

Study of Social Conflicts

Case of Naxalbari Peasant Movement

Partha Mukherji

Social conflicts especially in third world countries provide a context in which the articulation of the structural features of the system acquire greater prominence. Moreover social conflicts because they result in the surfacing of latencies which normally do not show up and may be missed out in any analysis of structure and change. This article sets out a series of hypotheses based on a theoretical orientation which sees social mobilisation aimed at changes within the system as quasi movements and those that are explicitly transformatory as revolutionary movements. The author tests these hypotheses with an examination of the Naxalbari peasant movement.

I

TWO questions are basic to any meaningful theoretical understanding of social movement and social change: (1) Does any change in society constitute structural change, considering that change is ubiquitous? (2) Is any social mobilisation¹ to be taken as a social movement? It can be sustained that social changes can and do take place without social mobilisations necessarily giving effect to them; equally, that social mobilisations do take place without necessarily leading to structural changes; and finally, that if every social mobilisation is considered a social movement its analytical value as a concept would be greatly undermined. It is important to bear in mind that social movement is a species of social conflict which has other manifestations as well.

Each of these concepts admit of a bewildering variety of characterisations. *Social conflicts*, defined as overt manifestations of collective behaviour rather than as potentials for action, are situations "in which parties are an aggregate of individuals, such as groups, organisations, communities and crowds, rather than single individuals as in role conflict. . . [it] encompasses a broad range of phenomena; class, racial, religious and communal conflicts; riots, rebellions, revolutions, strikes and civil disorders; marches, demonstrations, protest gatherings, and the like" [Oberschall, 1978: 291]. Attitude changes to pattern variables to notion of "development, progress, evolution, revolution, process, movements, transition, transformation, modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, bureaucratisation. . ." [Strasser and Randall, 1981: 16], all come under the umbrella of *social change*. And finally, it has been aptly observed, "so loose and slipshod has the employment of these words (*social movement*) become that they seem capable now-a-days of application to any kind of group activity whatsoever" (brackets mine) [Banks, 1972: 7]. Given this situation, for a proper comprehension of social conflict and social movement as it relates to social change it is necessary (1) to classify these phenomena so as to endow them with greater analytical power; and having done that (2) to integrate them within the framework of a unified theoretical orientation.²

But before we proceed to do this it will be well to point out that all these three concepts derive their theoretical relevance and coherence from some kind of a conceptualisation, implicit or explicit, of the social system. A social system in some sense is an arrangement of its 'parts' (structures) in a complex relationship such that changes in one or some of these have consequences for one, some or all of the others. What distinguishes various theoretical approaches (barring those which consider the concept as expendable),³ is how the structures are conceived and in what manner of relationship these are constitutive of the system. Generally speaking, the Marxist orientation postulates an asymmetrical interrelation of 'parts'; by contrast, the functionalists project an interdependence of asymmetries. But basically both the orientations would grant that social movements are products of the social system and have consequences for it. The former posits that conflicts arise out of contradictions inherent in the asymmetrical interrelationship of parts leading to changes and transformations, whilst the latter postulates the presence and management of tensions 'natural' to a system of interdependence of asymmetry. Transformatory changes are the exceptions, whilst evolutionary and incremental changes are the rule. Hence the major theoretical preoccupation with the functionalists is with dynamic equilibrium of social systems.⁴ Conflict theoretical approaches will be consistent with the position that social conflicts are products of interaction between competing, contradictory, inconsistent or incompatible elements in the social system in terms of groups of collectivities possessing and occupying differential positions in the arrangement of the distribution of power [Strasser and Randall: 42].

Another important theoretical consideration that should be borne in mind is that inherent in the conceptualisation of social conflict is the fact of antagonism. Relations which are non-antagonistic, therefore, will not manifest conflict. Equally, if not more importantly, it is true that not all relations of antagonism are, necessarily, *ipso facto*, translated into social conflicts. There is strength in the argument that the mere fact of inequality in the distribution of rights and opportunities is not enough to trigger off conflict between advantaged and disadvan-

tagged groups. This is a function of the degree of institutionalisation of this inequality relative to the degree of awareness of the structure of deprivation. To the extent that the disadvantaged groups become conscious that they are being deprived of their due share of the resources, the objective conditions for the manifestation of hostility is prepared [Coser 1967: 31, Strasser and Randall: 50].

Logically, the classification of social change is primary and the classifications of social conflict and social movement should be contingent on it. The rationale for this derives from the theoretical position that the main interpretative task is to explain the societal phenomena of movement and conflict in terms of social change. We are now in a position to classify social change in terms of:⁵

- (a) changes occurring within the given system;
- (b) changes occurring on account of the emergence of additional structure(s).
- (c) changes occurring due to the elimination or loss of structure(s); and
- (d) changes occurring as a result of replacement of existing structure(s) by alternative structure(s) of a system [Mukherji 1977; 1978; 1986].

It follows that the changes of the first type are accumulative, incremental, evolutionary, and entirely intra-systemic. It is preferable to conceptualise such changes as quasi-structural. The role of pressure and interest groups, social protests for remedial measures and the like, would constitute mobilisations for such changes. The changes here are in the nature of outcomes determined by institutionalised bargaining structures and are considered wholly legitimate.

Changes of the second and third varieties lead to alterations of the system. Hence, can be viewed as structural changes. The co-existence of established and emergent structures are likely to have consequences for the system as a whole. The change of an agrarian social system, from one characterised exclusively by attached labour to one which has also incorporated wage labour, would imply an alteration of the system on account of the introduction of an additional structure. Likewise, the elimination of a structure without replacement would also have similar implications for the system. For example, the

abolition of sharecropping tenancy would result in a change in the relations of agrarian production. Such alternative changes of the system which may presage a change for the future or become institutionalised, are therefore, structural-alternative.

Replacement of one structure by another is by far the most radical of changes. Consider replacement of private ownership of land by communal or state ownership, or vice versa. Such a change would be transformative in nature and will entail complex and comprehensive re-arrangement of structures of the system, hence can be described as structural-transformative.

Having arrived at a logic of classification of social change, we can proceed to classify social conflict and social movement consistent with that of social change. The rationale for doing this has already been stated earlier. We are now in a position to distinguish intra-systemic conflicts confined to quasi-structural changes from systemic conflicts related to structural or transformative changes.

The problem of ascribing the conceptual status of a social movement to any kind of group or collective mobilisation also has been noted. Consistent with our logic we can, therefore, state that *any social mobilisation for action directed explicitly towards an alteration or transformation of the structure(s) of a system, or against an explicit threat to an alteration or transformation of a system, can be properly understood as a social movement. Mobilisations aimed at changes within a system are quasi-movements. Social movements of an explicitly transformative character are revolutionary movements.*

While classification provides for greater conceptual clarity it neither constitutes, nor is it a substitution for, a theoretical orientation. A theoretical orientation should be capable of generating hypotheses, or at any rate, of giving us a better understanding of movement and change processes. Therefore, we need to move on to a 'dynamic', relational model. This can be at least partly achieved by the introduction of the praxiological dimension of means employed to achieve movement ends. The means would naturally include strategies and tactics. I have chosen to classify means as institutionalised or non-institutionalised, depending upon whether they are defined as legitimate or otherwise by the state.

To equate non-institutionalised means only with violence would be a fallacy, and to equate any violent mobilisation with social movement,⁶ an absurdity. Recent examples of social upheavals in Poland, the anti-Marcos movement, not to speak of the classic Gandhian satyagraha, are cases in point. What follows is a paradigmatic attempt at representing social movement and social change in relation to practice.

The paradigm envisages six kinds of situations. Situations in which intra-systemic (quasi-structural) changes are being sought to be brought about by legitimate, institu-

tionalised means through quasi-movements (A). Thus union mobilisations for better emoluments, guarantee of job security, protection against victimisation, etc, will illustrate this situation. Situation (B') refers to social mobilisations which seek systemic changes but only through institutionalised means. This is an unstable state of the social system, for it may carry the seeds of taking recourse to non-institutionalised means if its claims are not met with adequate response. The character of such a mobilisation, if it develops resilience and strength, would be somewhere in between a quasi-movement and a social movement. Trade union demands for a place in the board of directors could be such an example. Situation (B'') is characterised by a social mobilisation which adopts non-institutionalised means for the achievement of intra-systemic goals. The historic movement in Bengal for two-thirds share of the paddy for sharecroppers in place of less than half, exemplifies this situation. This again is an unstable state. While such a mobilisation is a quasi-movement, it may lead to an alteration of the social system with the establishment of a new structure of the peasant organisation.

The fourth situation (C₁) in which changes of the system are sought through the employment of non-institutionalised means can be described as one of social movement tending towards revolutionary movement. For instance, the Naxalite movement under the direct leadership of Charu Mazumdar confined itself entirely to underground operations. The last two situations (B'') and (C₂) in which use of institutionalised and non-institutionalised means for realisation of intra-systemic and systemic goals are employed, demonstrates a much larger participation rate and a greater degree of instability of the social system. The last situation can be illustrated by the Gandhian movement of *gramadan* (village-in-gift) which sought to replace private ownership of village lands by communal ownership of its members,⁷ and the Maoist movement which sought to replace the landed interest in power by the numerically larger deprived category as a step in the direction of bringing about radical changes in the social system.

