

## Saumyendranath Tagore and the Peasant Movement of Murshidabad: A Study on Historical Perspectives

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### Abstract:

*Saumyendranath Tagore and his party played an important role in mobilizing the rural poor and bring to light lower sections and lower voices of the neglected and oppressed people. He always stood for the peasants and other lower sections of the Indian people against the intolerable condition of existence created by wicked landlords and the imperialist colonial masters. It is interesting to note that Saumyendranath was the pioneer of the Marxist movement in Murshidabad. In 1936 Communist League of India was established in Murshidabad. Tarapada Gupta, on behalf of the CLI, hoisted the Red Flag for the first time in Murshidabad. In the territorial jurisdiction of the four police stations of Murshidabad, namely Kandi, Burwan, Hariharpara and Khargram, the CLI or RCPI had its political bases. They organized peasant movements in these areas which directed against local land lords and money lenders. These peasant movements during the late thirties or early forties consisted mainly of 'no-rent campaigns'.*

**Keywords:** Saumyendranath Tagore, Communist, RCPI, Tarapada Gupta, Peasants, Kishan Sabhas, Zamindari System, Land Revenue.

### Introduction:

In recent times, trends in historiography have shifted to analytical emphasis of the locality. A corpus of books and articles on it has come up in our country in the last few decades which tend to highlight the basic characteristics and dimension of a small region. The study of local history illuminates the understanding of the role of historical variables in national politics. It also throws light on local diversities. In the process of understanding, study of diversities is very important for a comprehensive knowledge of a wider region. Above all from these micro studies new information about social structure and relation of agrarian people, their unrest, their way of protest have been found and information concerning regional protest have also taken place during this period which have enriched the study of peasant movement of Murshidabad led by Saumyendranath Tagore.<sup>[1]</sup> He was one of the main architects of communism and trade unionism in India. He always stood for the peasants, the factory workers, the students and other lower sections of the Indian people. At the initial stage of the communist movement in Bengal, the communist party of India played the central role. But the role played by the other communist organization was also very important. As such it is necessary to discuss the role of these organizations. The communist party led by Saumyendranath Tagore was such an organization which played an important role in the development of peasant movement in Murshidabad and his success in mobilizing the rural poor.

The present work investigates a number of studies that deals with and analyse the political and economic conditions of Murshidabad and also engage with Saumyendranath and his rich political dimensions. *Census 1951; West Bengal District Handbooks, Murshidabad*, edited by A. Mitra, Calcutta, 1953, present a graphic account of districts topography, land tenure, agriculture, revenue history etc. According to the Census, Murshidabad is the North-Western district of the Presidency Division of West Bengal. It has area of 2,094.5 square miles. Murshidabad was the last of the Mohamadan capitals of Bengal. The permanent settlement which was introduced in 1773 created a new class of Zamindars and intermediaries as an appendage of British Rule in India and it resulted in the all-round deterioration of agriculture and allied occupations. Because of this problem ridden agriculture and decimated indigenous industries the exploitation of the people of Murshidabad reached a new high. Famine and pestilence began to stalk the looks and corners of Murshidabad. Bishan Kumar Gupta's *Political Movements in Murshidabad 1920-1947* (Calcutta 1992) deals with the movements of several political parties and gives special emphasis on the leftists and their political movements in the district. He also focuses on the tradition of Hindu-Muslim unity. He has shown that the communists as well as other left parties achieved much success than the National Congress in the 1930s and 1940s in Murshidabad. The book throws light on the emerging features of popular movements in Murshidabad. So far as

