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**TEBHAGA STRUGGLE
OF
BENGAL**

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ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA

FOREWORD

Harkishan Singh Surjeet

THIS IS THE SECOND PAMPHLET IN THE GOLDEN Jubilee Series of our publications, and we propose to soon bring out more such pamphlets dealing with some of the glorious pages of the history of our organisation, the All India Kisan Sabha, which is going to complete fifty years of its service to the cause of Indian peasantry.

This pamphlet deals with the Tebhaga movement which the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (now, the West Bengal State Kisan Sabha) led on the eve of freedom, in 1946-47. It was a struggle that highlighted the oppression by *Jotedars* and the necessity of securing for the sharecroppers (known as *Bhag Chasis*, *Adhiyars* or *Bargadars*) the right to secure a proper share in the crop produced by their own labour. This movement not only inspired the sharecroppers of Bengal but became a source of inspiration to the sharecroppers in the rest of the country where the worst conditions of exploitation existed and even now exist. In some of these places, in Punjab, U.P. and Bihar, systems like *kankut* (appraisal) or *danabandi* existed under which the share of the landlord was decided even before the crop was ready.

The Tebhaga movement created a new consciousness, a new awakening and a new sense of confidence amongst the sharecroppers as well as the poor peasants. It was the biggest movement of its time in any State, led by the Kisan Sabha, in which many peasant workers rendered supreme sacrifice to add glory to the peasant movement and their great organisation, viz. the All India Kisan Sabha. If West Bengal today has the strongest unit of All India Kisan Sabha with a membership of more than 52 lakhs, the foundations for such a big movement and such a powerful organisation were firmly laid in those days by the heroes who led and participated in this great Tebhaga struggle.

(Continued on third cover page)

TEBHAGA STRUGGLE OF BENGAL

M.A. Rasul

THE TEBHAGA MOVEMENT OF 1946-47 WAS THE MOST important and extensive movement of the peasantry of Bengal before independence and the partition of the province. It was fought under the leadership of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha which was the Bengal branch of the All India Kisan Sabha. It was a struggle against the worst form of feudal exploitation in which peasants belonging to various categories had no rights whatsoever, and landlords dictated the terms.

BACKGROUND

Before proceeding with an account of the struggle, it is necessary to give an idea of the agrarian system of the province at the time.

As early as 1793, when Bengal was under the rule of the East India Company, the Permanent Settlement and zamindari systems were introduced in the province. The zamindari system was a system of statutory landlordism directly under the provincial government. The system stipulated that the zamindars (landlords) would pay the government an annual amount of land revenue, fixed permanently for each of them, without fail by the prescribed date. They would collect rent from their respective estates, the rates of which they were free to enhance.

The zamindari estates gradually underwent a process of sub-infeudation and several strata of landlordism came into existence under them.

In course of time a class of big landholders was born with

the rights of a tenant (*ryot*). They were called *Jotedars*. Their holdings were generally big and they could not cultivate their entire land themselves. So they leased out most of it to small farmers who were their sub-tenants and who cultivated their land usually on a share-cropping basis, called *Bhagidars* (or *Bhag Chasis*), *Adhiars* or *Bargadars* in different parts of the province, the last term being at present used in law. These cultivators were either landless or land-poor with no rights in the *barga* land, no written contract for their lease, no security of cultivation, and no permanent and hereditary right to cultivate. They could be evicted at the sweet will of the owners. The *bargadars* were among the most exploited and harassed peasants. Many of them could not maintain themselves with their miserable incomes from *jotedars'* land and had to work as wage-earners on others' land in order to supplement their meagre incomes.

WAR PREVENTS STRUGGLE

The plight of the rack-rented *bargadars* as well as agricultural labourers was noted by the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha at the early stage of its existence. Even prior to that, in 1928, when the kisans were being organised sporadically in different districts of Bengal, there was a kisan struggle in Jessore district (now in Bangladesh), in which the slogan of *tebhaga*, which means two-thirds share of the produce of *barga* land for the *bargadars*, was raised.

The manifesto of the Provincial Kisan Committee, issued in November 1939, formulated certain demands of the kisans, one of which claimed occupancy right for the *barga* land of a *bargadar* and at least five-eighths share of the produce.