Let us now see whether the theoretical orientation reflected in the paradigm is any aid to our understanding of some of the

TABLE 1: CLASSIFICATORY SCHEMA OF CHANGE, MOVEMENT AND CONFLICT

Description of Change	Type of Change	Type of Movement	Type of Conflict
a) Changes occurring within the given system	Quasi-structural (Accumulative, Intra-systemic)	Quasi-movement	Intra-Systemic
b) Changes occurring from an emergence of additional structure(s)	Structural (Alternative, systemic)	Social-movement	Systemic
c) Changes occurring due to elimination or loss of structure(s) and			
d) Changes occurring as a result of replacement of existing structure(s) by alternative structure(s)			
	Structural (Transformative, systemic)	Social and revolutionary movement	

TABLE 2: MOVEMENT, CHANGE AND PRACTICE

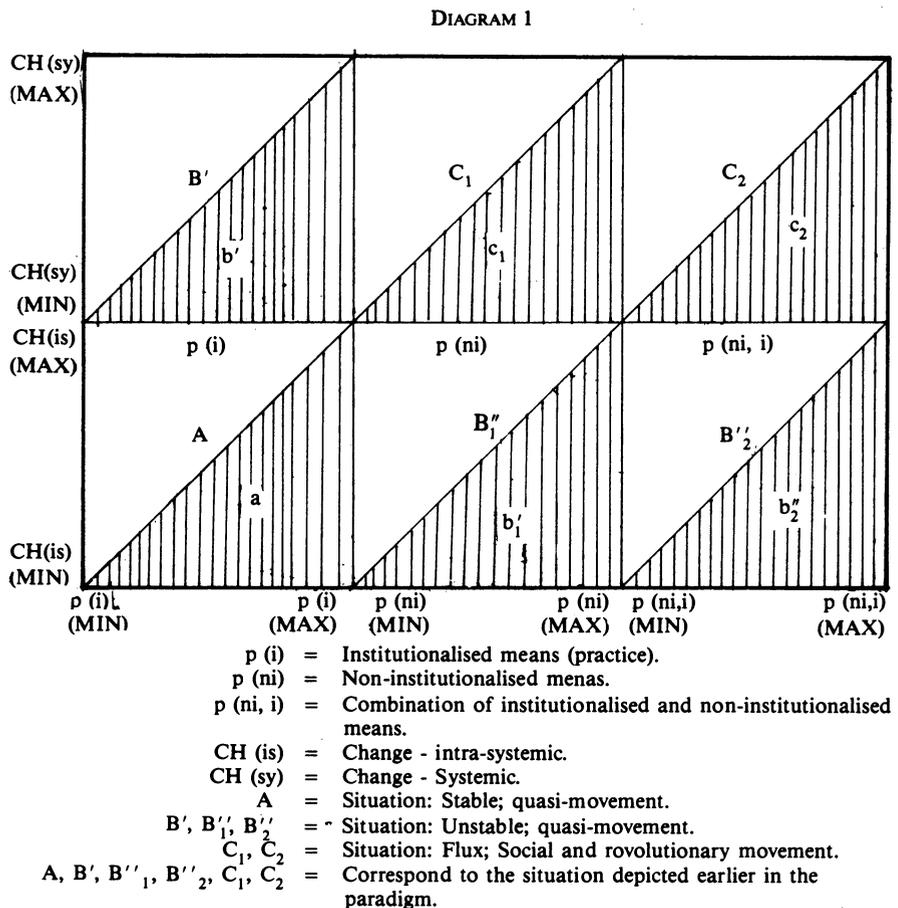
Means (Practice)	Change Promoting/Resisting Goals	
	Intra-Systemic	Systemic
	Quasi-movement	Quasi-movement tending towards social movement
Institutional	Example: strikes, lockouts, protest marches, etc, for legitimate demands and redressal of grievances. Stable state (A) Quasi-movement tending towards social movement	Example: union claims for decision-making powers Unstable state (B) Social movement tending towards revolutionary movements
Non-institutional	Example: Tebhaga movement in Bengal involving peasant revolt for 2/3 crop share by tenants getting 1/2 share. Unstable state (B')	Example: Naxalite movement—Charu Mazumdar pase—totally underground Flux (C ₁) Social and revolutionary movements
Institutional and non-Institutional	Example: riots, rebellions, peasant revolts against oppression exploitation Unstable state (B'')	Explanation structural changes associated with rebellion, revolution terrorism, civil disobedience, satyagrah, etc. Flux (C ₂)

major theoretical formulations. Marxist theory identifies two sets of contradictions, (1) as between capital and labour, i.e., by extension, between the capitalist and the working classes. This contradiction originates with the capitalist system and terminates with its disappearance. Hence it constitutes the "internal contradiction of a structure" [Godeliere 1978: 86]. (2) As between the structure of productive forces and the structure of relations of production. This contradiction is basic and immanent and therefore, does not originate or terminate. In a capitalist system, the former (in 2) acquires 'ever greater socialisation' with the development of productive forces, whilst the latter continues to remain characterised by private ownership. This contradiction manifests itself at "a certain state of development of the productive forces, the stage of large-scale industry in the context of a capitalist system", when the system is ready for structural changes [87].

Dahrendorf is critical of this 'big bang' theory in which the relations of production remain more or less unchanged throughout an epoch until the changing productive forces outgrow its structure giving rise to a revolutionary situation signalling the beginning of another epoch. He contends that this virtually amounts to postulating that all change of social structures is revolutionary change [1979: 59].

Finally, a look at a functionalist understanding of Marx. For Coser, "the change from feudalism to a different type of social system can be understood only through an investigation of the stresses and strains within the system... conflict leads not only to ever changing relations within the existing social structure but the total social system undergoes transformation through conflict" [1967: 26-27].

In terms of our theoretical framework this would mean that a prolonged period of intra-systemic and systemic conflicts manifested through stable and unstable quasi-movements ripen the objective conditions for structural transformation through social movements and revolutionary mobilisations. While one can visualise structural changes to take place short of transformations through revolutionary mobilisations, it is difficult to conceive of a revolutionary mobilisation taking place without activating preceding successive, defeated or successful stable and unstable quasi-movements. It is in this perspective that Dahrendorf's observation and Coser's generalisation can be viewed, without reducing the significance of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formulation centred on contradictions. However, the issues raised by them necessitate an important clarification. Whether or not a social transformation outcome is brought about by a revolutionary 'big bang' or by a cumulation of orderly changes through conflicts, these are two different functions of time. Thus when large scale changes take place within a short span of time, it takes place with a boom, but when a similar outcome



is effected over a much longer period of time, the noises made are not deafening, that is, system changes keep on taking place without major dislocations.

Let it be said that the concept of power has been omitted by default or design, it is necessary to state that it is pervasively implicit and embedded in the notions of asymmetrical interrelation of 'parts' and interdependence of asymmetries. How else can asymmetries exist or be held together?

Since a social system is an arrangement of asymmetrical relations, it is proposed that we view it in terms of an arrangement of structures of discrimination, exploitation and oppression (DEO). *Discrimination* essentially conveys the context of a social relationship which is asymmetrical and normatively legitimated by societal norms. These to a great extent are conditioned by the internationalisations that take place in the members of the society from birth through family and childhood socialisation. These strengthen primordial, ascriptive loyalties and provide major available anchorages for individuals forming solidarities on the basis of language, caste, race, creed, sex and so on. Exploitation is best applied to the context of unequal economic exchanges, resulting in differential distribution of material and other resources as well as differential access to such resources by different groups, who are differentially located in the productive system. This selective process is articulated through the normatively defined

system of exchange and market. Finally, oppression is clearly a political term having to do with the control and exercise of power. It defines the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. It is the process or means by which the dominant group (or individuals) is able to impose its conditions on those who are weak or unwilling or are deviants. It also implies deliberate impediments and barriers created to obstruct access to power.

It can be safely argued that a social system free from discrimination, exploitation and oppression (DEO), exists in utopia. Therefore, every system is an interrelation of these three structures. The contradictions, generation of conflicts and movements, can be traced from this arrangement of DEO. The contradictions giving rise to the movement would point to the directionality of change. A diminution in any or any combination of these would indicate a progressive change or social development. In a given society, at any given point of time, the contradictions can be hierarchically arranged beginning with the principal contradiction. The principal contradiction can be located in either of the three structures of DEO. Over a period of time the hierarchy of contradictions need not remain constant. It is worth attempting to explain the nexus of movement, conflict and change from this 'negative' conception of a social system.

I shall summarise diagrammatically (Diagram 1) the theoretical orientation and

try to arrive at certain formulations.