Saumyendranath and his party is concerned, only one book, an autobiography and some articles have been published on his contribution. Manjula Bose was the first scholar to write a book on Saumyendranath Tagore. The name of her book was *Saumyendranath Tagore: Karme O Monane* (Saumyendranath Tagore: His Work and Worldview; Kolkata 2007). It is about the political and cultural contributions of Saumyendranath Tagore. The books and articles written by Tagore are important documents for understanding not only his personal stature and charisma but also the policies and perspectives of his party. Sometimes they also reflect the situation prevalent in his times. These books and articles include (in Bengali): *Chasir Katha* (The Story of the Peasant; Calcutta 1939), *Fascism* (Calcutta 1934), *Saratchandra: Desh O Samaj* (Saratchandra: The Nation and Society; Calcutta 1381 BS), and *Yatri* (Traveller; Calcutta 1357 BS). In English, his works include: *Hitlerism: The Aryan Rule in Germany* (Calcutta 1944), *Repression in Chittagong* (Calcutta 1936), *The Hour Has Struck* (Calcutta 1949), *Revolution and Quit India* (Calcutta 1946), *Leftism and Leftist Unity* (Calcutta 1946). Amitava Chandra has written three successive articles on Saumyendranath Tagore and his organization in *Itihas Anusandhan*. The first article was “Communist League: Tirish Dashker Ekti Samantara Communist Sanghatan” (Communist League: A Parallel Communist Organization of the 1930s; Calcutta 1993). This article mainly deals with the activities of the Communist League from 1934 to 1938. The second article was “Communist League Theke R.C.P.I.: Samantara Communist Sangathaner Bikasher Bibhinno Porjay” (From the Communist League to the R.C.P.I.: The Various Stages of the Development of a Parallel Communist Organization”; Calcutta 1994). This article deals with the period between 1939 and 1945. He gave special emphasis on the stand of Communist League or R.C.P.I. on the character of the Second World War and on the activities of the organization during this period. The third article is titled “R.C.P.I. ebong Bharat Chharo Andolon” (The R.C.P.I. and the Quit India Movement”; Calcutta 1995). This article focused mainly on the activities of R.C.P.I. during the Quit India Movement. Amitava Chandra depicted brilliantly, but shortly, the contribution, aims and objectives as well as the limitations of Saumyendranath and his party during the above-mentioned period. Given the relative paucity of commentary on Tagore, it should however be mentioned that a number of studies that deal with and analyse the theoretical framework of the communist movement in Bengal engage with Saumyendranath and his rich political dimensions. Amitava Chandra in his *Abibhakti Banglar Communist Andolon, Suchana Parbo* (The Communist Movement of Undivided Bengal, the Initial Phase; Calcutta 1992) presents a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the communist movement in Bengal from 1928 to

1941. Gautam Chattopadhyay in his *Samajtantrer Agni Porikkha O Bharoter Communist Andolon* (The Trial by Fire of Socialism and the Communist Movement of India; Calcutta 1992) traces the course of the Indian Communist movement from 1917 to 1946 with special emphasis on communist leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose, Abani Mukherjee, M.N. Roy and Saumyendranath Tagore. Somendranath Basu in his work *Sarkari File-e Saumyendranath Tagore* (Saumyendranath Tagore in Government Files; Calcutta 1978) gives an important account of Tagore. On the other hand agrarian and political dimensions have been successfully correlated in various studies propounding a more generalised theoretical framework of agrarian structures in Bengal.. Muzaffar Ahmad in his book *Bharater Communist Party Garar Pratham Jug* (The First Age of Organizing the Communist Movement of India; Kolkata 2011) gave special emphasis on the history of how the Communist Party of India came into existence and its first conference in 1925. In his other book *Samakaler Katha* (Annals of the Contemporary Times; Kolkata 2012) he discussed about the formation of Workers and Peasants Party and its activities. *Three studies on the Agrarian Structure in Bengal 1850-1947* (Calcutta, 1982), edited by Asoke Sen, Partha Chatterjee and Sougata Mukherjee, represents a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the agrarian economy of Bengal in the last hundred years of the colonial rule. They also analysed the complex relationship between landlords, peasants and the colonial state, dealing clearly with the problem of landed property. *Bengal Land Tenure* (Calcutta, 1988) of Sirajul Islam dealt with the complex problem of the ‘*madhyaswatva*’ (subinfeudation) in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. He confined his study mainly to the districts of East Bengal. Sunil Sen in his book *Peasant Movements in India: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Calcutta, 1982) and Dipankar Bhattacharyya in his book *Peasant Movements in Bengal and Bihar* (Calcutta, 1992) deals with the agrarian movements of Bengal.

