
**History of Peasant Movement in North Bengal from Naxalbari
Peasant Movement to Peasant Movement of 2020:
A New Dimension**

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Abstract:*In an agrarian civilization, land was the root of all social structure. Economy of the society of North Bengal was depended on land. Naturally, village economy and state economy, social structure was totally depended on land system. Peasants were very important part under the social structure of North Bengal. They were being exploited by Jotedars, Zamindars and others officials of the administration. Naturally, they raised their voice against these sorts of oppression. Under this situation, Naxalbari armed Peasant Movement took place which was a militant peasant discontent of 1967 under the leadership of Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal and others. Charu Majumdar has written 'Historic Eight Documents'. They demanded 'Land to the Tiller'. They forcefully captured the surplus land of the Jotedars and Zamindars and distributed among the landless agricultural labourers. A good numbers of tribal peasants actively participated in the armed peasant Uprising of 1967. In 2020 again peasants of Punjab, Hariyana and others parts of India launched a powerful movement against the two agrarian bills of the central Government. More than hundreds of peasants lost their life to establish their demand in India. So, the question of land and the problem of the peasantry and their movement are not assessed properly.*

Keywords:*Armed Peasant Movement, Gram Rakhsya Bahini, Krisak Sabha, Landed Gentry etc.*

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Introduction

After the Land Acquisition Act of 1953 and Land Reforms Act of 1955-56, Jotedary system or Zamindary system abolished permanently. But the problems of the peasantry of Bengal as well as India were not uprooted forever. Jotedars and Zamindars of Naxalbari and its adjacent region captured huge cultivable land under their control either in the name of their relatives or in the name of their pet animals. So, Marxists scholars stated that history of the human civilization is the history of class struggle. Always he has to fight and he has to go and it is a continuous process. Only the opponent is changing. Some time nature vs. man and some time man vs. tradition or customs or system. ¹ Peasantries were not ever free completely in the past. Jotedars, Zamindars, Mahajan or money lenders all of them exploited the cultivators class indiscriminately and mercilessly for a long period. Even after independence of India there was no such remarkable change in the agrarian sector.

The historical food movement of 1959 and the election of 1967 brought the sign of historical change in the life of cultivators. So, the united front with the help of Bengal Congress formed the Government and Ajay Mukherjee became the chief Minister of the then Bengal. They had taken some steps to reform the land policy of the government but they did not end the problems of the peasantry intoto. Practically, there was still some landlords of Naxalbari who had hundreds Bighas of land. So, the backward class tribal peoples of Naxalbari raised their voice in the following Santhali poem-

Hadur Bijli Malkakani, Da Ai Karat

(It is thundering. Rain will come)

Disam Harkar Chamkaka, Larai Ai kayote

(Poor people are being impatient. Battle is in front)

Anam Jati Rangej Boiya, Daiya Akora

(Poor peoples are crying. All poor people be united)

Samaj Jati Rangej Boiya, Je Se Midupe ²

(There will be no discrimination. Equality will come)

Due to West Bengal Land Reform Act, a large number of Jotes of Darjeeling district and others districts of West Bengal were declared as excess lands or surplus lands under ceiling. But all these excess lands were not distributed among the landless peasants and agricultural labourers. Besides these, there was a ideological clash between two leftist Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M). CPI(M) highly criticized the parliamentary policy of CPI and CPI(M) emphasized on revolutionary policy. So, under such a situation a group of CPI (M) leaders like Saraj Dutta, Niranjana Bose, Asit Sen, Parimal Dasgupta, Pramad Ranjan Sengupta, Sunity Kumar Ghosh of South Bengal and Charu Majumdar, Souren Bose, Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Saontal, Khokon Majumdar, Shanti Munda of North Bengal were preparing

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for the revolutionary anti-parliamentary movement.³ The All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries that met in a plenary session from 19th to 22nd April, 1969 announces the official formation of the revolutionary party, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) based on the thought of Mao-Tse-Tung on 22nd April, 1969, one hundred birthday of Great Lenin. So, to them, it was a holly task for them to work for the development of the peasants and labour class.⁴