In the six boxes the lines joining the *diagonal-points* represent, notionally, that for a given amount of mobilisation employing institutionalised means P(i) or non-institutionalised means P(mi), or a combination of institutionalised and non-institutionalised means P(mi, i), the corresponding intra-systemic CH(is), and systemic CH(sy), changes transacted in the six situations A, B', B₁'', B₂'', C₁, C₂ are of normal expectations. Within the six situations, the *shaded portions* a, b', b₁'', b₂'', c₁, c₂ are of less than normal expectations. Therefore, there is a greater probability in the shaded portions (in which changes transacted have been less than normal expectations), as compared to the unshaded portions (in which changes transacted have been greater than the normal expectations), that mobilisations would try to shift their strategies and tactics (means) in an attempt to 'equalise' their expectations of change. The various paths that such mobilisations could take can be worked out.

But the important thing to bear in mind is that situation C₂ does not arise in a vacuum or all on a sudden. It matures in situations a, b', b₁'', b₂'', c₁, more than elsewhere in A, B', B₁'', B₂'', C₁, and having come into existence, it is likely to reinforce, in turn, a, b', b₁'', b₂''. However, there is the probability that these efforts are successfully countered by counter-strategies and tactics of groups whose established power is threatened by the possibilities of changes. The theoretical orientation proposed admits longitudinal analysis of processes through which a single movement has proceeded over time, changing its tactics and strategies, as it took stock of losses and gains; it is also capable of cross sectional analyses of a number of movements within a comparative frame. In the end, I shall conclude by stating a series of hypotheses consistent with the theoretical orientation:

(1) A more evolved society, differentiated by a large number of institutionally legitimated groups, representing competing and conflicting interests is likely to accommodate demands for change through institutional means without having to cause major structural alterations. In a less evolved society a similar change may amount to a structural change. E.g., the impeachment of Nixon vis-a-vis the dethronement of the Shah of Iran.

(2) The greater the threat to those who would be affected adversely by the changes envisaged by the social mobilisation, the greater would be the use of coercive powers to contain the movement, the greater would be the probability of severe deprivations the participants in the movement would have to face. Therefore, the solidarity of participants in the movement phase is sustained by non-material rewards at the level of values, manifested in commitment to movement ideology. Present deprivations will be accepted with expectations of deferred gratifications, even as counter movements and counter ideologies seek to counter the

movement.

(3) Manifestations of non-institutional means for achieving intra-systemic or systemic goals are symptomatic of the vulnerability of the system to structural change.

(4) The three phenomena—quasi-movement, social movement, and revolutionary movements can be understood in terms of a hierarchy of orders. Existing structures, institutionally legitimated are unlikely to make demands for structural changes unless supported by more over arching mobilisations demanding structural and transformatory changes. Corollarily, a revolutionary mobilisation will be effective to the extent that it is able to mobilise and activate its two other sub-sets—quasi and social movements—in a similar direction of achieving change of their respective structures.

It is appropriate to conclude by emphasising the theoretical relevance of the study of conflicts. Social conflicts, particularly conflicts of scale, and more particularly in the less evolved third world societies, provide a context in which the articulation of the structural features of a system acquire greater prominence. It provides a clearer and sharper delineation of the vulnerable points within the social system through which a change is likely to occur or be resisted. Furthermore, social conflicts result in the surfacing of latencies which normally do not show up, and hence, likely to be missed out in any analysis of structure and changes.

II

The genesis and evolution of the Naxalite movement by 'communist revolutionaries' seeking fundamental changes in the Indian society, is inextricably tied to the peasant uprising that took place in and around Naxalbari⁸ ever since the communist movement experienced its first split in 1964. The formation of the Communist Party of India-Marxist CPI-M out of the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) was a manifestation of the disengagement of the pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese ideological divide. Within a space of three years, the contradiction between the more radical pro-Chinese groups and the larger body of moderates within the CPI(M) became intensely antagonistic and by April 1969 the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) with avowed revolutionary objectives, was formed. By 1973 nearly 40,000 of its members were reportedly languishing in jails and many were eliminated in encounters. The party was banned, its publications confiscated, its activities deemed as insurrectionary. Strangely enough, the application of such force by the established ruling party did not lead to the dissolution or dissipation of the movement, but rather to its multiplication and dispersion. From a single party practising Naxalism, the politics of Naxalism now embraces countless political groupings operating in various parts of the country. Many of these would prefer to maintain with puritanic zeal

their ideological position shying away from a reconsolidation under a bigger party organisation.

It is in this perspective that the significance of the study undertaken by us can be viewed. The Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967, continuing until about 1972, gave rise to spontaneous structural responses all over the country involving large numbers of youth endowed with intellect and courage, fired by a revolutionary idealism. The mobilisation was the only one of its kind after the nationalist struggle for independence.⁹ The Naxalbari peasant revolt gave rise to a revolutionary agrarian movement, which in turn, was expected to surround, overwhelm and overpower the urban citadels of power for bringing about a revolutionary socialist transformation. Naxalbari therefore, is the only region which experienced the phases of revolt and revolutionary mobilisation. It was felt that a study of the movement in the Naxalbari region would be of considerable significance in the understanding of structure and change and in the analysis of theory and practice.

The theoretical orientation guiding our research has already been dealt with. It is obvious that the canvas laid out cannot be restricted by a positivistic methodology nor can it be fully exhausted. The study was designed in two stages. In the first stage, we confined ourselves mainly to the task of describing the structure of the agrarian system in the movement and non-movement belts of the region. It was an attempt to reach out to the movement through the structure largely in terms of the consequences. In the second stage, our attention was focused on the movement, and through the movement, on the structure of the agrarian system over a long period of time. It was felt that without a proper understanding of the first stage, it was not possible to enter efficiently into the more crucial second stage.

It is in the Phansidewa, Naxalbari and Khoribari regions in the Siliguri sub-division of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal that the peasant uprising took place. It covers an area of roughly 274 square miles with a population of about 1,67,000 (Census 1971) at the time of the movement. The area was covered by 32 revenue units (*mouzas*) including 90 settlements (*jotes*).¹⁰ This phase of research was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, a village schedule was canvassed with 25 per cent PPS sample¹¹ of all *mouzas* in the rural areas with a view to get an approximate idea of the distribution of agrarian categories. In the process, nearly 32 *mouzas* consisting of 90 *jotes* were covered. This stage was the most extensive and diffusive. In the second stage, 12 *jotes* were selected in a somewhat purposive manner from amongst those *mouzas* already explored in the first stage. Six of these were characterised by the co-existence of peasant mobilisations and the presence of land, labour and credit markets. These constituted

the intersection or movement *jotes*. These were then matched by an equal number of non-movement or non-intersection *jotes*. In these *jotes* a complete enumeration of agrarian categories was made. This stage was intensive but exclusive of non-agrarian categories. The first two stages were directed largely to be unravelled of the agrarian system. In the third stage, all *jotes* in the three purposively selected *mouzas* were completely enumerated. The idea was now to attempt a construction of the agrarian social system. In the first phase of research as many as five schedules were canvassed.

In the second phase the units of enquiry were the partisans, anti-partisans and non-partisan households with respect to the movement. The selection of units followed the logic of linkages as they became apparent with the progress of the enquiry. The data at this level goes into longitudinal depth. The depth interviews which pursued the logic of oral histories through case studies were controlled only by an interview guide. The data is, therefore, of an intensely qualitative nature providing valuable insights into the structure and functioning of the agrarian social system, revealing the contradictions that provided the basis for social mobilisation and change. In this paper I shall largely confine myself to this second phase of research.

Before the 18th century it is unlikely that there was any human habitation worth the count in this region. The area initially under Sikkim, was subjugated by the Gurkhas of Nepal, before they were compelled to transfer it to the British after they lost the Gurkha war (1814-16). The British, in turn, restored the territory to Sikkim but annexed it in 1850. The earliest settlers presumably were the dhimals and the meches followed by koches. All the three communities could belong to the same racial stock, and quite likely migrated from the north-eastern and eastern parts [Hunter 1974: 66; Dash 1947: 39]. Almost the whole koch population sanskritised itself and christened themselves as rajbansis claiming kshatriya caste status [Mitra 1951: 73; Dash: 58].¹² Apart from these certain peasant castes from the adjoining state of Bihar also inhabited the area. The meches and dhimals were settled in the upper reaches of the Himalayan foothills, the koches/rajbansis in the lower parts and the peasant castes in the plains portion, before they all got mixed up. The ecology of the place was characterised by very dense vegetation, heavy rainfall, excessive dampness, and infested by killer-diseases like malaria and kalazar—a largely inhospitable terrain.