#### Methodology:

The present article is an attempt to investigate the unrest among the agrarian people of Murshidabad with special reference to the political party led by Saumyendranath Tagore in mobilizing and organising the peasant movements in this district. The study is based primarily on archival materials preserved in the State Archive of West Bengal, Calcutta; printed official report of the Government of Bengal available at the National Library, Kolkata; and other primary sources. A lot of secondary works, memoirs and some newspapers have also been consulted.

#### Study Area of Research:

The study mainly deals with the peasant movements in Murshidabad led by Saumyendranath and his party during 1930s and

1940s. Between the period 1920 and 1947, Murshidabad was politically controlled by the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and (from the 1930s) the Marxists. Saumyendranath Tagore<sup>ii</sup> was the pioneer of the Marxist movement in Murshidabad. In 1936 Communist League of India<sup>iii</sup> was established in Murshidabad before the Communist Party of India (here after CPI) and Revolutionary Socialist Party (here after RSP). All these parties played an important role in shaping the political movements in Murshidabad. Saumyendranath had close contact with Murshidabad and his party had its bases in the peasants, workers and students fronts. The aim of the Communist League was not only to protect the peasants from tyranny and oppression but also to awaken revolutionary consciousness among the peasants for the socialist revolution.

### **Saumyendranath: A pioneer of communism in Murshidabad.**

A confidential file (which described “A Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal during the year 1937”) shows that this year saw the introduction of vast political changes. We can notice a great increase in the number of political and quasi-political meetings. The number of these was curiously enough greatest in May and September. The size of these gatherings and the deep and sustained interest in their proceedings seem to indicate that the attention of the ‘masses’ had really been awakened and that new ideas were finding a ready audience. The majority of these meetings seem to have been the work of the Congress and also of the Communists.<sup>[iv]</sup>

From the mid-1930s, the left challenge through trade unions, kishansabhas, radical student organizations, congress socialists and communist organizations became an important part of the country’s life. The leftist forces of Murshidabad, most of which were earlier connected with terrorist activities, were dissatisfied with Gandhian politics. Revolutionary leaders who were arrested and thrown into various jails got an opportunity to engage in political studies. They were motivated in the direction of mass action and class struggle based on Marxism-Leninism.<sup>[v]</sup>

Under the leadership of Saumyendranath a Marxist party was formed in Murshidabad. Tarapada Gupta, on behalf of the CLI, hoisted the Red Flag for the first time in Murshidabad in 1936. Tarapada was a noted revolutionary of Murshidabad. After his release from jail in 1935, he came under the influence of Tagore and his party, the CLI. Tarapada Gupta was given the organizational duty of the CLI in Murshidabad.<sup>[vi]</sup> In the year 1935, Tarapada Gupta and Asit Ranjan Chatterjee established link between Tagore’s group and Berhampore Anushilan Party through Sudhangshu Majumdar, an ex-convict of the Mechuabazar Bomb Case and Abhaypada

Bhattacharjee. Provat Sen, a lieutenant of Saumyendranath, was sent to Berhampore with Sudhangshu Majumdar with communist literature. Tarapada Gupta also preached Communism at the Kandi sub-division of Murshidabad through Madhusudhan Sengupta, an ex-convict of the Kandi Bomb Case. <sup>[vii]</sup>

### **CLI or RCPI: Its political bases and peasant the first session of the Murshidabad district**

In the territorial jurisdiction of the four police stations of Murshidabad, namely Kandi, Burwan, Hariharpara and Khargram, the CLI or RCPI had its political bases. They organized peasant movements in these areas which directed against local land lords and money lenders. These peasant movements during the late thirties or early forties consisted mainly of ‘no-rent campaigns’. It was no-rent to the local zamindars. Actually, the CLI workers successfully organized the peasants against the landlords and they refused to pay any rent.<sup>viii</sup> The first peasant conference under the CLI banner was held at Beldanga on 8 and 9 May 1937. It was presided over by Bhupendranath Dutta and Saumyendranath Tagore was the chief guest. It was attended by nearly 1,500 people. A secret report gave the information that Saumyendranath arrived at Beldanga, Murshidabad on 07 May 1937 to attend Murshidabad District Krishak Conference. He left for Calcutta on 11 May 1937 after attending three Krishak Committee meetings in this district.<sup>ix</sup>