Research Questions

Naturally, some of the pertinent questions came to our mind i.e. why the question of land came to our forefront again? How was the nature and pattern of leadership given in the Naxalite Movement of 1967? Who were more benefited -the peasantry or the landed gentry of the region? Who were their actual class enemies-the Jotedars who had 10/20 Bighas of land or the Zamindars who had 1000/3000 Bighas of land or the Government? What was the condition of the next generation of Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Saontal and other Tribal leaders who played their prominent role in the Naxalbari armed Struggle? What was the role played by the members of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI(ML) and All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in the peasant movement of 1967? What was the role of China in the movement? What was the relation of the local leaders and the state leaders of the movement? How did land was transferred from the hand of cultivators to non-agriculturalists at the time of Naxalbari Uprising? How was their politics of killing the petty Jotedars of North Bengal as their class enemy? What was their principal limitation to run the movement? What was the consequence of inner conflict among the party members and their leaders? What was the nature and patter of the transfer of land the hand's of the agriculturalists to non-agriculturalists in the region? Why did the peasants of Punjab, Hariyana and others parts of the country were dissatisfied with the Agrarian Bill of the central government? How was the nature and pattern of peasant movement of 2020? The question of class enemy was not clarified by the true sense of the term. My intention is not to raise some pertinent questions but to create an academic atmosphere to fill up the existing gap of research on the theme from new dimension.

Naxalbari Peasant Movement

There were so many causes responsible for the origin and growth of Naxalbari Movement of 1967. Charu Majumdar, one of the leaders of the movement stated that *'we have, however, adopted the programme for a people's democratic revolution whose chief task is land reform in the interest of the peasantry. Land reform in the interest of the peasantry can take place only when we have smashed the power of the feudal classes in the countryside.'*⁵ To organize the

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peasant movement on the basis of armed struggle and they started to collect poor and landless peasants to set up militant peasant organization and they also collected arms from different sources to form liberated zones in the different parts of the country. Charu Majumdar told that '*A liberated zone is a peasant area from which all the class enemy have been ousted. To build a zone we require peasant armed power. Peasant must be trained with gun to face enemy equipped with arms. We will get arms by sudden attack on armed forces of the Government....*'⁶ Under such a circumstance, Naxalbari Armed Peasant Movement of 1967 took place raising slogans like-'Mao-Tse-Tung Zindabad', 'Land to the Tiller', 'Pipe of gun is the source of all power', 'Mao-Tse-Tung is our leader, 'Path of China is our Path', 'Tomarbari Amarbari, Naxalbari' etc. So, land became the principal elements of the Naxalbari Peasant Movement. The victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949 made tremendous impression on the Indian Communists. The tactics and strategies of Mao-Tse-Tung inspired a lot the Indian Communists to bring socialism in the country.⁷ Naxalbari Movement of 1967 occurred due to question of land and handful of rice and unconditional right on land which was reflected in the writing of poet Kamallesh Sen-

Akmutho Bhat (handful of Rice)

Ba Akfosoli Jomi I To (or land of one crop)

Chasir Sattikarer Jibon (Real Life of Peasant)

Ami Jani Na (I do not know)

Jibon Bolte Kobira Ki Bojhe (What is the definition of life according to poet?)

Kabyer Bhasa (Language of poetry)

Na, Jomir Upor Nisharto Adhikar (Not unconditional right on land)⁸

... Kamallesh Sen

That means the tribal people of Naxalbari area demanded handful of rice and pieces of land for one crop because land is the real life of peasant of North Bengal. Poet told that 'he does not know what is meant by life, either language of poetry or unconditional right on land'. But the peasants of Naxalbari neither get handful of rice nor unconditional right on land.

The West Bengal State committee of CPI(M) in its meeting dated 19-20 June 1967 decided to expel some of the members from CPI(M) including Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Souren Bose, Asit Sen, Saroj Dutta, Sushital Roy Choudhury, Parimal Dasgupta and others due to their anti-party activities. About four hundreds anti-party members were expelled from the party.⁹ A group of peasants were organized by Charu Majumdar to occupy land with arms on 03.03.1967, demarcating land with red colour flag and declared it as the land of the *Krisak Sabha* which was a sub-organization of CPI(ML). In the next two month such type of 60 incidents were found in Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansideoya police station. They started forceful land occupancy, plundering of paddy and other crops from the Jotedar's land.¹⁰ According to Souren Bose Naxalbari Struggle was started on 8th May, 1967. But the incident of Bigal Kisan was also important episode in this respect. Bigal Kisan himself commented on 24th May in 1992 in the *Ajkal* news paper that