The meches and dhimals described as 'nomadic cultivators' practising shifting cultivation by periodic clearing of forests, had a relatively undifferentiated societal organisation. The instruments of production used by the families consisted of "an axe to fell the forest and strong bill-hook to clear the underwood and to dig the soil, a spade for rare and more effectual digging, and last-

ly, a dibble for sowing the seed". In their social system there was "no separate calling of herdsmen or shepherd, or tradesman and shopkeeper, or manufacturer, or handicraftsman", they had no buffaloes, few cows, no sheep, a good many goats, abundance of swine and poultry, and some pigeons and ducks; each family tended "its own stock of animals, which [was] entirely consumed by that family, and no part thereof sold"; they admitted no strangers among them and yet "lived on perfectly amicable terms with them". Their sex roles were clearly differentiated in terms of their contribution to the family—the man made "basketry for himself and family", whilst the women spun, wove and dyed the clothes of the family. They hardly had any concept of property on soil. The Sikkimese rulers recovered from them an annual payment of one rupee per agricultural implement, and extracted *corvee* or tribute of labour for the sovereign and for his local representative". Considering that they could raise Rs 30 to 40 worth of agricultural produce per implement, the 'land tax', we are told, 'was very light'. Devoid of any "public laws or polity... nor even traces of the village economy which so pre-eminently distinguishes Indo-Aryan societies", each little community had a head *gra* (or *mandal*) who was answerable to the raja's representative the *choudhuri*, regarding revenue collection and law and order matters [Hunter: 68-72].

Whether or not the rajbansis (koches) settled later than the meches and dhimals, they obviously had a more evolved society and economy. The preponderant community of the rajbansis established and institutionalised the predominant mode of production in the foothills region of the Himalayas of north Bengal (*tarai* region).

Immediately after British annexation of the Darjeeling *tarai*, Campbell in his first settlement of agricultural lands reported the settlement of 544 *jotedars* who renewed their *jotes* annually "but in fact they had hereditary rights which could not be refused" [Hunter: 227]. This indicates that the *jote* form of organisation of production predated British control. It was with the least alteration in the existing agrarian system that a land revenue system was imposed. The lands were never permanently settled in this border area but perpetually leased out.¹³

We know that prior to annexation the *choudhuries* "held large grants of lands and exercised civil and criminal powers" [Dash: 227]. They, as well as those with lands, whose lands were settled were described as Bengalis, but one can be reasonably certain that they were rajbansi Bengalis. We are told "the origin of their rights is obscure and that exact determination of their status has never been attempted" [Dash: 227].

The structure of the *jotedary* system was based on a patrimonial-feudal culture of the rajbansis. It is generally held to be true that the original *jotedars*, who are almost exclusively rajbansis, settled down on a tract of largely forest or fallow land. They

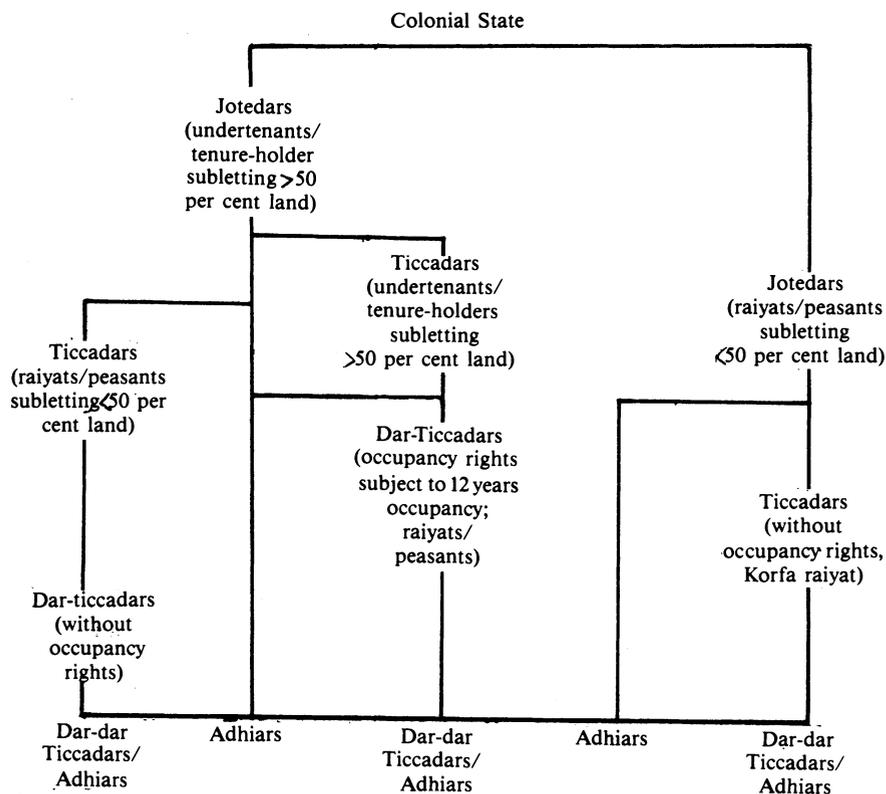
possessed both working capital and fixed capital (instruments of production). They brought with them their fellow-castemen who had only their labour at the disposal of the *jotedar*. These were the *adhiars*. Initially, both the *jotedar* with his family labour and the *adhiars* would clear forest land and engage in settled cultivation. The *jote* was named after the original settler.¹⁴

The concept of *jotedar* in the macro-context of Bengal is a landlord, often absentee. Now that landlordism is almost non-existent in West Bengal, in common parlance, its usage is associated with the rich and powerful peasants. However, the concept of *jotedar* in the *tarai* region of Darjeeling district, historically was one who held "land directly under government and [paid] revenue to government" [228]. Under the British land revenue system this did not make them a class of substantial landholders, but in fact, admitted of considerable heterogeneity. On the one hand, there were non-resident *jotedars* and 'well-to-do *jotedars*', who would cause their *nijjote*¹⁵ lands to be cultivated by *adhiars*.¹⁶ On the other hand, the majority of *jotedars* had "holdings of moderate size, cultivating their lands either by their own labour or in the system of *adhiar*" [Dutta 1898: 10, 11]. An infructuous attempt was made in the settlement of 1897 to isolate the "non-resident classes" who were mere 'rent-receivers' and the *jotedars* who got their lands cultivated exclusively by *adhiars* as a class of under-tenants¹⁷ assessing them on the rental they levied from their tenants [10, 11]. In fact, in 1897 the *jotes* varied in size "from 2 acres to 1192, and there [was] a corresponding difference between the position of those who held them". In 1924, the unresolved problem of tenure holding sought to be tackled by stipulating that *jotedars* 'who had sublet over 50 per cent of their lands were recorded as 'under-tenants', meaning, "they [were] what is commonly known as tenure holders. *Ticcadars* under *jotedars* who have held over 50 per cent of their lands unlet were recorded as *raiya*s¹⁸. . . *Dar-ticcadars* under such *ticcadars* were recorded as *korfa raiya*s having no right of occupancy. A small number of *ticcadars*, the area of whose tenancy was large with 50 per cent leased-out to *dar-ticcadars* were recorded as 'under-tenants' and the *dar-ticcadars* under them were recorded as *raiya*s having a right of occupancy where they had been in occupation of their land for 12 years".

Thus the *jotedar* category admitted of a range of classes from the absentee and non-absentee rentier landlord classes to a wide spectrum of peasant classes including the poor *raiya*.

This pattern of differentiation for the *jotedar* category continued right upto 1953 until the enactment of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, with the major difference that the upper limit of landholdings at 1192 acres in 1897 was transcended manifold and the rajbansi predominance in

DIAGRAM 2: LAND TENURE AND AGRARIAN CATEGORIES, SILIGURI SUB-DIVISION, 1924



Source: A J Dash.

the large *jotedar* category was reduced, but not considerably (Table 3, Diagram 2).

Barring a very small number of *ticcadars* who fell in the category of under-tenants, most of them were small lease-holders. In 1898, they constituted 43 per cent of the land holdings averaging 5.4 acres per holding. This comes close to the status of the *adhiars* who occupied 25 per cent of all holdings with an average of 5 acres per holding. In fact, the *dar-ticcadars* were the worst off with 2.4 acre per holding constituting 25 per cent of all holdings. This overall situation of the categories below the *jotedar* more or less continued to remain the same throughout, verging on marginal subsistence. The categories of *ticcadars* particularly were extremely vulnerable to fluctuations of the market resulting in large scale turnovers and lease-alienations.

This arrangement of structures cannot be adequately comprehended without a close look at the predominant mode of organisation of the agrarian social system. The social organisation of production of the *jotedari* system has been likened to that of a farm in comparison to the traditional village economy. Structurally, this was a two-tier system of the *jotedar-adhiar* or the *ticcadar-adhiar*, forming a complex of social and economic relationships. Normally, if an 'ordinary' *jotedar* had lands in excess of what could be cultivated by family labour, he would parcel out a portion of his lands to fixed-rent tenants (*ticcadars*). In the rest of the lands he would settle upto 10-15 families of *adhiars* who would be given lands to

cultivate with a share-contract of 50 per cent gross of the produce. The limited number of *adhiars*, which was a pervasive phenomenon, followed some latent concept of an outer-limit size beyond which it would be difficult to retain the patrimonial-fuedal, quasi-extended 'family' structure. This seemed to be generally the case in *jotes* in which the *jotedar* was a resident. Variations from this model central tendency occurred in the case of substantial, generally non-resident *jotedars* who preferred fixed rent tenants. However, many substantial *jotedars* even after exhausting these arrangements were left with surplus uncultivated or uncultivable lands. Under these circumstances there was an effort to attract *adhiars* and *ticcadars*. However, since tenurial arrangements with the *adhiars* were not legally guaranteed, and *ticcadars* were bound by annual contracts, there was a continuous and large-scale turnover in these categories. Thus if a *jotedar* was able to attract a more efficient *adhiar* he could easily ask a 'lazy' *adhiar* to pack up. The unemployed *adhiar* would find another *jotedar* whose marginal efficiency

level at that point in time allowed the recruitment of a fresh entry. One septuagenarian erstwhile *jotedar* likened these turnovers to retrenchments and dismissals in tea gardens or factories (*adhiar chhantai*).

