

**FROM CHUAR REBELLION TO THE NAXALITE UPSURGE:
THE LEGACY OF RESISTANCE IN MIDNAPORE**

SYNOPSIS

OF

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The Context

The predominance of the rural sector, as expressed best by Mahatma Gandhi's famous saying, 'the soul of India lives in its villages', has been a feature of Indian society and economy across centuries. Hence agriculture, which forms the base of the socio-economic structure of the entire human civilisation itself, has been the predominant source of livelihood and revenue. The productive capacity of agriculture in turn primarily depends on land and its quality. Land, especially productive one, is scarce and hence is contested. 'Rights to land' hence has always been a controversial, sensitive area of deliberation and a site for conquest, colonisation and resistance. Land rights, in general, can be understood as legal rights to own, use, access, control, manage land and its resources. Such rights are linked to questions of livelihood, development, social justice and identity. The idea of property in land in the legal-rational sense is relatively new in India, as it was born out of her colonial experience. Resistances that shook early colonial India have a totally agrarian composition and can be directly linked to the revenue administration of the colonial state and experiments to find answer to the question -Who owns the land in India?

The genesis of colonial state in India can be traced to September 26, 1760 when Mir Qasim ceded the revenues of the districts Burdwan, Midnapore¹ and Chittagong to the East India Company (hereinafter referred to as the Company) and August 16, 1765 when the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II granted the *diwani*² of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa post Battle of Buxar.

Acquisition of *diwani* implied that the Company was faced with the task of devising a system of revenue administration and define a role for themselves as an administrator in an alien territory. The period between 1765 till the introduction of Permanent Settlement by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 saw a variety of experiments in revenue management which created confusion. Understanding revenue collection required an understanding of land ownership and land rights. Based on their own native perception, they attempted to impose a legal -rational

¹ In this study, the district has been referred to as Midnapore to maintain consistency. The district is referred across literature as Midnapore, Midnapur or Medinipur. Colonial accounts tend to use Midnapore while post-colonial ones tend to use both Midnapur and Midnapore. In Bengali, the district is consistently referred to as Medinipur and in recent years this use has become the dominant one in English as well. Given the period of study the geographical extent of the undivided district covers the present-day districts of Midnapore (East) / Purba Medinipur, Midnapore (West) / Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram. The administrative break up of undivided Midnapore into East and West was executed on January 1, 2002. Midnapore (West) was further administratively divided and Jhargram Subdivision was made a separate district with effect from April 4, 2017.

² Right to collect revenue and conduct administration

understanding of land ownership and state formation on a traditional socio-economic structure, generating a variety of fissures in the social fabric culminating in resistances.

The Perplexing Question of Property in Land, Permanent Settlement and ‘Land to the Zamindar’

The question that has been central to any discourse on land was the status of the zamindar in the revenue hierarchy. Though the nearest English translation of the word is landlord but, in this case, a zamindar was just an agent who collected and remitted revenue. Private property in land was not officially established anywhere either on the King or the zamindar or peasant. Private property rights existed over the shares in such produce of the land as was left after the payment of land revenue. Neither Hindu nor Mohammedan law claimed the sovereign to be the owner of all land. The British system of an ‘estate in land’ with the fixed idea of an owner for every plot of land did not apply here.

The intention of the Company regarding revenue assessment and administration was maximisation of monetary gains and attempts to extract them without a clear understanding of the land rights and revenue collection presented a baffling problem. Confusion ranged from the stage of assessment to collection, the most drastic effect of which was the Bengal Famine of 1770. The final solution devised was vesting of statutory right of property in a class to simplify revenue administration and improve productive efficiency of agriculture. The result was Lord Cornwallis’s Proclamation of 22nd March, 1793 with its 48 regulations which constituted the creation of the notion of private property in land. The property right in land was for the first time officially vested in the zamindar and the assessments were fixed ‘for ever’.

The Chuar resistances (1767-1800) that shook the administration during this period in Midnapore is directly linked to the imposition of formal revenue administration in a customary agrarian setting and infringement on special land rights in the first half, while in the second half it was a reaction to the effects of Permanent Settlement. The first half of the present study deals with this aspect of land-resistance dynamics in the colonial setting.

‘Land to the Tiller’ and Agrarian Resistances in 20th Century Bengal

The post-colonial agrarian setting is built upon a plethora of continuities from the colonial period, the biggest one being the effects of Permanent Settlement. The movements that shook India at the verge of independence are linked to the exploiter -exploited relationships, as they

evolved post-Settlement. One significant change that developed in the agrarian hierarchy was decline in the position of the traditional zamindars and rise of the jotedar class. The structure is roughly presented in the figure below.