Superintendent of Police, Murshidabad, informed the I.B. in Calcutta about a hand bills distributed on behalf of Murshidabad Zila Krishak Samiti in Berhampore and Beldanga area on 07 May 1935. It was printed from Karunamoy Press, Gorabazar under the order of Haridas Dasgupta, Secretary of the Murshidabad Krishak Committee, requesting the people to attend district Krishak Sammelan at Beldanga, Murshidabad on 08 May 1937 at 4pm to protest against the oppression and exploitation of the peasants. The first session of the Murshidabad district Krishak Conference was held on 08 May 1937 in the go-down of Muhammad Khoda Bux, which was taken on lease from a sugar mill at Beldanga. Bhupendranath Dutta of Calcutta was the chair. About 15,000 persons, mostly peasants of the neighbouring villages, attended. Saumyendranath hoisted a red flag in the marquee with the insignia of the sickle, hammer, and star embossed on it before the opening of the conference and delivered a short speech explaining the meaning of the flag’s red colour and of the sickle, hammer and star. The meeting was attended by the following persons: 1) Saumyendranath Tagore, 2) Abu Mohammad Akhfaruzamman, 3) R.N. Dutta, 4) Abdul Rahaman, 5) Md. Khoda Bux, 6) Nuruddin, 7) Radhapadha Pramanik, 8) Kritish Chandra Ghosh, 9) Sasanka Sekhar Sanyal, 10) Chhatrapati Roy, and 11) Haridas Dasgupta. The president read out the message of good wishes received from Subhas

Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, from the League against Fascism and War and also from the 24-Parganas peasant association.<sup>x</sup>

The following resolutions were past in this meeting:

1. The conference encouraged the peasants and workers of Murshidabad and their protests against government action of obstructing peasant organization and attempting to prove it contemptuous.
2. During the last few years there had been failure of crops and the production was not quite sufficient. But the zamindars were forcibly attaching the produce and realizing the arrears of rent. So, the conference demanded exemption of last three years' rent.
3. The conference vehemently protested against the power of certification and demanded its withdrawal as it had reduced the ryots to a miserable condition by enabling the zamindars to attach their moveable properties and their crops and also their homesteads.
4. To exempt payment of arrear rent of those, who were unable to pay; Re-assessment of rent according to the value of production of land; No collection of rent in a year in which crop has failed; Imposition of Choukidari Tax according to means; Improving the fertilization of land; Improving the arrangement and supply of fertilizers; To stop realization of water-cess and arrange for good drinking water; Establishing agricultural banks for giving loan at a low rate of interest; Abolishing taxes on salt, sugar, tobacco, and match boxes which were articles of everyday use; Opening hospitals for free treatment. Introduction of free primary education<sup>xi</sup>

It was an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist peasant rally. The chief object was to organize the poor peasants and to make them conscious about the feudal exploitations and to develop their class hatred and finally suggest remedies. Khoda Bux was the chairman of the Reception Committee of this conference. It was a significant peasant rally in the history of Murshidabad and never had Murshidabad witnessed such an outstanding peasant rally. Poor peasants belonging to both the Hindu and Muslim communities of Beldanga and its adjacent areas assembled here under the Red Flag and raised their demands.<sup>xii</sup>

The Murshidabad district Krishak Committee for the year 1937 had been formed with the following members:

- President: Sasanka Sekhar Sanyal
- General-Secretary: Ram Chandra Dubey
- Organizers: Narendranath Biswas, Haridas Dasgupta, Md. Nuruddin.
- Propaganda Secretary: Tarapada Gupta
- Law Secretary: Gopal Chandra Dubey
- Office Secretary: Krishna LalSaha
- Volunteer Secretary: Naba Krishna Das