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*'Gundas of Jotedars attack on my head with Lathi and fell down. News spread that hundreds of peoples under Jangal Saontal reached to spot with shouting. The gundas of Jotedars fled with fear. Jangal helped me a lot to occupy my land with stick. During that time, Jotedars lost their normal heart bit after hearing the name of Jangal Saontal. It was decided that they will prevent the Jotedars to enter in to the village. Jotedars of Kotiya Jote, Lalji jote, Chhoto Moniram Jote, Dhakna Jote, Prasadu Jote fled to town due to their fear. There was huge slogan 'Land to the Tiller'.*¹¹

Bigal Kisan also told that *'on 24th May we got news that police came to Barajharu Jote of Hatighisa. Thousands of cultivators were running and reached to the spot crossing big field and surrounded the field. Police came to arrest the leaders of the peasants to save gourd the interest of the Jotedars. We had decided to prevent the police to enter in to the village. Each and every peasants had taken either lathi or bow and arrows. Labours of the Tukuria tea garden also came to the field to support the poor cultivators. Police fled leaving their rifle to save their life. Inspector Sonam Wangdi was an officer of Naxalbari Thana died on 24th May, 1967 due to poison arrows of the tribal rebels.'*¹² Ananda Bazar Potrika has written that *'at least 4 police personals were injured on 24th May, 1967 when there was a counter attack of the peasants.'*¹³

The death of Sonam Wangdi added fuel to fire and police was then searching the leaders of the movement from village to village and tried to take revenge on 25th May, 1967 when the leaders of the movement organized a meeting at Prasadu Jote. Prollad Singh of Bengai jote was their leader as well as organizer of that meeting. Police intentionally opened fire which took eleven lives including two children and seven women.¹⁴ From then it was not movement it was 'an ideology', it was a 'theory', a 'principle', a 'path' and Naxalbari was not the village's name it preoccupied the preeminent position in the history of the peasant movement of the world. Jyoti Bosu, the then police minster had given order for judicial investigation. 28th June, 1967 radio of Peking declared that *'it was the front side steps of revolutionary movement by the teaching of Mao-Tse-Tung, Indian communist revolutionaries of village under the leadership of Darjeeling organized this movement.'*¹⁵ After one week on 5th July, 'People's Daily' published an article named *'Bharoter Akase Bosonter Bojra Nirghash'* and this article was like the bible to the followers of the Naxalbari Uprising. In this connection, Sankar Ghosh has written that *'the article became an inspiration with the Naxals and was twice reproduced in liberation, because 'a fundamental evaluation of the Indian revolution has been made by the International Communist Leadership in the article.'*¹⁶

Charu Majumdar had written a secret letter to his comrade in the following line-

*The result of West Dinajpur is good. Today's news paper reported that peasants of three places of West Dinajpur forcefully looted paddy. They informed me that the members of Communist party of Bihar may call us. So, we have to be more careful and prepare our comrade for future struggle.*¹⁷ Situation was more complex. Poor tribal peasants stopped to make their traditional intoxicating drink, instead of it, they devoted their time to make bow and arrows. They spited to show their hatred to Jotedars of the region. Kisan Chatterjee, a brilliant student of the University of North Bengal devoted his life refuting his bright career and he moved from village to village

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for the cause of the interest of peasant.¹⁸ So, illegal land acquisition, plundering paddy, threatening was going on from both sides. On 3rd March, 1967 nearly about 150 peoples forcefully plundered 300 Maunds of paddy from the house of Jotedar Joyananda Singh and Jotedar Gaisu Singh. Peoples were well equipped with arms, sticks and bow and arrows and others traditional weapons and the red flag of CPI(ML).¹⁹

The movement soon expanded many places of Bengal as well as some parts of India. In the year of 1966-67 total numbers of members of *Krisak Sabha* district wise Malda-27666, Jalpaiguri-26462, West Dinajpur-19495, Cooch Behar-19000, Darjeeling-6233.²⁰ What is interesting is that though the number of *Krisak Sabha* members of Darjeeling was less yet Naxalbari Uprising first started from Darjeeling. Why? The peasants of Gazole, Bamongola, Habibpur, Manikchak also started their armed struggle. The peasants of Malda occupied vest land and distributed it among the landless peasants and continue their movement.²¹ During this time, there were fictitious land, Jalpaiguri-4185.77 acres, Malda-3468.42 acres, West Dinajpur 3727.79 acres, Cooch Behar-4617.12 acres, Drajeeling-874.11 acres came to the hand of the Government. *Krisak Samity* rescued 16000 Bighas of vest land that were concealed by the Jotedars of seven thana of West Dinajpur.²²

On 12th October, 1967 Bara Jotedar of Balurghat fired five round bullets that created a hidden anxiety among the peasantry of the region. Finally, police arrested 6 Jotedars and seized two guns of the Jotedars.²³ Ganashakti published that 'yesterday 4 peasants were killed by police firing at Raiganj. At last, Pijush Das, a local leader handled the situation with soft hand.'²⁴ On 28th March, 1970 police slaughtered two cultivators at Kaliachak that resulted to the birth of joint search operation by police and the Jotedars of the region.²⁵ Police of Karandighi Thana physically tortured Kshetramahan Singha and sent to Jail. He was again brutally tortured by the police of prison then he died.²⁶ The movement also engulfs the parts of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling.