Fig.1

Agrarian Structure at a Glance

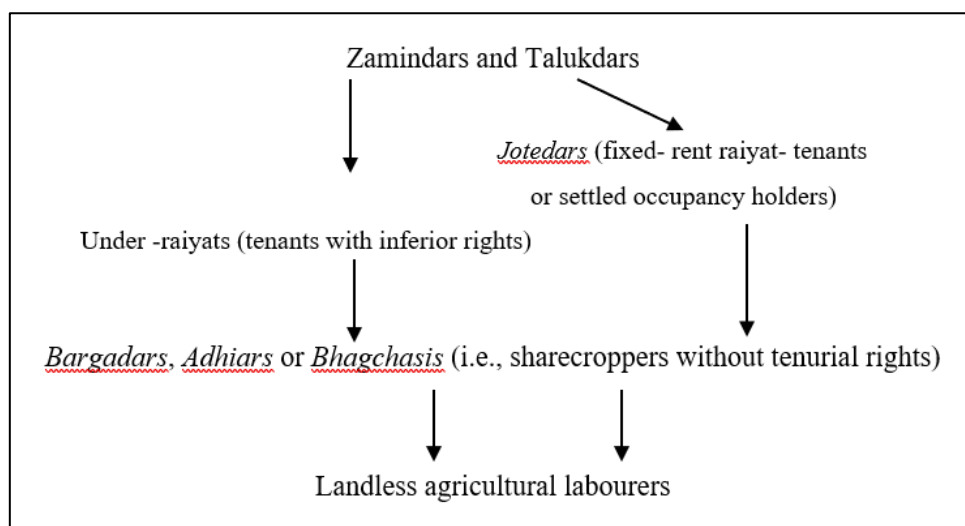


Fig. 3: Adopted from D.N Dhanagare, "Peasant Protest and Politics: The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (India), 1946-47", *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 3, no.3 (1976) :361, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066157608437988>.

As we move into the 20th century, the jotedar- bargadars equation and feudal relations of exploitation became the key feature of agrarian relations in major portions of Bengal. This was topped by exploitation by moneylenders (mahajan) who were the major source of agricultural finance. Over time the traditional moneylenders also declined leading to the rise of the jotedar-mahajan as the chief agrarian exploiter. Droughts, famines and market relations compounded their existential problems. The economic and political climate necessary for the rise of the Communist Party of India (CPI) was provided by the dismal condition of this class of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers and the policy vacuum of the Indian National Congress (INC) regarding their plight and redressal of grievances. It was the Left mobilisation of these lower rungs of the agrarian hierarchy leading to movements all over Bengal which culminated in the Tebhaga movement and finally Naxalbari. The slogans '*chashir haate jomi chai*' or '*langal jaar jomi taar*', translating in essence as the phrase 'land to the tiller' forms the crux of land and agrarian reform demands of such movements. It is not just a political demand but also a question of public policy and social justice.

Land reforms have been a consistent agenda in policy circles since independence. Land reform normally includes abolition of intermediaries, protection of tenants against eviction, control of land rents, consolidation of land holding, prevention of fragmentation, transfer of ownership rights to tenants, imposition of ceilings on the amount of land that can be held by one person or family unit, distribution of surplus land among the landless and others and settlement of landless agricultural workers. Various models of such reforms exist.³ In the Indian context the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, the Land Revenue Commission Report (1940) are examples of the tenure-reform model of reforms where the terms and conditions in which the non-owning cultivators hold lands are altered like lowering of rents, tenurial security etc . The Land Revenue Commission Report of 1940 recommended abolition of the zamindari system, grant of direct tenancy rights to the sharecroppers and reducing the share of produce legally recoverable from them from half to one third. Such recommendations became the catalyst to the launch of Tebhaga movement at the verge of independence. This brings us to the ceiling-redistributive category of reforms. The Constitution (First Amendment) Act of 1951 effected the abolition of zamindari. Various state governments on their own initiative passed laws intended to remove zamindari, impose ceiling on holdings and redistribute lands excess of ceiling like the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953. Based on the logic of distributive justice, these reforms aimed at eradicating feudal relations by removing intermediaries. However, in the implementation stage they failed on numerous fronts like existence of clauses of retentions and exemptions, fictitious transfers and asymmetrical access to legal recourse. Also, dependency for livelihood added to complications. Such reforms failed in protecting the traditional rights of the tenants and also failed to grant them new rights. In many cases reforms were promulgated by ruling elites who themselves depended on agrarian elites for votes. The Left (at that point, CPI) strongly criticised the Zamindari Abolition Laws, as not bringing in any substantial change and also opposed the issue of compensations for acquisition. Land rights to the cultivator became the central mobilisation point for the Party which forms the third type of reform model based on the normative ideal of a classical peasant centric society and economy, in which the landlord -tenant organisation of production is altered.

The overall situation that prevailed in Bengal after independence, provided the ground for the Communist Parties, CPI and CPI (Marxist), to become part of a ruling coalition in 1967. However once in government, they faced the problem of converting the ‘land to the tiller’ logic

³ For various reform models see Ronald J. Herring, *Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983) ,8-9.

to solid legislation and execution. The Left forces despite their revolutionary promises failed on account of strategic and tactical dilemmas, paving the way for further radicalisation within their ranks leading to the Naxalbari movement.