- Treasurer: Gouri Prasad Sen.<sup>xiii</sup>

#### **The 'no-rent' campaign in the Hizol area of Kandi.:**

The Hizol area of Kandi was an important spot where 'no-rent' campaign was organized. In this movement, under the leadership HasilHazi, a peasant worker, the peasant movement in different villages of Hizol area like Amitya, Pairakol, Bagachra and Natungram intensified. Tagore personally went to these places and organized meetings. As a result, many clashes took place. Actually two big feudal lords of Kandi, namely Bejoyendra Narayan Roy (alias Tiku Raja) and Sarat Chandra Trivedi, earned lakhs of rupees yearly from the Hizol area as rent. They used harsh methods of exactions of rent from the poor peasants. But they spent nothing for the betterment of land or for a better irrigation system. So, there was a movement for better irrigation facilities to the poor peasant's at a just price. They also organized movements against greedy moneylenders and other vested interests. To gear up the political consciousness, group meetings of the peasant were often organized. A vast area of the Murshidabad district received wide sympathy and support for the 'No -Rent' campaign in Hizol.<sup>xiv</sup>

So the movement led by the volunteers of the CLI opened a new horizon in the political movement in Murshidabad. When the 'No-Rent' campaign in Hizol area started in full swing, the feudal lords with the help of their agents and police counterattacked. The peasant rally at Sitalatola in Andulia, which was addressed by Tagore, gave a bold resistance to the goons of Sarat Chandra Trivedi and finally the goons had to surrender. The peasant organization was very strong. Police cases were lodged against them one after another at the instigation of the feudal lords. But none ventured to adduce evidence for fear of being assaulted by the toiling peasants.<sup>xv</sup> A Home Political File reports that "during the year 1940 there was no indication of agrarian unrest on a serious scale, although there were reports of the formation of a 'No -Rent' mentality in several districts."<sup>xvi</sup>

#### **The Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference:**

Saumyendranath Tagore delivered an important speech at a peasant rally in Jiaganj on 09 May 1937. Landlords of this area were exacting 'abwabs' (illegal fines, cesses, or imposts) from the tenants. Tagore in his speech prominently stressed upon the point that the landlord was persistently preventing the tenants from getting their just deserts; the tenants must have their just deserts. He also pointed out that while the landlords are living in luxury in towns with the money extracted from the tenants, they were not only indifferent but absolutely callous with regard to improving the condition of the tenants. Developmental work, such as digging wells, was not being carried out at all. In this conference, Tagore gave the history of how the

landlord class came into existence and quoted examples from foreign countries about the struggle of the tenants there. He also spoke of how ultimately the tenants had succeeded in getting what they wanted. Tagore appealed for unity. He made a fervent appeal to the tenants to be united and make a united demand. Actually, Tagore wanted to create unity among tenants for the protection of their own rights and for the removal of their grievances.<sup>xvii</sup>

Saumyendranath attended the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference and a peasant conference in Lalbagh of Murshidabad district on 26 February 1938 and 27 February 1938 respectively. He came to Berhampore town for these meetings on 24 February 1938 by the 6pm train and halted at Gorabazar Town. During his stay there he addressed a meeting at Gorabazar on 24 February at 7pm and delivered a lecture on the utility of holding the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference. He attended the Lalbagh conference. After the first session of the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference was over, Tagore and Ekramu IHaq attended a meeting attended by about 2,000 persons. He addressed the gathering of peasants of the neighbouring villages just in front of the conference marquee. In this meeting Saumyendranath denounced the present ministry and described the KrishakSamiti as the only organisation capable of fighting for the real cause of the people. He also discussed about the problems of the Krishaks. Saumyendranath returned to Berhampore on the next day. After returning to Berhampore, he spoke on Socialism, Communism and Imperialism in a meeting of 400 youths and students of Berhampore Town organized by the Student League in Berhampore Grant Hall. The meeting was held on 28 February 1938 at 7pm. He left for Calcutta on 1 March 1938 by the 1am train.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **The hyacinth-clearance movement of Hariharpara:**