The Provincial Kisan Conference of 1940 demanded abolition of the *barga* system and the right of ownership of *barga* land being conferred on the *bargadar* by law.

The Second World War intervened, and Bengal, being a border province, was on the war front and directly affected by Japanese bombing. Besides, large numbers of kisan leaders and workers were either in jail or in hiding. Mass struggle on this issue was not possible.

So the next Provincial Kisan Conference which was held in

1943, decided that one of the tasks of the Provincial Kisan Committee would be to organise *bargadars* and others for realising the *Tebhaga* demand. Similar demands were raised also at the Conference in 1945. It was only when the war was over that this question could be taken up in serious earnest for starting the movement.

ABOLITION OF ZAMINDARI AND BARGADARI

The Krishak Praja Ministry had been installed in 1937. In 1938 it constituted the Bengal Land Revenue Commission. The whole agrarian situation including the Permanent Settlement and the zamindari system were brought within its scope. The Commission submitted its report to the Government of Bengal in 1940. It recommended, among other things, the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and the zamindari system. It also recommended the abolition of the *barga* system, pending which the *bargadar* would get two-third share of his produce and make over the other third to the owner. This provided a very important argument in favour of the *Tebhaga* demand.

The World War II ended in Europe in May 1945. By that time the Pakistan slogan of the Muslim League had gained wide and increasing popularity among the Muslims of Bengal who were in a majority of the population. The majority was even in the case of the peasant population. A Muslim League Ministry had already replaced the Krishak Praja Ministry of A.K. Fazlul-Haq during the war period.

The election to the Legislative Assembly was in the offing. It came about in February 1946 when the Muslim League with its Pakistan demand swept the polls, as far the Muslim constituencies were concerned.

Communal tension was growing among Hindus and Muslims. Riots broke out in Calcutta on August 16, 1946, on a horrendous scale. Mass killings were perpetrated on both sides. The life of the city was totally paralysed for five days, after which the public transport system resumed in the day time only. Restoration of normal condition was possible after quite some time.

This was followed by large-scale riots in various parts of the country. In October 1946 riots broke-out in Noakhali

district in East Bengal, where the Muslims were in a large majority of the population.

In its desperate bid to save itself from being swept away by the tempestuous march of events in India in wake of the Second World War, British imperialism was communalising politics and instigating communal riots in different parts of the country. The Tebhaga movement which united the peasants of all communities in their common struggle against their feudal exploiters was at the same time, a powerful rebuff to the divisive policies of imperialism. It represented general post-war mass upsurge of the enslaved peoples against their imperialist masters and their local allies and collaborators.

HASNABAD

Hasnabad, a village in Comilla district (now in Bangladesh) near the border of the riot-affected Noakhali district, with other villages surrounding it, was traditionally a strong base of the peasant movement.

Long ago the Comilla District Kisan Sabha announced a "Kisan Day" for intensifying its struggle against the merciless exploitation of the peasants by zamindars and moneylenders. This led to a tense situation and posting of armed police at Hasnabad. As early as in February 1932, a rally of 15,000 kisans was held there on that day. It was fired upon by the police, killing five villagers and injuring many more. The martyrs did not lay down their lives in vain. The village and the area became a bastion of communal amity based upon a powerful sense of class unity.

About a dozen villages clustering round Hasnabad gave shelter to about 3,000 Hindus—men, women and children fleeing from their homes in riot-torn Noakhali villages. They were rescued by both Hindu and Muslim kisan leaders of the area, who arranged for their shelter in both Hindu and Muslim homes. A strong kisan volunteer force was organised to guard the villages even at night so that the life of the refugees, as of others, was absolutely secure. They could move about freely in these villages. Necessary relief was also secured from the government and systematically distributed by Kisan Sabha

workers.

As for medical relief, at first the People's Relief Committee of Calcutta sent its medical squads with necessary equipment, and later a hospital was opened temporarily by the government at the instance of the Kisan Sabha.

This glorious unity of the two communities gave inspiration to kisan workers in the districts which were involved in the Tebhaga struggle a few weeks later, and that too in spite of provocations by *joiedars*.