The central value which guided this mode of organisation was an assurance of loyalty to the *jotedar* (respectfully called *giri*). To insure such loyalty the *adhiar* was expected to seek for paddy loan for household consumption from his master at the end of every harvest. He would, of course, begin his tenure with a paddy loan. This eating-out-of-the-*jotedar* was regarded as a *symbol* of loyalty. Even if an *adhiar* produced enough for his household consumption he would be expected to seek for a paddy loan. The other side of the coin was the exploitative character of this credit relationship. The interest payable on such loans was 50 per cent. The recovery of interest at the time of the harvest ensured that the net take-home share of his crop fell far short of his annual household consumption. On the average, the *adhiar* would be left with about 3 months to 6 months consumption. He naturally, would then seek for his next round of paddy loan. This system not only assured loyalty, it at the same time, was an extraction which swelled the coffers of the *jotedar*.

Initially, this loyalty was reciprocated by providing the *adhiar* with free supply of materials for construction of his house. He would be given on the average anywhere between 15 to 40 bighas of land depending upon an assessment of the labour productivity of the settled household. He was supplied with seeds, plough-cattle and other instruments of production free of charge. With the passage of time rentals in kind was imposed for supply of seeds and plough-cattle. The cost of the seeds was shared equally. This indicates an attempt to have a firmer grip over the *adhiar*. Possibly this was due to demographic increase in the size of *adhiar* population and a propensity for greater exploitation. There was a further reciprocation in providing some kind of a medical insurance for the *adhiar* household. There was a stake in keeping the *adhiar* family in health and humour.

Another feature about this relationship which is unique and which does not make the *adhiar* a sharecropper in the classic sense of the term, is that the *adhiar* could not have more than one master. In this sense the tenancy market was culturally restricted. The sharecropper was not 'free' but 'attached'. This delicate balance of perpetual indebted-

TABLE 3: CLASS IDENTITIES OF AGRARIAN CATEGORIES AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Category	Class Status	Percentage Distribution
<i>Jotedar</i> as under-tenant	Landlords	62 (535/860) ¹⁹
<i>Ticcadars</i> as under-tenants	and rich peasants	3 (171/5075)
Ordinary <i>jotedars/ticcadars</i>	Rich and middle	38 (325/860)
under under-tenants	peasants	44 (2252/5075)
<i>Ticcadars</i> under <i>riyati jotedars</i>	Middle and poor	52 (2629/5075)

Source: A J Dash.

ness and loyalty was disturbed when the *adhiar* accumulated debts in disproportion to his repayment capacities and became a drag. In such circumstances the *adhiar* fled on his own and the *jotedar* did not pursue him with a legal stick or his physical might. He was allowed to settle down with another *jotedar* even if he came to know about it. Nor would the relationship between the two *jotedars* sour on this account. Not only the flight of an *adhiar*, but 'thefts' of *adhiars* took place and were either condoned or settled or left unchallenged. This happened when a *jotedar* had an eye on an *adhiar* for his qualities and would like to have him. He would then lure him and organise his flight. The matter could be settled between the two *jotedars* by a settlement of his debts, or overlooked, depending upon the power nexus within which the *jotedars* stood.

Apart from the crop-sharing content of the economic relationship, the *adhiar* was expected to contribute his labour toward repairing his master's house, his granary, his irrigation channels and so on for which he would be given a free meal, but this was not necessarily the practice with regard to the latter two. In addition there was the practice of *haoli* or voluntary contribution of the collective labour of several *adhiar* households in somebody else's fields particularly during sowing and harvesting times. This took two forms. The *adhiars* of a *jotedar* contributed such voluntary labour in the lands under his personal cultivation, that is, in lands in which family labour of the *jotedar* family was also involved. But no case of reciprocation by the *jotedar* family came to our notice. In this sense the relationship was not reciprocal and therefore exploitative in spite of its 'voluntariness'. The other form in which it was practised was a reciprocal arrangement amongst the *adhiar* families themselves, and therefore was truly voluntary.

The *jotedari-adhiary* system did not generate a class of agricultural labourers. There were however, prosperous households keeping *naukars* or domestic servants (attached labour) on long term basis. Thus the system was marked by a pervasive system of 'attached' relationships (attached sharecropper, attached labour). Thus neither the labour nor the sharecropper was 'free' in the market sense. However, in the Darjeeling *tarai* perpetual indebtedness never reached the extremes of bondage and slavery as in many other parts of the country. In this respect alone can we describe this system as less exploitative than the others. Its reproduction was maintained by a mechanism which assured a comfortable subsistence and a general insurance for the *adhiar* for which a premium of perpetual indebtedness was the price. This was the essence of the patrimonial-feudal culture.

The otherwise sharp relationship of exploitation was blunted by a blurring of social distinctions. Within the *rajbansi* culture the social relationships between the *jotedar* and *adhiar* were almost indistinguishable. The

rajbansi adhiar would have free access to the inner sanctums of his master's house and participated in all the social ceremonies helping willingly in their organisation. Just from the looks one could easily mistake a *jotedar* for his *adhiar*. In the event of a marriage in an *adhiar* household the *jotedar* family's participation was also visible. Exchange of gifts flowed both ways, the larger flow from the *jotedar* to the *adhiar*.

Cases of *jotedars* without sons bringing *adhiars* into their families as sons-in-law was not frequent but an institutionalised practice. But even on the occasion of such social ceremonies when it came to the requirement of supplying paddy, this was provided with a 50 per cent interest tag. The economic content of loyalty was unsparingly uniform.

Barring exceptional cases of some very prosperous *jotedars* attracted by the glamour of urban consumption styles giving into ludicrous display of wanton spending, the average well-to-do *jotedar* lived a very simple life. Surprisingly, his surpluses were not even entrusted to the custody of banks. Usually hard cash in the form of gold guineas and ornaments would be hidden under the floors or in specially devised receptacles in roof thatchings and so on. The concept of a monetised market economy had hardly penetrated this region and certainly not the *rajbansi* community. There are well known instances such as that of a *jotedar* setting his long standing dues with a shopkeeper by transferring a *jote* or a part of it, as a clearance of his dues. The grandfather of a prosperous Bihari *jotedar* served as a *chowkidar* to one of the big *rajbansi jotedars* without drawing any salary. After 10 or 15 years of such 'free' service he was rewarded with the gift of a *jote*. This is illustrative of the cognitive structure of the *rajbansi* culture which had failed to grasp the operation of the land market.

The *rajbansis* combined economic prosperity with social backwardness to a degree which is difficult to absorb. The previous generation had not entered the threshold of college and almost the entire *rajbansi* population inclusive of *jotedars* and *adhiars* were either illiterate or barely with an education not beyond the seventh grade in schools.

The social organisation of production in the Darjeeling *tarai* was highly institutionalised with the indelible imprint of the *rajbansi* culture on the socio-economic situation. Such was the degree of self-regulation of the system that it required no coercive apparatus to control deviations from the norms. Unlike the *zamindar* landlords, the *jotedars* had no muscle-men, no *sepais*, no courts. There was not a single instance of an *adhiar* house being razed to the ground, or his woman violated for his 'crime'. Incredible as it might sound, even the two largest owners (blood brothers) with estates totalling about 10,000 acres owning countless *jotes* all over Phansidewa, Khoribari, Naxalbari, utilised the services of a manager, a couple of *sepais* who were sent on errands for rent collection from *sherwans*. *Sherwans*

were selected from among the *jotedar's* favoured *adhiars* who would inspect the weighments of crop during harvest and supervise the share. As an extra consideration for his services the *jotedar* could reward him with some more land, sometimes even rent free. There was no evidence of any resistance in the operation of this system. The *jotedari-adhiari* system established by the *rajbansis* expanded to include non-*rajbansis* who entered the land market. Finding the system so smooth in its functioning they found their investments in land very safe and very good. The British too were happy to protect a system which yielded them good land revenue with the minimum cost of governance.