Role of CPI(ML)

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) played an outstanding role in the armed struggle of Naxalbari of 1967. Due to anti-party activities Charu Majumdar and others were expelled and the Darjeeling District Committee was dissolved and instead of its an ad hoc committee was formed which opened a new opportunity to Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal to set up new CPI(ML) party outside the Communist Party of India.²⁷ On 14th June 1967 a committee named '*Naxalbari o Krisak Sangram Sahayak Committee*' (NKSSC) was formed in a public meeting with Pramodh Sengupta, Satyananda Bhattacharya and Parimal Dasgupta as its President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively.²⁸

In West Bengal in the beginning of July, 1967 the Maoists started publishing a Bengali weekly named *Deshabrati* and after few month an English monthly '*Liberation*'. With these the Maoist propagated their ideas and ideology among the poor cultivators and landless labourers. In 1966

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another journal 'Anik' was published to propagate the doctrine of the revolutionary party and this group popularly known as 'Anik group'. This journal believed the line of new democratic line of Mao-Tse-Tung.²⁹ Internal Party conflict resulted to the birth of 'Kalpurush' also by Amiya Bhusan Chakrabarty, Promodh Ranjan Sengupta, Sunity Kumar Ghosh and Bimal Mitra.³⁰ The leaders of the CPI(ML) understand the importance of agrarian problems in the following way- *The Naxalbari Problem is not an administrative problem i.e. problem of law and order. It is fundamentally an agrarian problem-the most burning of all problems-the problem of land to the tiller, with which inseparably associated the problem of the stopping of eviction of sharecroppers.*³¹

Charu Majumdar understand the importance of revolution and stated that 'Revolution was the solution and nobody will help you to established your right on land so, it is your duty to establish your right on land forcefully not lawfully. Law maker is our enemy in the true sense of the term. We have to carry on our revolutionary movement by armed struggle.'³² Kanu Sanyal stated that 'we want an armed struggle not for land but for state power'. Thus it was argued -*Relying on the armed revolutionary strength, they established a new political power, i.e. the rule of the revolutionary peasants committees in their area....Such a political power, no matter in how small area it is established, is the embryo of the future people's democratic state power in India.*'³³

Role of China

In the Naxalbari Armed Struggle, China and its Communist Party of China (CPC) played an important role to gear up the movement. The Naxalbari peasant uprising was warmly greeted by the Communist Party of China. On 5th July, 1967 'People's Daily' published an editorial news entitled 'Spring Thunder Over India' and later CPC commented from the radio Peking in the following-

*A pearl of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in the Darjeeling area have arisen in rebellion. Armed struggle has been established in Naxalbari as well as other parts of India under the leadership of revolutionary group of Indian Communist Party(Marxist Leninist).*³⁴ Kanu Sanyal, Dipak Biswas, Khudan Mallik and Khokan Majumdar visited with Mao-Tse-Tung who advised them to snatch the rifle of the police through sudden attack. He also advised to build small armed squad for the struggle. Kanu Sanyal and others were trained about the use of explosive weapons by the people's liberation army.³⁵ China Communist Party severely attacked the CPI(M). The attack was also supported by the broadcasts from China radio.³⁶ In this way, CPC and China prepared the ground for the armed struggle of Naxalbari.

End of Naxalbari Armed Peasant Movement

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There were diverse of opinion among the leaders of the movement regarding the method and strategy of the movement within 1977. There was Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) group who did not join with the *Dakshindesh* group CPI(ML). On the same year in the month of April, West Bengal Committee of Communist revolutionaries (WBCCR), AIPC, CUC(ML), Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee(APRCC) agreed to form jointly Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries Marxist (UCCRI(ML)). Gradually, there were more groups came in to being due to internal clash and conflict. E.g. OCCR, CPI(ML), CCCR, CRGU, CRLI, TNT,FND,COCCPI(ML) and others.³⁷ That means they were not busy with their revolutionaries activities rather they were involved with internal conflict which ultimately weakened the strength of the party and resulted to open new branches.