Many well-meaning people questioned the advisability of starting a kisan struggle so soon after the communal riots, but the provincial kisan leaders were convinced that, despite the fact that communal frenzy had made many people go mad, the powerful anti-communal class sense would withstand and overpower the communal virus when the Tebhaga struggle was launched. Events proved that the decision of the Kisan Sabha was correct.

ADHIAR MOVEMENT

A few years before the Tebhaga movement, the poor *bargadars* used to get only the half share of their produce, and they hardly ever had sufficient food to sustain themselves and their families for the whole year. So, generally, they had to take grain loan from the owners of their *barga* land for the lean months, particularly the sowing season.

They were charged high rates of interest—at least 50 per cent. The loan was advanced for a few months before harvesting when it was to be repaid in grain, both capital and interest. Discontent against the exorbitant rate of interest among the *bargadars* was accumulating over the years.

This was especially seen in the northern districts like Dinajpur. In November 1939, the Dinajpur District Kisan Sabha Committee discussed the issue with the *adhiars* (*bargadars*) who too readily agreed to the proposal for an anti-usury struggle. The idea of a struggle spread like wildfire, far and wide in Thakurgaon sub-division of the district and other places.

The movement gripped the *adhiars* in such a manner that

thousands enrolled themselves spontaneously as Kisan Sabha volunteers—men and women, old and young. This response came mostly from the Rajbanshi kisans. As usual, the police soon appeared on the scene in favour of the *jotedars* who resisted the movement stoutly. But the enthusiasm and militancy of the *adhiars* forced the sub-divisional officer (SDO) to intervene. A tripartite agreement was reached between the *jotedars*, the Kisan Sabha representing the *adhiars* and the SDO representing the district administration. The agreement provided that the grain loan taken by *adhiars* would bear only 25 per cent interest and that the seed advanced would be interest-free.

As for the location of the *khamar* (threshing floor) where the harvested crop was stacked and threshed, whether it was to be the *jotedars'* or the *adhiars'* place, would be decided by a committee to be formed with representatives of both parties and the SDO in case of a dispute.

A public meeting of 10,000 people, mostly kisans, carrying lathis, gathered at the call of the Kisan Sabha with its red banner flying aloft. The SDO himself addressed the meeting to explain the terms of the agreement.

This victory was of great significance for the *adhiars*, whose morale now ran high, in their future struggle for Tebhaga.

CALL FOR TEBHAGA STRUGGLE

When the kisan leaders found that large sections of *bargadars* were eagerly awaiting a call for struggle for their Tebhaga demand and that their mass militancy was at a high pitch, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Council decided, in September 1946, to launch the movement in the ensuing harvesting season—November 1946. An announcement was made to that effect.

The decision was taken in a situation when memories of communal riots in the country had not yet completely erased. The *bargadars* and agricultural labourers, who were the main force of the struggle, displayed remarkable unity, courage and discipline as soon as the signal for the start was given. The movement began in 13 districts on a large or small scale, particularly in areas where class exploitation and oppression of

bargadars was most pronounced and large scale landowning resulted in sharp polarisation between *jotedars* and *bargadars*.

These characteristics were most notable in three northern districts, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri, and two western districts, 24-Parganas and Midnapur. Rajbanshis were concentrated in the northern districts and were most militant fighters, both men and women.

Harvesting began with cutting of the paddy crop and gathering and stacking it at the *bargadars'* *khamars*.

When the Kisan Sabha announced that the Tebhaga movement would be launched in the harvesting season, the *jotedars* apparently did not take it seriously. They could hardly believe that the illiterate and backward peasants would be able to unify themselves into a cohesive force and start such a mighty struggle. They also banked on the atmosphere so widely surcharged with communal tension. Hence they were not much prepared for a confrontation with their *bargadars*.

The first stage of the movement—cutting the crop and stocking it at their *khamars* instead of at the *jotedars'* as they had generally done so long—passed off smoothly and peacefully, without any organised opposition from the *jotedars* as a class. The Muslim League Ministry, headed by H.S. Suhrawardy, felt that the main demands of the movement were not unjustified. It therefore prepared a Bill, called the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Regulation Bill, and published it in the official *Calcutta Gazette* of 22nd January, 1947.

The provisions of the Bill stipulated that the *bargadar* would retain two-thirds of the produce, if he bore all the expenses of cultivation himself, and that eviction of a *bargadar* would be stopped (of course with loopholes left in the Bill). Thus in principle the two main demands of the *bargadar* movement were embodied in the Bill.