In have only tried to delineate the central structural tendencies of the *jotedari-adhiary* system around which fluctuations and variations were of many shades. But at least in one respect the non-*rajbansi* participants of the system were qualitatively different. They differed in their social customs and norms, consequently their life-styles were different and the *rajbansis* applied selective discrimination to distinguish themselves from them. This happened with the entry on a large scale of the tribal population into the tenancy (*adhy*) and land-lease (*ticca*) markets. While the economic relationships continued with *rajbansi jotedars* preferring *oraon*, *munda*, *santal adhiars* and *ticcadars* to their own castemen for their higher labour productivity, they were socially defined as 'polluted' communities with whom social interactions were guided by strict commensal restrictions on inter-dining and inter-marriage. Tribals were not allowed to draw water from their wells and entry into their households was restricted to the outer verandah. Thus social discrimination was practised along with the economic exploitation which was already embedded in the *jotedari* system. Thus the 'strain' within the system was introduced by the entry of non-*rajbansi* Bengalis and other professionals who entered the land market in increasingly large numbers on the one hand, and the encouragement provided by the *rajbansi* landed interests themselves to the tribals to participate in the tenancy and land-lease markets. This necessitates a brief statement on the tribal influx into the area.

The induction of the tribals is coterminous with the introduction of the tea plantation industry into the region. The first tea garden in the area was established in 1862. The plantations could not attract *rajbansi*, *mech* or *dhimal* labour so it reached out to the traditional reserves for such labour into the tribal areas of Bihar and West Bengal and got them over in large numbers. Until 1901, we are given to understand two things:

(1) In the *tarai* rural areas "the social unit is not the village characteristic of the rest of India, but the farm", (2) the *oraons*, *mundas* and *santals* who spoke their own languages and came from the Chotanagpur plateau reside almost exclusively in the Siliguri *thana*, where they are employed as *coolies* on the tea gardens" [Imperial Gazetteer of

India 1908: 168, 171]. The tribal population was close to 14,000 and almost exclusively within the boundaries of the plantations whilst the 29,500 rajbansi population were engaged in farm-type agrarian society. After 1901 the tribal population entered the rural economy in large numbers, so much so that by 1941 their (santal, oraon, munda) participation exceeded that of as Coolies in the plantations (57 per cent). But the rajbansi population of 18,000 still constituted the "non tea garden rural population" with only 140 of them residing in Siliguri town [Bengal District Gazetteer: 68]. The total rural population of these three tribal communities constituted 26 per cent and that of the rajbansis 34 per cent. In all, these four communities constituted roughly 60 per cent of the rural population the rest being distributed among many others in small proportions. Between 1901 and 1941 the tribal population not only had cent per cent command over plantation labour, they had made significant inroads into the agrarian economy mainly as *adhiars* and *ticcadars*. They also started investing in land from cash savings earned through labour in plantations.

The decade of the forties and the fifties brought about cataclysmic changes in this region. The partition of India and consequently of Bengal witnessed a massive influx of population from across the border of Pakistan (the then East Bengal), and the promulgation of the West Bengal Land Acquisition Act of 1953 resulted in large scale appropriation of land affecting suddenly and mainly the rajbansi landowning population. Subsequently through a series of land reforms, involving ceiling on land and protection of the tenancy rights, the economic power of the rajbansis witnessed a steep decline.

Shorn of their previous economic status, lacking in education and political consciousness, without any class organisation and identity the predominant mode of organisation of the preponderant community crumbled before the forces of market, migration, reform and political mobilisation of peasants. This overall context of historical evolution of agrarian relations in the *tarai* is a *prima facie* requirement for a proper understanding of the Naxalbari movement in store for the future.

III

The *tebhaga* movement which had raged in the adjacent districts of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur, between 1945-47, had not affected the Siliguri area. It was in the fierce *tebhaga* struggle for two-thirds crop share in place of half share that Charu Mazumdar received his first field training under the leadership of Sachin Dasgupta, who had sacrificed a brilliant career in medicine, to become the president of district committee of the Communist Party of India of Jalpaiguri district. Charu Mazumdar was the son of a prosperous *jotedar* family which had an enviable record in the national struggle for in-

dependence led by the Congress party. He plunged into the *tebhaga* movement while he was still a fresher in college. His father was a learned person well known and admired for his qualities of head and heart. By marriage he had come into the vast property amassed by his father-in-law and as per his desire agreed to become a part of his father-in-law's family. On the demise of his father-in-law he seemed to have been disillusioned and disenchanted by the behaviour of those of his in-laws who might have felt deprived of their due share in the property. He led a spartan existence, a life of self-abnegation, little interested in the affairs of his estate and dedicated to public service. It was in this kind of an environment that the sensitive mind of Charu Mazumdar was nurtured. This background is essential to understand and appreciate the paradox of a *jotedar* alienated landlordism. This is also a key to his early Bohemian adventurism, an attitude of don't-care-a-damn that he possessed throughout. So much for a minimum psychologism which I consider is a necessary backdrop for the charisma that Charu Mazumdar became.

The first peasant committee under the inspiration of the communist workers was established in Siliguri sub-division in a place called Patharghata in 1946. Even as the *tebhaga* movement came to an end in Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur districts, this newly-established committee under the leadership of the three brothers Atin, Nripen and Souren Bose, and Bandhan Oraon made forcible demands for two-thirds share of crops for the *adhiars* on the threshing floor (*khamar*) of Bhagwan Dayal Singh, a big *jotedar* who hails from the Hindi speaking state of Uttar Pradesh. The police were called, seven arrests were made, and the leaders were forced to sign a bond under section 107 of the Indian Penal Code undertaking to refrain from such illegal activity in that region. If the *tebhaga* movement was dead in body, its spirit provided the beacon light for those who two decades later would create another peasant revolt. The slogans of *tebhaga* and its front organisations—the Krishak Sabha (peasant association) and Krishak Samiti (peasant committee)—were the programmatic and organisational instruments with which activists like Kanu Sanyal, Jogen Mukherji, Chunilal Goala; Panchanan Sarkar, and some others made their first entry amongst the exploited peasantry. The initial slogans were carried over from the *tebhaga*. These were demands for *zamindari* abolition, for land to the tiller, against tenant eviction, for a reduction of interest to 25 per cent on paddy loan, followed by a call to the peasants not to surrender their lands under threat. The earliest contacts with the peasants were established in weekly or bi-weekly village markets (*haats*). They were not welcome to the *jotes* nor could they enter these without attracting notice of the *jotedars*. 1952 witnessed the humiliating defeat of their candidate Bandhan Oraon in the first general elections.

This only promoted the determined band of workers to step up their activities and efforts. They decided that political work in the rural areas could not be carried out by basing themselves in Siliguri town. The first meeting of the Krishak Sabha was called in Ambari in 1952 in which an estimated 2,000 peasants were reported to have attended. A co-ordination committee was formed consisting of Panchanan Sarkar, Jogen Mukherji, Chunilal Goala, Mujibur Rehman, Khokon Mazumdar, Keshab Sarkar who were assigned to Khoribari, Buraganj, Naxalbari, Hatigheesh and Champasuri. Kanu Sanyal presided and became its co-ordinator.

Hereafter, peasant organisational strength went on increasing with every little struggle that yielded result. While it is not necessary to go into all of them, three deserve mention. Soon after the conclusion of Ambari conference news reached the Krishak Samiti that an *adhiar* had been evicted by one Harihar Singh and Bihari *jotedar* in Buraganj. The Krishak Samiti resolved it would make its presence felt with all its might and come what may they would not settle for anything less than his reinstatement. A shocked and completely shaken Harihar Singh was quick to oblige. The Krishak Samiti tasted its first victory in its maiden effort. Two other incidents in the fifties against Mitin Lal and Serket Singh involved large scale mobilisations of peasants and a proper trial of strength between rajbansi *jotedars* and peasants (*adhiars*). In the case of Mitin Lal more than a thousand surrounded his house and forcibly reinstated their evicted tenants. Later on, through legal procedures he was able to sustain their eviction. But in the case of Serket Singh the fight was over *tebhaga* share. The bloody outcome resulted in the loot of his entire granary followed by a massive display of armed procession of peasants. These three incidents broke the power of the *jotedars* who at most took recourse to courts of law where sometimes their claims were upheld.

Programmatically, the Krishak Samiti began with their crusade against tenant eviction. Then after the 1953 Act their role was to counter attempts by *jotedars* to circumvent the land ceiling laws. *Ticcadars* and *adhiars* were asked not to pay any rental unless the *jotedar* produced bona fide documents of ownership claim of the lands they were tilling. In course of time they picked up issues relating to 'extra-economic coercion', viz produce rents on bullock (*panudan*), free labour for *jotedars* households, etc. *Tebhaga* or 2/3 share (which was legislated) was pursued with vigour until the *adhiar* himself found out that the half-share was working out better. During periods of food scarcity peasant mobilisations would take place.