In Hariharpara, the RCPI or CLI organized a peasant movement against the Midnapore Zamindari Company and some local zamindars backed by the local administration unleashed terror. As a result, sometime in 1938, led by the then SDO (Sadar) Mr. T.K. Ahamed, 400-500 poor peasants were forcibly recruited to clear up hyacinth from a big pond of Rajballav Mondal of Beharia. Naren Biswas and his other comrades, namely HarenAdhikary, NarenMondal, etc., protested against this forced labour and the peasants who were so recruited refused to work. This incident had a serious impact over the rural poor. But the local authority and other vested-interest groups became furious and tried to give a communal colour to this organized peasant resistance. Finally punitive tax was imposed in that area. There was a crisis when the collector of this punitive tax was assaulted by the organized

peasantry with a sharp cutting weapon under the leadership of Naren Biswas. Obviously the police atrocities were intensified and a criminal case was lodged against the leaders of this movement. They were arrested and later released after appeal.<sup>xix</sup>

This hyacinth-clearance movement of Hariharpara was very popular and gave an incentive to the poor peasants against the zamindari oppression and exploitation. According to an intelligence report, on 6 April 1938, a Kisan conference was held at Khargram of Murshidabad district. NarenBiswas of the CLI was the speaker and it was attended by 60 persons. He was moving from village to village and delivering lectures on the oppression of the zamindars. This movement had two important aspects— first, the lawyers refused to accept briefs of the zamindars; and, second, the administration made a futile attempt to give a communal colour to it.<sup>xx</sup>

### **The Second District Peasant Conference of the CLI:**

The Second District Peasant Conference of the CLI was held at Kandi in 1938. Saumyendranath came to Kharghat Road Railway station on the night of 28 May 1938 and attended the second annual session of Murshidabad District Krishak Conference held at Kandi H.E. School compound on 29 May 1938 and on 01 June 1938. Tagore stayed at Berhampore on the night of 29 May 1938. He addressed a Congress election meeting at Berhampore on 30 May 1938. He visited Jiaganj on the afternoon of 31 May 1938. Haridas Dasgupta, a graduate was one of his important associates. He was the secretary of Murshidabad District Krishak Committee and belonged to Tagore's Communist group. He was also a member of the Anushilan party.<sup>xxi</sup>

On 26 May 1938, the Birbhum district intelligence branch office of Suri reporting to the intelligence branch of Calcutta said that the Murshidabad District Krishak Conference would be held at Kandi on 29 May 1938. Tagore and Swami Sahajananda were expected to participate in this conference. Saumyendranath was supposed to preside and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati to open the conference. Kisan leaders were expected to attend. The programme was as follows:-

1. 29 May at 7 am—Reception of the President elect and the town march.
2. 29 May at 11 am—meeting of the Subject committee.
3. 29 May at 5pm—Opening of the conference and the mass meeting.
4. Visitors Tickets—Rs.10 and Rs.5 only.

Owing to the fact that only about 300 persons were present on the 29 May because of heavy rains, the Murshidabad District Krishak Conference was adjourned to 1 June. The conference was held finally on 1 June and was attended by 3,000 cultivators, one-third of who were Muslims.

Saumyendranath Tagore, Sasanka SekharSanyal, Khan Bahadur EkramulHaq, Krishnalal Shaha, Gopika Bilash Sen and many other local leaders were present. The government reporters and District Intelligence branch officers were compelled to pay Rs.10 each as entrance fee. A batch of volunteers, dressed in white shorts and shirts, *khadder* caps, and tennis shoes marched with *lathis* to the accompaniment of drums and mouth organs under the leadership of Durgapada Singh. The speakers advocated abolition of the zamindari system, and denounced imperialism, capitalism and communalism. They urged the cultivators to start Krishak Samitis in every village and to fight for the abolition of the Permanent settlement. It was resolved that—

1. No zamindars should own more than fifty bighas of land.
2. All illegal exactions by the zamindars should be stopped.
3. Arrear rents should be remitted.
4. The rent should not be paid on non-productive land
5. All fishery taxes should be abolished
6. Free primary education should be introduced.[<sup>xxii</sup>]