After the first stage of the struggle was more or less over, the *jotedars* as a class began to feel that it was the time they asserted their rights against the interests of the *bargadars* which were conflicting. They tried to rally their forces, all *jotedars* big and small. It was not very difficult for the big *jotedars* to draw most of the small *jotedars* to their side, since the latter also felt that their interests suffered equally adversely by the movement.

When the Bargadars Bill was published in the official Gazette, they felt alarmed. They were sure it would soon be adopted by the Assembly and jeopardise their interests.

POLICE AND JOTEDAR OFFENSIVE

The *jotedars* put powerful pressure on the government and wanted the Bill to be withdrawn and scrapped.

The *jotedars*, especially Muslim *jotedars*, were the main social base of the Muslim League Ministry. Hence it was not possible for the Ministry to turn down their demand and proceed with the Bill. It did not, however, withdraw the Bill, but, instead, simply kept silent over it, without introducing it in the Assembly.

When, later, Comrade Jyoti Basu, a Communist MLA, asked Prime Minister Suhrawardy in a private talk as to why the Bill had not been introduced, he replied frankly that before publishing it he had no idea that the *jotedars* were such a powerful force to reckon with.

There is no doubt that the *Jotedars* scored their point and that the government had to yield to them. Within a few days the government issued a secret circular instructing the district administrators to resort to all sorts of repressive measures and violent action to scotch the Tebhaga movement. *Jotedors* also began their offensive against the *bargadars* equally ferociously with the help of their goondas and the police.

Large numbers of police camps were set up in the strongholds of the movement, with armed forces moving about.

The *jotedar* offensive was to carry away the crop stacks from the *bargadars' khamars* to those of the *jotedars* for which they engaged gangsters and took police help. In many cases policemen themselves did the job for them. Whenever the *bargadars* resisted, as they did in most places, they were attacked and beaten up without mercy and even fired upon. The government was now bent upon crushing the movement only to protect *jotedar* interests.

The peasants, however, put up a determined and heroic defence of their interests in a number of places. The Tebhaga demand was so deeply entrenched in their minds that they were

prepared to pass through any ordeal while pushing back the offensive of the *jotedars* and the police.

In one of the villages in Nilphamari sub-division of Rangpur district, armed *jotedars* went to a *bargadar's khamar* to carry away the gathered crop. A large number of peasants, led by Bachcha Munshi and Tatnarayan Barman, local kisan leaders, collected to resist the offensive. The *jotedars* fired upon the gathering, killing Tatnarayan.

PROTEST AGAINST MURDER

The kisans' anger was inflamed and they were about to take revenge on the guilty *jotedars*, when some local leaders asked them to desist, lest it lead to a communal riot, the *jotedars* being Muslim. The *jotedars*, however, got panicky and fled from their villages.

A protest demonstration of the Kisan Sabha against the murder followed. Thousands joined it. Led by district kisan leaders like Dinesh Lahiri and Mani Krishna Sen, who had come out of their hide-outs, it ended in a big rally in Nilphamari town. The mood of the kisans was such that the police did not dare to touch the underground leaders who were well known to them. They addressed the meeting and then quietly escaped to safety.

The Tebhaga struggle was most intensive in Dinajpur district, especially in Thakurgaon sub-division. It was equally extensive and brought within its purview most of the *bargadars* and agricultural labourers, and large numbers of other kisans who supported them. It threw up many kisans as their leaders. They were mostly Rajbanshis and Muslims, and also some tribals. Among them were Kamparam and Pastaram, and women peasant leaders, Jaimani and Bhandani.

In a January 1947 night the police raided a village in the Chiribandar area of Dinajpur and arrested and took away Samiruddin, an agricultural labourer, from his house. His sister protested and asked the police why and where they were taking away her brother. The police answered by assaulting her and one of them hit her with the point of his bayonet, thus injuring her foot.

The villagers gathered in the field from where Samiruddin was taken. The shouts raised by them brought others from the nearby villages. Among them was a Santhal youth named Shibram who, as usual in such cases, came with his bow and arrow.

The police killed Samiruddin in cold blood. This sight was intolerable for Shibram, who instantly shot his arrow which flung into the chest of the killer and he fell dead. Another policeman shot Shibram dead with his rifle.