The change from this environment of ongoing struggle started taking shape from 1962 with the Chinese attack on India. The Siliguri and Jalpaiguri units of the party found the government of India guilty of expansionism. This led to a rift within the

Communist party and to its subsequent split in 1964. The Siliguri sub-divisional committee in course of time took up an even more pro-Chinese stand within the CPI(M) to which they now belonged. Their belligerent attitude was spearheaded by Charu Mazumdar. Subsequent, to his electoral defeat in the 1966 bye-election to the West Bengal legislature he circulated a series of documents calling for an armed struggle for revolutionary transformation. This was met with approval by the Siliguri sub-divisional committee of the peasants which was largely guided by the unquestioned peasant leadership of Kanu Sanyal. But differences between Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal began to surface when the former insisted on fighting economism by reducing the role of peasants and workers organisations, which had, according to him, got habituated to making only economic demands and hence were inappropriate instruments for bringing about any qualitative structural changes. Kanu Sanyal, on the other hand, felt that the long established tradition of struggle so assiduously built over two decades could be propelled towards revolutionary objectives. While the former denounced the parliamentary institutions and likened them to pig sties, the latter held that these should be utilised for their political ends and their ultimate overthrow.

In the first phase of this inner party contradiction in Siliguri, Kanu Sanyal's view prevailed. The 1966 harvest was bad. The elections to the legislative assembly was slated for March 1967. Jangal Santhal, the tribal leader, was made the official candidate of the CPI(M) from this constituency. Political work was stepped up on a class basis. The food shortage led them to declare that no hoarding of foodgrains would be allowed. The peasant committee relentlessly went on a dehoarding and confiscation spree alienating many landed interests. In the elections Jangal Santhal lost to the Congress party, but the Congress party in the state lost to CPI(M) and its United Front allies.

The fact that their own party had now come to power prompted the peasant leaders to step up their dehoarding activities, give the signal for forcible seizure of lands with dubious ownership claims (*benami*), and to declare that not one single peasant would be allowed to starve as long as there were paddy stocks in houses. The rampage that followed made many erstwhile rajbansi *jotedars* flee their homes for safer refuge. An embarrassed CPI(M) leadership in state power unable to persuade their more radical comrades finally resorted to police action and subsequent control. All the peasant leaders sooner or later found themselves behind bars.

The determined vigour with which the party members rebelled against their central leadership was fuelled by the Chinese declaration that Naxalbari revolt was the spring thunder over India and that soon the whole country will be engulfed by the prairie fire of revolutionary struggles. This gave

further legitimacy to the activists to whom a Chinese certification of their actions was more important than what their comrades in the central leadership thought about them. During this period the United Front government had gone out but once again returned to power through another election. More strongly straddled in power they took a let-by-gones-be-by-gones attitude with the imprisoned Naxalbari leaders and released them. Kanu Sanyal was released on April 8, 1969 and the formation of the CPI(ML) was announced by him on April 22.

The political work leading to its formation was carried out by Charu Mazumdar whilst Kanu Sanyal and other peasant leaders were languishing in jails. He was able to create within a remarkably short period of time a completely new set of leadership drawn from amongst the youth which replaced maturity with a spirit of revolutionary adventure. The new leadership was almost entirely urban middle class and subject only to the authority of Charu Mazumdar. The veteran comrades both in Jalpaiguri and Siliguri found in them new faces who had now been privileged with direct access to the leader whose authority and dictat followed directly from him and through them. The released leaders found these new comrades lodged in their agrarian bastions issuing orders and demanding protection and sustenance from the peasants. In this manner the inner contradiction within the Siliguri party organisation saw the ascendance and imposition of Charu Mazumdar's line.

There are certain clearly discernible patterns in the events from 1969 that stand out in sharp contrast to those that took place in 1967. The conspiratorial style of execution by guerilla squads replaced the involvement of peasant masses in collective struggles; there was less visible conflict on agrarian issues, and targets seemed to include betrayals by members of the poorer classes than real class enemies; and finally, the peasant leaders again found themselves behind bars within a very short period of their release, leaving the terrain free for the new leadership to operate from. The new revolutionary elan rejected the state and its institutions and sought for their destruction by revolutionary violence. The involvement of the urban middle class youth carried terrorism into the towns and cities totally upsetting the instruments of social control. In course of time a non-plussed alienated peasantry became indifferent or withdrew support even as the state power mounted its offensive determined to carry on to a bloody finish. By 1972 the second phase of agrarian revolution came to an end in the Naxalbari region.

IV

We are now in a position to attempt an analysis of the movement. Before the advent of the British the two-tier agrarian social system in the *tarai* was largely an arrangement *within* a single community—the raj-

bans. Presumably the meches and dhimals at the same time practised their egalitarian mode of production. With the advent of the British, the introduction of railways, the growth of urban centres like Darjeeling and Siliguri, the penetration of the market in a basically non-market economy had its effect. It introduced investment in land by commercial and professional people who came to seek their fortunes in the promising town of Siliguri. These interests were quick to see the value of the rajbansi style of organisation of production and fitted their economic interests without seeking to disrupt it. So, for both the British as well as the urban investors the peaceful, stable exploitation of labour and the yield the reform was welcome. For land speculators it was a safe investment. The colonial and commercial-professional interests responded to this situation in their own ways. The British, who at any rate did not propose a permanent land revenue settlement for the area chose to lease out areas for specific periods of time. In doing so they incorporated the elements of hereditary property rights in a lease contract system, a practice which is somewhat paradoxical. The commercial-professional interests were conscious of the fragility of this delicate structure. They were quick to realise that the wealthy yet unlettered rajbansis were unconscious of the dangers that could destroy their system. They sought to create a class organisation of the *jotedars* so that their own interests also could be safeguarded. The formation of the *Jotedar* Association and the Tarai Mangal Samiti were such efforts. In the face of rajbansi apathy neither of these two organisations lasted for long. The Congress party entered the scene and got the Tarai Mangal Samiti dissolved to be integrated with the peasant wing of the party.

As long as land was plenty and labour scarce the *adhiar* was assured of a comfortable subsistence. The power structure of the *jotedhari-adhiari* system was represented by ever so many small 'pyramids' with the *giri* and his *adhiars* and *ticcadars*. The power did not extend very much beyond their boundaries. That is why *adhiar* flights and thefts were left to go by default. In fact only later do we find some evidence of *jotedars* from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh employing strong arm men. As long as the social relationships between rajbansi *adhiars* and *jotedars* blurred the exploitation of *adhiars*, the system went on reproducing itself without difficulty. The entry of the tribal population as *adhiars* and *ticcadars* to rajbansi *jotedars* signalled the beginning of a new contradiction, that of social discrimination. The consciousness of being looked down upon as of low status unworthy of social interaction with their rajbansi masters, when their rajbansi counterparts enjoyed unfettered access into their households provided a contrast so direct that it developed into an antagonistic relationship in course of time. Also during this period the tribal population had generated a stratum of self-cultivating rich and middle peasants who had entered into the land

market by dint of their own industry and hard labour, as also through savings from the plantation economy. The juxtaposition of these two phenomena prepared the ground for the maturation of an antagonistic relationship embedded in the tenancy structure of exploitation.

This is clearly explained by the fact that the earliest to be mobilised by the peasant leadership were the tribals both in the plantations and in the agrarian fields. The militant culture of the tribals made their armed mobilisation easily possible. The extraordinary mobilisation of the peasants and plantation workers in 1955 demanding for bonus can be explained. Plantation labour was exclusively tribal. The peasants mobilised were predominantly tribal ranging from rich to poor peasants. Savings from plantation labour provided the basis for tribal peasantisation. Therefore tribal peasant support for tribal worker demand for bonus meant a reinforcement of the process of tribal peasantisation through increased savings leading to further investment in land. Besides, the close-knit tribal organisation provided a readymade base for the invocation of tribal solidarity.

It is true that rajbansi *adhians* joined the movement as time progressed but it would not be a misplaced perception to state that generally speaking whilst the tribal peasant responded against exploitation, the rajbansi *adhiar* was lured by the prospect of greater gain. They had hitched themselves with the wagon of tribal peasantry.

It is interesting to note that rajbansi *jotedars* never developed a consciousness of class. The one time prosperous rajbansi *jotedars* bemoan the fact that they could never unite in strength to counter the challenge of the Krishak Samiti threat. Leading Bengali lawyers with outstanding professional credentials as owners of *jotes* sought to give leadership to the rajbansi *jotedars* but failed. It is significant that most of the targets were rajbansi *jotedars* as non-rajbansi Bengali *jotedars* were non-residents. In a few cases tribals were targets, but almost invariably they were Christians. Even as the class organisation of the rajbansi *jotedars* weakened, the peasant classes grew from strength to strength.

Incredible as it may sound, the 1953 Act had disastrous consequences for many rajbansi *jotedars* who had not cared to distribute their assets among their next of kin, even to the extent possible within the ceiling laws. This was another blow to their already dwindling power.

While so far the analysis has followed an ethnic-class logic, it is instructive to look at it from the perspective of the movement. The peasant associated had clearly set secular goals of combating exploitation based on the principal contradiction located in the exploitative tenancy relationships. Tactically, peasants, initially could not but be organised through tribal peasant solidarities. Thus ethnic mobilisation was sought for achieving secular goals. The party itself sought to

secularise the movement by attracting to its fold rajbansis and other communities. The peasant leadership was able to maintain universalistic values within their organisation guided primarily by secular principles. The Ambari conference in 1952 saw 2,000 peasants cooking their own food in 22 different hearths. By the 1960s their conferences were catered to by single kitchens. Such has been the long term impact of this secularisation process, along with other factors, that today it is almost inconceivable that they can once again be mobilised in the same fashion. They are now fragmented in different trade unions and peasant associations all of which are now competing against each other recruiting from the same social bases.

