Though this long discussion it tried to see why the demand of crop sharing got displaced into a struggle for private property right over land. The demand of crop sharing is related to the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. The movement for private property right over land, on the other hand, was carried on with the right over private property at the fore. Exploitation is unethical in the first case. In the second, this question does not arise at all. The question of exploitation does not become any issue if we are driven by the idea of private property. Much important is the question of private ownership. Social reality based on private ownership and social reality in context of surplus labour creates two different geographical sketches of reality. The peasants wanted to proceed with their movement in context of surplus labour. But that avenue could not be realized. We have seen that opposition of capitalism by following the ideals of capitalism actually strengthens the clutches of capitalism.

Somnath Hoar, in his “Tebhagar Diary” writes, “hope someday they (the peasants) will write their own history; they will cease becoming the subject-matter of history for someone else” (1991: 10). Can the peasants write their own history? Either utter passivity or extreme activeness; either subject-matter of history or subjectivity – we have tried to go beyond this duality and attempted to assess if the peasants can write their own history.