The grip of the movement was so strong that it became almost a part of the kisans' being. They were undaunted in the face of the repression let loose against them by the enemy.

A kisan meeting was held at a village about three miles from Thakurgaon town at a very short notice. It was addressed by a kisan leader from the provincial centre. Nevertheless, the meeting was attended by not less than 10,000 people. It was presided over by a local kisan leader, Niamatullah by name.

The provincial leader was also to speak at a special (general body) meeting of the Kisan Sabha workers and volunteers to be held after their night meal. At least 400 of them were present. The cooking had to be done yet. So it was only after midnight that this meeting could be arranged. But no hour was unearthy for the militant kisans and activists engaged in a grim battle against the enemy.

A few days later a kisan demonstration was staged at Thakurgaon town and the police opened fire on it, when five people were killed. One of the wounded persons was Niamatullah who was arrested and taken to hospital. One of his legs had to be amputated in that condition. When he was released from jail, he would not go home straight, without first visiting the Kisan Sabha office at Thakurgaon. This is how they loved their Sabha.

At Thumnia village in the same district, police firing took a toll of four kisan lives.

KHANPUR TRAGEDY

The most tragic and atrocious incident of the Tebhaga struggle of 1946-47 occurred at Khanpur village in Dinajpur district. It accounted for 22 kisans lives, who were killed in

police firing at one place and at one time. Of them 14 died on the spot, and eight others in Balurghat hospital where the wounded were removed.

This happened on 20 February, 1947. Early in the morning three truckloads of armed police were sent to the village to arrest some kisan leaders who had taken shelter in the village. The villagers led by an agricultural worker, Chiarsai Shaikh, prevented them from entering the village. They dug a trench across the road and placed the trunk of a tree lying nearby across the road. While some of them resisted the police with their crude arms, the alarm that was sounded brought in large number of people from the neighbouring villages, and they joined the fray. There were men and women, Hindu, Muslim and Adivasi kisans participating in it.

Chiarsai continued his fierce fight like a wounded tiger, as the police were reported to have remarked later, even when he was injured in the firing. At last he succumbed. Some of the fighters cut the tyres of the trucks. Altogether 22 were killed, one of them by a *jotedar* who fired his gun from his house.

The information came to the Kisan Sabha in Calcutta in a telegraphic message. The same night we started for Khanpur—I representing the Kisan Sabha and Dr. B.K. Basu on behalf of the People's Relief Committee which packed plenty of medical supplies and a good quantity of tinned food and fruits. A reporter of *Janayudha*, CPI weekly in Bengali, accompanied us.

Next morning we reached Balurghat town and left for Khanpur in two bullock carts waiting for us there. The distance was about 13 miles and there was no bus service in those days, nor a *pucca* road. We had hardly reached midway when a police jeep intercepted us and took us back at the District Magistrate's order, they said. Shortly after we had returned to Balurghat, we three were served with order to quit the district for 60 days. The bullock carts, however, proceeded to their destination without us.

Later the Kisan Sabha workers informed us that in Khanpur the dead bodies had not been delivered to their respective families but put in one big grave in the bed of the creek of the river Atrai, flowing through the town just on the outskirts of

Balurghat. The kisans showed exemplary unity—the unity of kisans, men and women, Hindu, Muslim and Adibasi.

Some days later, Prime Minister Suhrawardy had to admit in his Assembly statement on the Khanpur tragedy that the police fired 121 rounds, killing 20 kisans, all at one place.

Following the incident the whole area was turned into a police camp. Police for a pretty long time made indiscriminate arrests, torturing unarmed kisans, forcing the kisans to leave their homes and take shelter outside the disturbed area.

JALPAIGURI KILLINGS

But Dinajpur and Rangpur did not cover the whole story. The movement had spread far beyond their borders. The Jalpaiguri *bargadars*, many of them tribals, joined the movement belatedly. They did not lack in courage and militancy, but they were not well organised. Their leadership was also weak.

In spite of this position the peasants decided to go into action and carry away the gathered crop from the *khamar* of a big *jotedar* in the Mal Area on 1st March. The police were camping in the *jotedar's* house. When the kisans were carrying the crop, the police fired on them, killing four people.