At a time when these massive peasant mobilisations used to take place the agrarian social system was less evolved and simply stratified. Thus between the *jotedar* and the *adhiar* there were no intervening categories. The categories were discrete, the exploitation or discrimination direct, such a system was vulnerable to class polarisation. The definition of the exploiter and the exploited was visible and clear and did not require any sophisticated analysis or conjecture. The alliance of classes on this account was not difficult to form. It is obvious that the middle and poor peasants had nothing to lose as they did not get their lands cultivated by *adhians*. So their support could be sought against the landlord. One can now safely hypothesise, in the present circumstances in which classes do not stand in sharp and direct relationship between themselves; when a single communist party contending against a single Congress party has changed to a situation in which half a dozen Marxist and non-Marxist parties are competing amongst and against each other; when any number of voluntary organisations are extending their clientele; it is difficult to imagine that any class contradiction can be sharp enough to bring about a class mobilisation for structural changes as in the past.

Finally, a look at the movement dynamics. In the initial phase of the movement the peasant association sought to bring about a series of quasi-structural changes. It sought to obtain for the *adhiar* better and less exploitative terms with the *jotedars*. Its claim for *tebhaga* and its struggle against all other forms of deductions from his legitimate crop share are illustrations of these. The means adopted were a combinations of legal and non-institutional (or illegitimate) means. This explains the several trips to the jails every year by the leading peasant leaders and their followers. Thus intra-systemic changes were sought through non-institutionalised and legal means. This vulnerability of the system towards change continued until 1967 when the mobilisation was stepped up with a call for forcible seizure of land by the actual tillers of the soil. The movement had now started making demands for systemic change through a more intense use of non-institutionalised means. This resulted in a counter action by the state and its support

to the counter movement by the first ever manifestation of class consciousness among the rajbansis. In 1969, the movement stepped up non-institutionalised means, stopped using any institutionalised means, and took a plunge for a revolutionary transformation, by inactivating the quasi-movement structures. This resulted in invoking the much larger might of the state on the one hand and a loss of legitimacy for the movement from its quasi-movement base. The loss to the movement has since been irretrievable in Naxalbari.

Notes

[The theoretical section is a concise revision of my earlier paper 'Social Conflict and Social Change: Towards a Theoretical Orientation' in Urmila Phadnis et al (eds), "Domestic Conflicts in South Asia", Vol I, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986. If there is any difference between my earlier paper and this paper, the latter should be accepted as reflecting my current position. The research on which this paper is based is in its final stages of completion, hence to that extent the tentativeness of the observations must be recognised.]

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- 1 Earlier I had also used the term collective mobilisation. The decision to use social mobilisation has been taken with a view to dissociate it from the connotations of the word 'collective' in collective behaviour.
- 2 A theoretical orientation is not the same thing as theory. It is, the set of ideas, assumptions and methodological approaches that serve to guide or orient the researcher in his examination of substantive issues. Hence it does not constitute what is normally thought of as theory. An orientation offers ways of selecting, conceptualising, categorising, and ordering data relating to certain kinds of analytical problems. But it does not in itself form a consistent system of interrelated propositions which are capable of being tested empirically, although it may facilitate the formulation of such theories [Long 1977: 4].
- 3 The phenomenologists, for instance.
- 4 Coser represents the neo-evolutionary functional school which attempts to integrate conflict and change within its framework. He observes: "There is always some sort of a continuity between a past and a present, or a present and a future social system; societies do not die the way biological organisms do, for it is difficult to assign precise points of birth or death to societies as we do with biological organisms. One may claim that all that can be observed is a change of the organisation of social relations; but from one perspective such change may be considered re-establishment of equilibrium whereas from another it may be seen as the formation of a new system"[1967: 27].
- 5 For arriving at this classification of change

I have been influenced by Ramkrishna Mukherjee, [Mukherjee 1970: 9].

- 6 For example, Dhanagare reasons that the *tebhaga* movement in Bengal could not develop into a massive peasant rebellion because "the total number of peasants killed in scuffles with the police did not exceed fifty, although 3,119 arrests were made..." [Dhanagare 1983: 172].
- 7 For further details on the *gramdan* movement please see my paper: 'Gramdan in Berain: A Sociological Analysis', 'Gramdan: A Study of Gramdan: Social and Economic Outcomes', "Disciplined Electicism" and "Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections", Popular Prakasan, Bombay, 1986.
- 8 Situated in the northern district of Darjeeling in the eastern state of West Bengal.
- 9 The massive mobilisation for a total revolution on neo-Gandhian lines was to come up five years later resulting in the declaration of a *jote* differed from the more dispersed villages. One *mouza* can include one or more than one *jote*.
- 10 *Mouzas* are strictly defined boundaries of an area which is the smallest unit of revenue collection in the rural areas. The *jote* is the native term of an identifiable cluster of households. The original settlement pattern of a *jote* differed from the more dispersed villages. One *mouza* can include one or more than one *jote*.
- 11 PPS sample stands for Probability Proportional to Size sample.
- 12 The present rajbansi population of this region will deny this attribution of their ancestry belligerently.
- 13 The Siliguri sub-division was a sensitive frontier region bordering Nepal, Sikkim and close to Bhutan, Tibet and China. Hence the British declared it a non-regulation area, meaning that the legislative decisions taken in Calcutta did not become laws in this region. Its administration was directly under the governor of Bengal. Apart from agricultural crops, the cultivation of tea in plantations was extensive. This paper discusses only the agrarian structure.
- 14 Even today the names of *jotes* are attributed to the names of the original *jotedars*.
- 15 These included marwaris, pleaders, merchants, etc, who had acquired the holdings by moneylending, who were rent receivers and whose tenants were the actual tillers of the soil; *nijjote* literally translated means "own *jote*", i.e. *jote* under personal cultivation.
- 16 *Adhiars* received some share of the crop they cultivated from lands allotted to them by the *jotedars* or *ticcadars*. The gross share was half, but the net take-home share was always far less. *Ticcadars* are fixed rent tenants under the *jotedars*. *Dar-ticcadars* are fixed rent tenants of *ticcadars*. This fixed-rent category did not go beyond *dar-dar-ticcadars*. The well-to-do *jotedars* did not cultivate themselves but their predecessors were cultivators.
- 17 Under-tenants refer to the category of landowners who own large tracts of land and pay rent only to the state and to no intermediary. They are the intermediaries. In permanently settled areas they were the *zamindars* or landlords.
- 18 *Raiyats* are cultivating peasants.

19 As many as 97 of the 535 *jotedars* had practically no cultivated lands in their direct possession. These naturally included all non-resident *jotedars*. This number was 53 in 1987, indicating a rise in landlordism.

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DISCUSSION

Effect of Tariffs on Foreign Prices

Andre Sapir

IN a recent paper on 'Effect of Tariffs on Foreign Prices: The Case of India'¹ R G Nambiar and R Mehta (hereafter, N and M) raise the interesting possibility that tariff reductions may not be suitable for India due to the presence of market imperfections such as foreign monopoly power. The paper is divided in two parts. In the first the authors sketch a model of a domestic market dominated by a foreign monopolist whereby a tariff liberalisation would lead the foreign supplier "to raise [its] export price and rob the domestic consumers of the benefits of tariff reduction."² The second part of the paper is devoted to providing empirical support for the assumption that foreign producers enjoy monopoly power in Indian markets.

The purpose of this comment is to show that the policy recommendation formulated by N and M does not follow from their theoretical or empirical arguments. Instead, if anything, their analysis reinforces the case in favour of trade liberalisation in India.

I begin by setting up graphically the model that N and M seem to have in mind in the first part of their paper.³ The figure depicts the Indian market for a product entirely sup-

plied by a foreign monopolist. The demand curve (DD') and marginal cost curve (C_FC'_F) are assumed to be linear for ease of exposition. Under free trade the foreign monopolist sells OQ_F at a price OP_F. If India imposes a specific tariff at the rate *t* the monopolist's supply curve shifts upto C_TC'_T, implying a reduction in sales to OQ_T and an increase in price to OP_T. Comparing the situations with and without tariff shows that a tariff reduction (i) raises the export price pocketed by the foreign monopolist from (OP_T - C_TC_F) to OP_F; and (ii) raises its monopoly rent from P_TA_TB_TC_T to P_FA_FB_FC_F, thereby lowering India's welfare (measured as the sum of consumer's surplus and tariff revenue) from (DP_TA_T + B_TE_TF_TG_T) to DP_FA_F. So far the results confirm the analysis by N and M. And it may seem as if indeed, "a rise in tariff might be rightly placed; it would exert pressure upon the foreign producer to absorb the tariff hike".⁴

The next step before drawing policy recommendations from the theoretical apparatus is to identify those Indian markets that fit the central assumption of monopoly power on the part of foreign producers. The