The complexity of finding solution to the layered issues on land rights results in any reform measure becoming a resource of politics, both electoral and revolutionary. This entire study keeps land rights as the central theme in its account and analysis of the politics of resistance in Midnapore and also thematically linking it to its revolutionary legacy. Two resistances in the district divided by almost two centuries has been deliberately chosen to highlight the continuity of the link between land rights and resistance. If the Chuar rebellion (1767-1800) was about loss of special land privileges by a community along with the effects of Permanent Settlement clauses on the traditional zamindars, the Left mobilised movements of post-colonial Midnapore (1967-1971) was a reaction to the feudal system of exploitation that was entrenched by the effects of the Settlement, thereby demanding its abolition along with claims of land usage rights by the actual tillers of the soil.

Why Midnapore? An Overview of the Area under Study

In 2008, Bengal was in the cusp of an uprising led by the CPI (Maoist) that spiralled certain parts of the state outside administrative control. Lalgarh in the West Midnapore district (currently in Jhargram district) became the focal point of the Left-wing extremism. Resistance in this zone is not a new phenomenon. This zone stands different from the Gangetic Bengal plains and has plateau topography as it is located on the extension of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, making it conducive to asymmetrical resistances against state machinery. The cultural geography is also different from the plains. The laterite red soil, evergreen *sal* forest cover, tribal hamlets with their beautifully painted houses, people in bright coloured traditional attire present a picture-perfect locale where one can feel the aura of romanticism in folk songs and *dhamsa – mada*⁴ beats. On the other hand, the same soil reeks of deprivation, alienation and underdevelopment. Such has been levels of deprivation that hunger deaths took place as late as in 2004 at Amlashol village under Banspahari panchayat in the Belpahari Block of West Midnapore district which in turn came to be enlisted as one of the most backward and underdeveloped districts in the whole country. Though the Lalgarh upsurge of the CPI (Maoist) does not feature directly in the study undertaken here, this can be considered as a continuation

⁴ Tribal folk musical instruments.

of a legacy of resistance in the region as well in the entire district from its undivided days. The 2008 upsurge brought into focus a renewed interest in understanding the region and exploring the causes of frustration that became the rallying point of the Left extremism. The slogans of *jal-jangal-jamin* (water -forest -land) raised during the initial days of the upsurge validates the central thematic bridge chosen in this study i.e. land rights, agrarian relations and resultant exploitation, to connect centuries of history of resistance in the district. Resistances are not born in vacuum. The repository of the past is an important reference point for analysing the present and hence this study tends to go back in time and bring a centuries old resistance back into mainstream history, thereby connecting it to modern resistances.

In this study, the first focus of discussion is the Chuar rebellion. The first phase was concentrated in the south-western half of modern Bengal (Bengal -Jharkhand-Odisha tri-junction). Documented, systematic records, especially administrative ones, before the British period are not readily available on this region. The nature of rule penetration in the area was customary and even in revenue terms, relations were tribute paying rather than based on formal assessments. The colonial rulers in their attempt to create a modern state and simplify administration made forays into the impenetrable jungles for initial purposes of revenue extraction. Midnapore was ceded to the Company on September 1760 and military expeditions were required to bring the jungle chieftains of these areas to comply with the revenue demands. The Permanent Settlement framework when imposed brought about drastic changes in the socio-economic-cultural life of the area, disrupted the traditional functioning in these areas and caused land alienation of a particular class ushering in the second phase of the Chuar rebellion, which in turn was met with state coercion. This uprising-coercion-conciliation dynamic has been a feature of this zone in the post-colonial period as well. The initial post -independence euphoria with all the promises of betterment faded over time creating a crisis in the hegemonic claims of a new democratic state and through this vacuum the Naxalite movement of the 1960s -1970s found its validity and support base. It is interesting to note that the zones of resistance of the early colonial India somehow coincide with the Naxal activities in the post -colonial period in this zone. This indicates that the hegemony creation in these zones has had its flaws. Hence in this context, understanding the scenario requires attention to the roots of poverty, misery, degradation and injustice suffered by large sections of the people that date back to pre-independence periods. If the accounts on the rebel areas in Midnapore during the 1960s are noted, the plight of the participants and the grounds of mobilisation appear continuous across centuries.

The Naxalbari incident of May 1967 had a phenomenal impact across all levels of society leading to the creation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist -Leninist). It especially impacted the young mind. Triggered by the turbulent decades of post-colonial Bengal, crisis of expectations and armed with a revolutionary ideology espoused by Charu Mazumdar, a section of the students-youths moved to certain areas of Midnapore to mobilise the rural exploited sections comprising the landless labourers and sharecroppers. The Midnapore uprising was witnessed predominantly in the tribal inhabited areas and participation dynamics indicate at greater lower caste-tribe involvement. Continuities can be noted in strategies of rebels and counter -insurgency strategies of the state from colonial to the post-colonial periods. The district has had a legacy of radical resistance dating back to colonial period passing through the nationalist phase, Naxalite phase and the Maoist phase of the 21st century. This continuity has been the primary consideration for its selection as the area of study.