Similar action was taken by the *bargadars* at Mangalbari village in the Meteli area on 4th April. Here too it was a big *jotedar's khamar* from where the crop was being taken away. The police camping in the *jotedar's* house killed nine kisans.

In 24-Parganas district there were many big *jotedars* who were notorious for fleecing their *bargadars* and agricultural workers. These landless people were an overwhelming majority of the population.

The Tebhaga movement was organised there. A police camp was set up at a big *jotedar's* place in Bermajur village under Sandeshkhali police station where his employees were in charge. The crop was stacked at the *jotedar's khamar*. When on March 8 the *bargadars*, after giving notice to the *jotedar's* men, began threshing the crop, the police fired on them and killed five men on the spot. Alarm was sounded at once. The whole area was set ablaze. Thousands of peasants rushed to the spot of the killings from all directions. The sight frightened the

police and the *jotedar's* men, who escaped the wrath of the kisans before the people could gather there.

WEAKNESS OF THE MOVEMENT

The combined offensive of the government and the *jotedars*, equipped with firearms, made it impossible for the poor and practically unarmed kisans to withstand their attack for a long time despite their unsurpassed militancy, bravery and spirit of self-sacrifice. The political situation with the division of the country becoming a certainty, made it difficult to continue the struggle.

When the provincial leadership reviewed the struggle, it also spotted its other defects and shortcomings. They realised that a kisan struggle of the dimension of the Tebhaga struggle should have been planned with greater care, circumspection and better preparation before it was launched. An organisation of trained volunteers was most essential for the defence of the fighting peasants against the enemy offensive.

The most important factor which should have been taken into account was the possible role of the numerous small *jotedars* who might be drawn into a compromise with some concessions and thus neutralised. For this purpose, of course, their *bargadars* ought to have been given political education and convinced that this step was vital for the weakening of the big *jotedars* and their offensive as well as for the success of the struggle.

“TEBHAGA CHAI”

The extent of vicious police offensive can be gauged from the fact that 72 of the 73 people were killed by the police; of these 39 in Dinajpur district alone. Thousands more were wounded. Altogether 3,119 people were arrested, 1,200 of them in Dinajpur alone. Innumerable police camps were set up in different districts, Dinajpur alone accounting for 35. The police opened fire 22 times and raped many kisan women in several districts. Prime Minister Suhrawardy admitted in the Legislative Assembly that at Khanpur alone his police fired 121 rounds and

killed 20 people.

The fighting kisans, both men and women, displayed magnificent courage and heroism. They did not flinch because of firing and killing by the police. Bhandani Barmani, a young Rajbanshi peasant woman, snatched away a rifle from a police official who was then kept confined in a room which was guarded the whole night by Bhandani herself. The official was let out only when an important kisan leader came the next morning and asked her to do so.

There were cases of policemen patrolling village roads in the struggle areas when kisan women threw chilli powder or even dust into their eyes. Then they had to be dragged away by others.

The Tebhaga struggle had left an abiding impact upon the life of the *bargadars*. When one of the peasants, mortally injured at Khanpur while fighting against the police, was about to die in hospital and asked by the attending doctor if he wanted anything, he raised his feeble voice: *Tebhaga Chai* (I want Tebhaga). A little later, he breathed his last, leaving his words to ring in the ears of his fellow kisans and to inspire them to carry on the struggle against exploitation and for a better life till victory was achieved.

INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

The Tebhaga movement of 1946-47 thus came to a close. Although there was no acceptance of the demands, the sacrifices of the peasants who bravely fought for their cherished demands, many of them even laying down their lives, did not go in vain. The movement had a galvanising effect on raising the consciousness of the peasants. The peasants became conscious of their rights. The atmosphere in rural Bengal was not the same as it was before the struggle was launched. The Tebhaga struggle instilled confidence into the kisans and a sense of better organisation for future struggles.

Big and important events followed the movement within a few months. On August 15, 1947, India attained national independence and both India and Bengal were partitioned; a substantial part of the Indian territory became Pakistan which

came into existence as a new independent state.

As a consequence of the partition the whole situation in Bengal also changed. The Muslim League Ministry ceased to exist in West Bengal, which remained in India after the partition of Bengal. In its place was installed a Congress Ministry headed by Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, who was replaced by Dr. B.C. Roy a few months later.