According to a secret IB report a Krishak meeting was attended by about 700 persons which was held at Chawk Kalitala, Rahinagore during the July 1938, and was addressed by Sabita Sekhar Ray Chaudhuri, a conditionally released detenu named Sunil Kumar Ghosh and an ex-convict Krishna LalSaha, all of whom were satellites of Saumyendranath Tagore. A red flag with the insignia of the sickle and hammer was displayed. Another Krishak meeting was held on 5 August at Sagardighi and was attended by about 200 persons. On 24 October 1938, a Krishak meeting attended by about 2,000 persons was held at Sarbangapur, Nowda PS. This meeting was attended by Sasanka SekharSanyal (MLA), Sanat Kumar Raha and Chhatrapati Roy. [<sup>xxiii</sup>]

According to an IB Report two Krishak meetings were held at SataiPS area in Berhampore and were addressed by Khan Bahadur Ekramul Haque, Sasanka Sekhar Sanyal, Chhatrapati Roy, SabitaSekhar Ray Chaudhuri and Mangalmay Mitra. Another meeting was held on 24 November 1938 at Gazadharpara PS, Berhampore, and attended by about 150 persons. This meeting was addressed by ex-detenu Tarapada Gupta and Sabita Sekhar Ray Chaudhuri. All these meetings of the ryots advocated such things as reduction of land revenue and formation of arbitration boards to settle debts. There was also a slogan of a no-rent campaign against the zamindars. Saumyendranath visited Berhampore and Kandi on 10 April 1939. He attended a Krishak Conference in Kandi on 10 April 1939 and 11 April 1939. On 10 April Saumyendranath Tagore and several other leaders addressed the district Krishak

conference at Chatinakandi, PSKandi, which was attended by about 10,000 farmers. Saumyendranath left for Calcutta by the 1.15 am train from Berhampore court railway station along with Sudhir Kumar Dasgupta.[<sup>xxiv</sup>]

### **The third peasant conference: From 1930s and early 1940s led by the CLI workers.**

In the 1930s and early 1940s the CLI workers were associated with the workers of the CPI and Anushilan Samity and jointly organized the peasants in some parts of Murshidabad and highlighted their demands. Though Sasanka SekharSanyal was a Congress nominee in the Bengal Legislature, he addressed peasant conferences of the CLI and the CPI from 1937 to 1939. He was deeply influenced by Saumyendranath. He raised his voice in the Bengal Legislature supporting the case of the poor peasants. On 10 March 1939, Sasanka Sekhar Sanyal raised his voice against permanent settlement and demanded its immediate abolition as it was the root of all miseries of the poor peasants of Bengal and asked for a scientific solution. In another speech Sasanka SekharSanyal raised his voice in the Legislative Assembly and demanded the reduction of rent paid by the poor peasants.<sup>xxv</sup> However, Tagore seceded from the BPKS in May 1938 on the question of leadership and started working independently among the peasants.[<sup>xxvi</sup>] Tagore was systematically disseminating propaganda among the peasants for an agrarian revolution along the lines of the Russian peasantry to gain control of the administration.

The third peasant conference led by the CLI was held at Rukunpur, a village near Hariharpara and it was attended by Sudhir Dasgupta, the provincial peasant leader of the Communist League. The conference was presided over by Samsul Huda, a peasant leader of Comilla. From this conference a resolution was passed to launch a peasant movement in the 'Bagri' area in order to save the poor people from landlords and their exploitations.[<sup>xxvii</sup>] During the late 1940s under the leadership of the Communist League and RCPI areas of Khargram and Burwan set up peasant organizations and peasant movements. Their main target was feudal exploitation. Among the important villages of Khargram, peasant movements were developed in Balia, Eroali, Kirtipur, Raipur, Gai, Barar and Bele and, of the villages of Burwan, in Kundal, Kalyanpur, Haldi, Komadda, Barutia, Andi and Kharjuma.[<sup>xxviii</sup>] The RCPI organized the poor peasants in these villages and tried to convince them of the theory of class struggle and that only an armed peasant uprising can solve their misery. They organized study circles and peasant rallies to develop the class consciousness of the poor peasants against their class enemy. The man who was the main source of inspiration was Pannalal Dasgupta. He inspired the

peasants of Murshidabad during this time in armed uprising.<sup>[xxix]</sup>

‘Harijan union’ was formed at Berhampore in the year 1938 under the leadership of Nani Bhattacharyya who was an important leader of the RSP. This union later came under the control of the CLI. To fulfil certain demands, the sweepers of the Berhampore Municipality organized a strike for some days in 1939 and a big procession of the sweepers with red flag and Saumyendranath Tagore at the front created a sensation in the political circle of Berhampore. This movement threw a new light on the political movement of the toiling people of this district.<sup>[xxx]</sup>