The following maps will provide a basic idea regarding the area under focus in this study. The first map (Fig. 2) is a simple depiction of the tri-junction area of the current states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha to clarify the frontier nature of the area covered by the resistances. The second (Fig 3) and third (Fig. 4) maps have been adopted from the Census Reports (1961) of West Bengal and Bihar respectively and the main areas of the districts affected by the Naxalite upsurge have been highlighted. In the same maps, some of the areas affected by the Chuar rebellion has also been demarcated to depict the geographical overlap of the areas affected by the two resistances, temporally separated by nearly two centuries.

Fig. 2
Bengal-Jharkhand-Odisha Tri-Junction

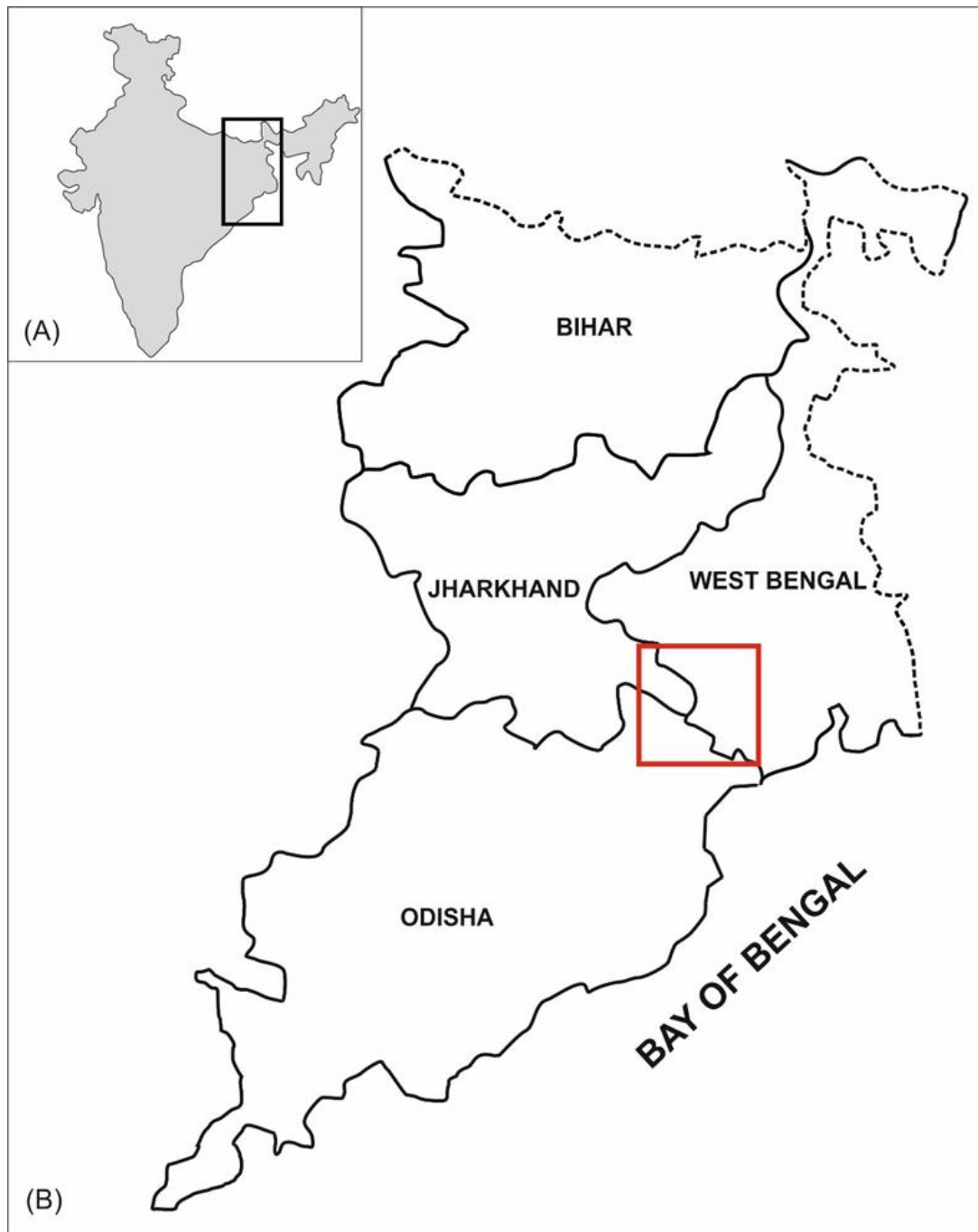


Fig 2 (B) depicts the geographical frontiers of the modern states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha and the red box signifies the tri-junction area of the three states as the area of study.

Fig 2 (A) in the inset depicts the location of the area of study in the map of India.