Apart from these, we found so many limitations in their strategy. Firstly, they could not understand the nature of the Indian society-it was semi-colonial and semi-feudal. They thought the Indian ruler class were semi-Bourgeoisie and semi-feudal. Secondly, the boycott of the election which was not at all a wise decision by the leaders of the CPI(ML). Thirdly, they give up the close contact of the mass organizations like Students Union, Trade union, *Krisak Samity* and it was their great mistake. Fourthly, their slogan was 'the Path of China was our Path' which was wrong intoto because the socio-economic set up of China and India was to some extent different.³⁸ One of their leader though mentioned that the path of Indian revolution was different from the path of China yet most of them did not follow it. China's stage of revolution depends on its people but in case of India Bourgeoisie class was their enemy.

Finally, the movement suppressed by severe action by the police as well as the gundas of the Jotedars by the help of some black act like Defence of India Rules (DIR) and Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Active party members were killed by the cadre of CPIM. On 13th January, representative of Frontier informed that internal clash killed 1345 Naxals and 365 cadres of CPIM. Some time they were arrested and killed by severe torture and interrogation. All these were responsible for the end of Naxalbari Armed Struggle.

Peasant Movement of 2020

Now, the question is why again peasant movement of 2020? Is it politically motivated or is it valid demand of the peasants? What is reason of sacrificing more than hundreds of peasants? Who are responsible government or opposition party's leaders? Problem started when National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government decided to withdraw three Peasant Acts i.e. Act for trade and commerce of agricultural goods, Act for fixing value and service of agricultural goods, Act for essential daily commodities that resulted to the birth of a huge peasant discontent by the *Bharatiya Kisan Morcha* of Punjab, Hariyana, Uttarpradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Madhyapradesh. The movement started from June, 2020 and continued for a long period and gradually expanded to various parts of the country. On 25th November, 2020 the active workers

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of the *Bharatiya Kisan Morcha* marched to Delhi against these three acts, police used tear gas and water cannon to defuse the movement. The representative of the *Bharatiya Kisan Morcha* and the NDA government tried to stop the movement by mutual discussion on 3rd December 2020 but failed. 4th January, again there was talk but the discussion meeting was failed. Ultimately, after three hundred fifty eight days victory came and the NDA government withdraws three agriculture bills. The leader of the *Bharatiya Kisan Morcha*, Rakesh Tikayet told that '*it was said that the Krishi Bill cancelled it was good. But we do not move here until and unless it was banned and sealed permanently. Our sit down strike will continue. We will uproot our pillar when the acts cancelled and sealed forever.*'³⁹ Naturally, we found again and again the upheaval of the peasantry.

Conclusion

The Naxalbari Armed Peasant Struggle did not end the principal problems of the peasantry of India as well as North Bengal. So, where is the root of the problems of the cultivators? Nobody asked the question of the socio-economic condition of the next generation of the leaders of the Naxalite movement of Naxalbari. How are they facing problem to achieve their right on land now? What is their opinion in this respect? Who are more benefitted by this movement peasant or Jotedars or others? What is the ultimate consequence of this revolutionary politics or the politic of killing the Jotedars in the region? We know that only court has the right to take someone's life through legal procedure but who has given them the right to kill the petty Jotedars as their class enemy? Actually they are being used by the leaders of the Movement. What is their present position in the region? Who are badly affected by this movement? I am not policy maker and I have no power to solve these all problems. But it is my request to scholars, academicians and historians to give their attention on this theme purely from historical perspectives.

If we meticulously study the nature and pattern of transfer of land then we must see that day by day huge land is transferring from the hand of peasants to multinational company, land Maphia (brokers of land) and other non-agriculturalist. So, time is changing and their methods of exploitation are also changing. The peasants of Uttar Dinajpur, mainly Kanki, Kanjia, Asuragarh, Surajakamal and Chakulia and its adjacent region are signing on the agreement with company for at least two year instead of Rs.10,000 per year to cultivate *Makhna* (Fox Nut). What is interesting is that they are getting only 10,000 but the price of 1 Kilogram of *Makhna* fox nut fruit is more or less 20 lakh. As it is the ingredient of precious medicines so it is highly expensive. In this way, they are being deprived. Few months ago another incidents of land acquisition took place in Naxalbari area. So, again peasants occupied land forcefully at Naxalbari which reported by Uttarbanga Sambad on 5th January, 2023.⁴⁰

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