### Conclusion:

We can say that the workers of the CLI wanted to free the people of the agrarian society from the torture of the zamindars and other illegal exaction. The aim of the Communist League was not only to protect the peasants from tyranny and oppression but also to awaken revolutionary consciousness among the peasants for the socialist revolution. They wanted to organize the poor peasants and to develop their class hatred. Tagore’s party successfully organised the ‘no-rent’ campaign, Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference, hyacinth-clearance movement and demanded the abolition of the zamindari system, reduction of land revenue and formation of arbitration boards to settle debts. All these movements threw a new light on the political movement of the toiling people of the Murshidabad district.

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[<sup>i</sup>] Henceforth, Saumyendranath Tagore would be simply referred to as either “Saumyendranath” or simply as “Tagore”. The latter reference should not be confused as a reference to his more famous uncle Rabindranath Tagore.

[<sup>ii</sup>] Saumyendranath Tagore was born on 08 October 1901 to the famous Tagore family of Jorasanko. His father was Sudhindranath Tagore and mother was Charubala Debi. He was one of the main architects of communism and trade unionism in India.

[<sup>iii</sup>] In August 1934 Saumyendranath floated the Communist League of India (hereafter CLI), a parallel organization of the CPI. At the time of its formation, there were five members of this organization, namely Saumyendranath Tagore, Sudhir Dasgupta, Prabhat Sen, Ranjit Majumdar and Arun Banerjee. A few years later the party changed its name to CPI. However, again it changed its name Revolutionary Communist Party of India (hereafter RCPI) in 1942 during the Quit India Movement. For details see Chandra, Amitava, *Abibhakti Banglae Communist Andolon*, p.15

[<sup>iv</sup>] A Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal during the year 1937, Confidential file, Government of West Bengal pp.11- 12

[<sup>v</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad 1920-1947*, Manisha: Calcutta, Jan 1992, pp.89-90

[<sup>vi</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad*, p.91

[<sup>vii</sup>] File no.-859/36, I.B

[<sup>viii</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad*, pp.98-100

[<sup>ix</sup>] File no. 166/26, I.B.

[<sup>x</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xi</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xii</sup>] Gupta Bejoy Kumar, Beldangar Ullekhjogyo Krishak Sammelan, in Chalormi, pp.17-18

[<sup>xiii</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xiv</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad*, pp. 101-102

[<sup>xv</sup>] Ibid, p.103

[<sup>xvi</sup>] Home Political File , Brief Summary of political events in the province of Bengal during the year 1940

[<sup>xvii</sup>] File no. 166/26, I.B.

[<sup>xviii</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xix</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad*, pp. 103-104

[<sup>xx</sup>] File no. 166/26, I.B.

[<sup>xxi</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xxii</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xxiii</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xxiv</sup>] Ibid.

[<sup>xxv</sup>] Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1939, Vol, IV, pp.127-131

[<sup>xxvi</sup>] According to Sunil Kundagrami, an assistant to the office of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Committee, early in 1937 the BPKC was an all-party organization. Sometime after, Saumyendranath Tagore with his supporters separated from this organization. They formed a rival organization at 220, Cornwallis Street. For details see File no. 166/26, I.B.

[<sup>xxvii</sup>] Gupta, Bishan Kumar, *Political Movements in Murshidabad*, p. 108

[<sup>xxviii</sup>] Ibid, pp.104-105

[<sup>xxix</sup>] Ibid, p.105

[<sup>xxx</sup>] Gupta, Bejoy Kumar, Shatabarsher Alope Baharampur, Poursabha, Berhampur, p. 34, 1978