Fig.3

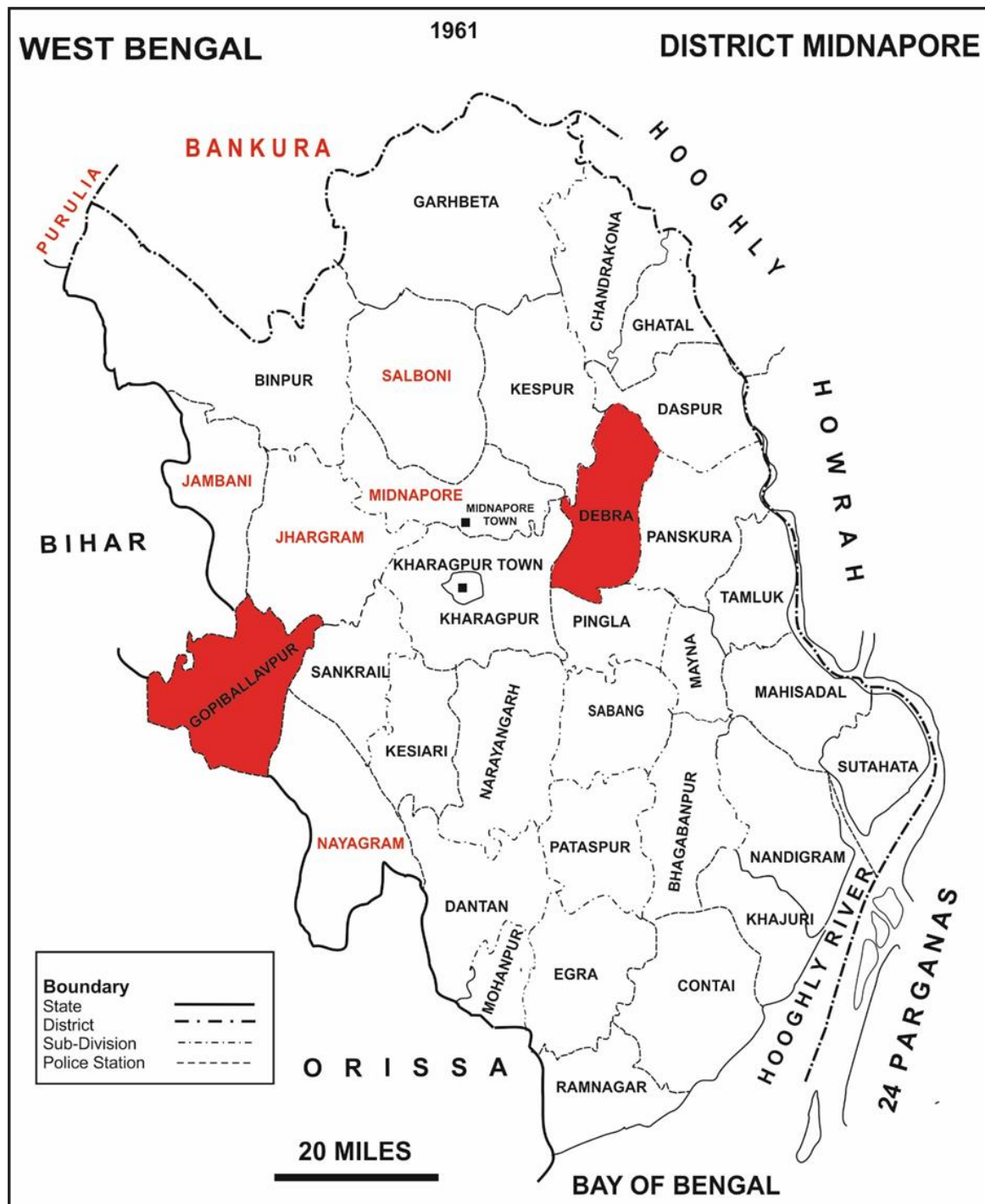


Fig. 3 depicts the frontiers and the areas of the Midnapore district in 1961 and has been adopted from B.Ray, *Census 1961 West Bengal :District Census Handbook, Midnapore*, Vol I (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1966).

The areas coloured in red, Debra and Gopiballavpur, signify the resistance zones of the Naxalite period. The red lettered areas depict the primary areas affected by Chuar rebellion including Gopiballavpur. The locations of the Chuar rebellion are scattered across the demarcated areas (red lettered) and in Bihar and Orissa.