In 1949, the West Bengal Government had to take into account the Tebhaga struggle and issued the Bargadar Ordinance giving some concessions to the *bargadars* regarding their share and other demands. There was also provision against eviction; but protection of *bargadars* against eviction was not guaranteed, it was conditional.

The ordinance was enacted in 1950. In October 1952, the Bargadar Act was amended by another ordinance. But these did not satisfy many of the legitimate demands of the *bargadars*, since the Congress Ministry always yielded to *jotedar* pressure.

At last, in 1953, the Estates Acquisition Bill was introduced by the government in the Legislature providing abolition of the Permanent Settlement and zamindari system which had come down from 1793. The Bill also provided the take-over by government of all zamindari estates and introduce the ryotwari system. The *bargadari* system, instead of being abolished, was allowed to continue as before, thus maintaining semi-feudal relations in land while encouraging the capitalist system of farming, if rather half-heartedly.

But more significant than the immediate gains of the Tebhaga movement was the lasting and far-reaching impact it had on the future struggles of the peasantry in India. It made the peasantry aware of its united strength. Describing the transformation brought about in the peasant masses of the region by the Tebhaga movement, the special correspondent of *Statesman* wrote, in its March 19, 1947 issue:

“Dumb through past centuries, he is today transformed by the start of slogans. It is inspiring to see him marching across a field with his fellows, each man shouldering a lathi like a rifle, with a red flag at the head of procession. It is sinister to hear them greet each other in silence of the bamboo groves with clinched left fists raised to foreheads and a whispered Inqilab

comrade."

The strong peasant movement in West Bengal today, has its base in the Tebhaga movement and it has truly inherited the militancy of the Tebhaga heroes.

The Tebhaga movement was the true precursor of the Telengana movement, which added a glowing chapter to the annals of peasant struggles in India.

The Tebhaga movement taught the peasants in U.P., Bihar, Punjab and other parts of the country to fight for their tenancy rights. Like Telangana, and before it, it was a movement which had a countrywide impact. The Tebhaga movement and its peasant fighters and martyrs will continue to inspire the Indian peasantry in all its struggles against its oppressors and for its rights and for a better future. □

M.A Rasul, Vice-President, All India Kisan Sabha and one of its oldest surviving leaders, was at that time too, one of the foremost leaders of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha and an important functionary of the All India Kisan Sabha. As such, he has direct experience and first-hand knowledge of that movement, and it is from his pen that this account of the movement follows.

It is hoped that this pamphlet will help the Kisan workers and organisers to understand that the Kisan movement has to be built by organising struggles and by facing repression from the landlords and the Government, and that there is no short-cut to this arduous course of struggle and sacrifice, if the struggle is to be carried forward successfully to the final victory of the agrarian revolution in India.

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TO commemorate the Golden Jubilee Year of the All India Kisan Sabha, the Central Kisan Council has planned to bring out a series of pamphlets which will highlight the various important movements conducted in various States under the banner of the Kisan Sabha—movements which assumed national significance. This will help the Kisan cadre to understand the important role which the AIKS has played in awakening the Indian peasantry.

The first pamphlet in the series, *Revolt of the Warlis*, by Godavari Parulekar, Vice-President, AIKS, is already on sale. The second pamphlet *Tebhaga Struggle in Bengal*, written by Abdullah Rasul, Vice-President, AIKS, is now in your hands.

The other pamphlets are :

—on the struggle of the Punnapra-Vayalar in Kerala, written by V. Achuthanandan, member, CPI(M) Polit Bureau, who himself was a participant in that struggle ;

—on the historic Telangana armed struggle, written by M. Basavapunnaiyah, one of the leaders of that struggle and a member of the Central Kisan Council of the AIKS and of the CPI(M) Polit Bureau ;

—on the 1959 anti-betterment levy struggle of Punjab, written by Harkishan Singh Surjeet, member, CPI(M) Polit Bureau ; and

—on what the AIKS stands for, by Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

We are making efforts to get pamphlets written on other movements as well.

These pamphlets are expected to be out by the Golden Jubilee Session of the AIKS, and will be low-priced.

All those interested in knowing about the peasant struggles in India, must send orders to—

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