Fig.4

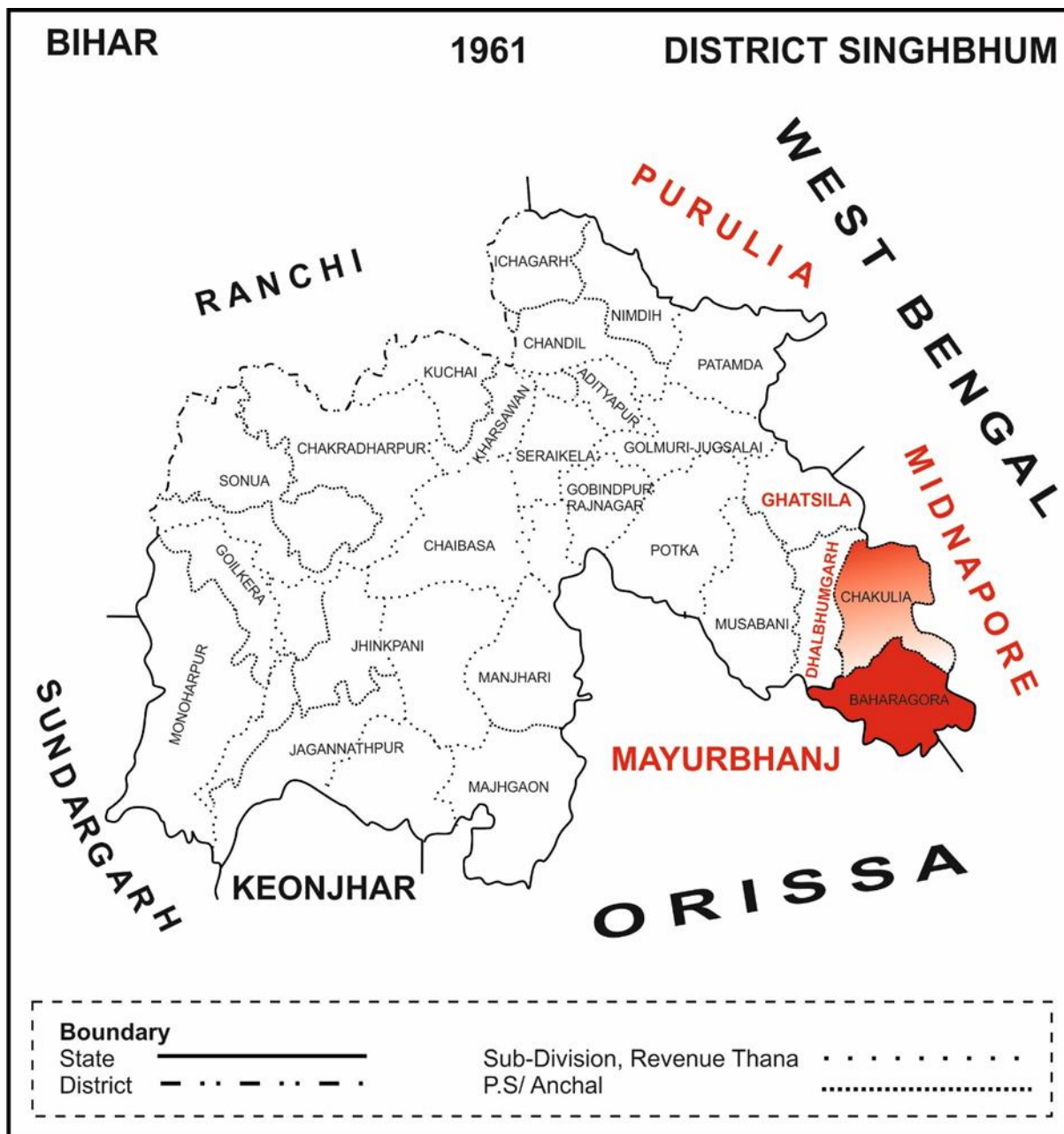


Fig. 4 depicts the frontiers and the areas of the Singhbhum district in 1961 and has been adopted from S.D Prasad, *Census 1961, Bihar: District Census Handbook 17, Singhbhum* (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1967).

The areas coloured in red, Baharagora and Chakulia, signify the resistance zones of the Naxalite period. Difference in shades of red indicate level of intensity. The red lettered areas depict the primary areas affected by Chuar rebellion including Chakulia. The locations of the Chuar rebellion are scattered across the demarcated zones (red lettered) in the district and in the neighbouring districts of West Bengal and Orissa.

Statement of the Problem and Research Agenda

The central agenda of the study is to examine the interconnectedness of two armed resistances separated in timeline by centuries in a frontier district of Bengal. This is a micro level study of a district which has had a legacy of radical resistance from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. Modern studies, to be successful, need to be rooted in solid long term historical understanding. Neither the late 1960s Naxalite upsurge in the district nor the ultra-leftist Maoist phase of the 21st century, causally and circumstantially spring from a vacuum. Hence, exploration of the long historical lineage which in turn constitutes popular memory of the area becomes important. Inclusion of the Chuar rebellion in this study serves this purpose.

It can be noted in this context that the major mainstream accounts of resistances in the early colonial period tends to leave out this phase. Even Ranajit Guha's seminal work on peasant insurgencies in colonial India leaves out the first thirty years from analysis. However, he does concede that even though consciousness was in a naive form throughout the first three quarters of the peasant movements, its existence must be acknowledged.⁵ As students of history, we learn that the first war of Indian independence or the first major resistance against the Company was the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It is only in the recent years we find the pre- Mutiny period coming into focus but even here the narratives of resistances are dominated by the hegemonic ones like the Santhal *Hul*. This study tries to address this gap by attempting to create a framework for thematically, strategically and geographically linking the Chuar rebellion to the modern-day resistances in the district. We can note that modern movements require their exercise of consciousness creation and mobilisation. Masses even in modern times are docile. References to a glorious past of resistance is a fruitful mobilisation tactic, as it appeals to sentiments. Any reference to Midnapore today in political propaganda or otherwise tends to focus on its revolutionary potential and legacy. Chuar rebellion is invariably a part of that legacy just like the nationalist, Naxalite and Maoist phases.

The study also aims to dispel the notion of interlinkages between idea of modernity and rationality and how it is erroneous to dub such resistances as pure pre-political, pre-modern

⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 5-8.

banditry, even though Hobsbawm's categorisation of Chuar rebellion indicates in that direction.⁶

The next important theme explored in the study is the impact of early colonial state making and the continuities of its effects in the post-colonial setting. The role of colonial statecraft in the initial stage has been maximisation of revenue for which they had sought to define land proprietorship, resulting in a plethora of effects on different sections of Indian society. Land rights and land use privileges thus become the common mobilisation point of the Chuar rebellion and the Naxalite upsurge. Hence, divided by centuries and united by issues and strategies becomes the defining tagline of this study.

The study also seeks to contribute to a detailed descriptive-analytical account of the Naxalite upsurge in Debra, Gopiballavpur and Baharagora as existing literature on this theme seems inadequate. Publication of two memoirs on the movement in the recent years, Santosh Rana's *Rajniti* and Ashim Chattopadhyay's (Chatterjee) *Naxalbarinama*, has revived discussions of this phase of Naxalite upsurge in the district. The study also intends to uncover parallel narratives of the movement by interviewing activists like Prithwiranjan Dasgupta (Meghnad), Mihir Rana, Ranabir Samaddar, Shipra Rana and Piyasa Dasgupta who have not yet written extensive personal memoirs. As these memoirs, interviews conducted by local magazines like *Ebong Jalarka* and by the author of this study along with available articles in *Deshabrati* are in Bengali, the national reach of these accounts and analysis are limited. This study, hence, seeks to integrate all these vernacular narratives with the existing national outreach literature of the movement and contextualise them using databases like Census reports of the period. Such an approach is aimed towards comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of the resistance keeping in mind regional profiles of the areas like topography, land use patterns, caste and class configurations, socio-economic conditions and nature of participation and inter-regional connections along with convergences and divergences in strategies. It can be safely asserted that similar analysis of the area in this period has not been attempted in the existing literature on the subject.

Any study on resistance is incomplete without an attempt to locate it theoretically and conceptually within the available analytical framework on social movements encompassing sociology, social anthropology, psychology and politics. Regarding theoretical analysis, the

⁶ E.J Hobsbawm, *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels; Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), 23.

approach taken here is inductive. Though the Chuar rebellion is temporally located much before the modern literature on social movements, this study attempts to analyse it using the causation-mobilisation-organisation analytical models of modern theories. As the study seeks to connect the two movements, causally and strategically, a basic comparative analysis of the two movements has been attempted. For analysing causality, the study hinges on Ted Gurr's relative deprivation theory and Neil J. Smelser's structural strain theory and for understanding mobilisation-organisation dynamics, use of Charles Tilly's mobilisation model comes as a natural choice. Also given the nature of the movements, highlighting the emotional-sentimental quotient is imperative apart from the social-economic-scientific models and hence in the theoretical section, this study also aims at highlighting the types of human emotions and their role in determining the trajectories of the movements.

Research Questions

In the context of the main theme of research i.e. land and resistance, the following main question can be raised,

- Can land rights be considered as the singular theme that links centuries of agrarian history and resistance together in Bengal – From Chuar Rebellion to Naxalbari?

In the context of the Chuar rebellion, the questions that arise are as follows,

- In what ways can the Chuar rebellion of Midnapore be categorised as the first anti-colonial resistance related to land rights and privileges?
- Can the revolutionary legacy of Chuar rebellion in Midnapore be considered a precursor to modern political consciousness and resistances in the district?

Regarding the post-colonial agrarian setting and the Naxalite uprising in Midnapore, the queries that can be raised are,

- How does the agrarian question, nature of exploitation as a result of colonial policies related to land and the revolutionary legacy of Midnapore maintain a continuity from the colonial to the post-colonial times through the nationalist movements and Tebhaga?
- What was the nature of effect that Naxalbari uprising had on the district and was the effect locally generated or imported from the urban centres like Calcutta via the students-youths and how is the student activism of College Street area focusing on Presidency College directly linked to the Midnapore upsurge of 1968-71?
- What was the nature of the upsurge, the issues raised, outcome and extent of success of the upsurge?
- Did the movement create a sense of 'agency' in the grassroot section in the district and did the peasant become a 'political subject' himself or remained just a means in the

urban educated middle-class project, who armed with the Left ideology in one hand and gun in the other, sought to 'liberate' the rural exploited?

Regarding continuities in nature of resistances, the questions that can be posed are,

- To what extent do the 'frontier' characteristics of the district- geographical, economic and demographic- appear to be a continuous feature affecting resistances from early colonial to post-colonial period?
- Using the prominent theoretical strands regarding causation, mobilisation and organisation of social movements, how can we analyse the two resistances chosen for this study?

Research Methods

In terms of research purpose, a major part of this study has been exploratory- descriptive in nature. Certain situations and events have been described in detail, in an attempt to develop in-depth understanding and setting the context for studying and analysing the resistances. Such account had set into perspective the feasibility of conducting the study and outlining the research methods. The explanation type used in the study is idiographic, as an exhaustive understanding of the situation and causes leading to events in two cases, the Chuar rebellion and the Naxalite upsurge in post-colonial Midnapore, has been sought. Explanations offered across archival sources as well as by the actors themselves have been used and different explanations of similar situations compared. This brings us to the comparative and historical method of research which has been used to provide historically grounded explanations of the important events and their outcomes. Regarding time dimension of the research, the nature of the study is cross-sectional as it involves observation of cross-section of a phenomenon at one point of time and a cross case-oriented analysis, where two cases of resistance separated by two centuries has been studied in details, in an attempt to understand continuities regarding the singular theme of land rights and strategies of resistance. The nature of evaluation of this study is qualitative focusing on causes, trajectory and outcome. For quantitative corroboration of descriptive accounts and evaluation outcome, existing data analysis has been used like Census Reports of Government of India and data available from newspaper reports.

Life story research has been a central method in this study. While studying the Naxalite upsurge period, the units of study are individuals who have directly been participants in the movement though few in number. Autobiographies, memoirs, qualitative interviews and oral history have been the main tools of life story research in this study. Such study has helped in developing a relationship between self and social context of the respondent by putting their lived experiences

and memory at the centre. In- depth interviews with individual participants have been conducted. Interviews with those participants who did not write memoirs enter the genre of oral history. The nature of the interviews has been open ended and conversational- participatory in nature. Given the age of certain participants, the nature of interviews in this biographical- interpretive method, in the first instance, has been attempts to obtain a life history in the literal sense of the term seeking response to questions like, 'Please tell me your life story' and then following up with further interviews to highlight and uncover certain aspects of narrative suited to the focus of research and its questions. Problems with memory are an issue on which debates exist. Eric Hobsbawm criticised this on grounds of 'slipperiness of memory'.⁷ Defenders like Trevor Lummis argues that while short term memory declines with age, long term memory is not impaired and can improve as well.⁸ While conducting interviews, it is true that accounts were not systematic and the respondents tended to deviate a lot, as they recalled incidents in bits and pieces scattered across timeline. Sometimes dates of events did not match. To offset this handicap, triangulation technique to test validity, by comparing accounts of other oral interviewees, memoirs or documentary evidence like newspaper reports etc. has been fruitful. While using this method certain considerations have been kept in mind like accounts of the past are not pure recalls, that memory interacts with experience and ideological inclinations of the present affect retrospective account for an event. Two autobiographies have been used extensively in the study. It is the most individualistic of any literary genre but given the nature of the period under study, even such individual accounts can shed light on the mindset of similar age groups of the period. The problem with autobiography is that the motivation of self- justification can dominate but this can be balanced by other parallel accounts. Content analysis of interviews conducted by third parties of other participants who were not personally accessible has been used as a tool to supplement accounts received from interviews and memoirs.

Humans in society possess considerable free choice and agency but are also controlled by environmental forces and factors. This is true in regard to the impact that Naxal ideology as espoused by its popular ideologue Charu Mazumdar had on the youth. The ideology at that time became the dominant discourse. Discourse is understood to be a particular knowledge system of the world that shapes how the world is understood and how things are done based on it. A powerful discourse can push subjects to particular ways of thinking and acting.

⁷ E.J Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), 206.

⁸ Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 118.

Understanding the Naxal ideology thus falls within the purview of discourse analysis. Hence extensive quotes from his works have been used to grasp its impact. Language has been an issue as the essence of the writings in Bengali is much more radically appealing than its English counterpart.

In course of research a combination of primary and secondary sources has been used. The research of the colonial period is heavily dependent on archives as available in the West Bengal State Archives and The National Library of India. It includes administrative letter correspondences, policy documents, departmental reports like those of Home (Political) and accounts by administrators themselves writing retrospectively on the period and events. The archival sources that have been of great assistance in the accounts of the 20th century are newspapers of those periods the primary ones being *Anandabazar Patrika* (Bengali), *Amritabazar Patrika* (English), *The Statesman* (English) and *Jugantar* (Bengali).

An Overview of the Chapters

The chapter division of the study is thematic in nature and each chapter combines descriptive narratives with theoretical analysis. The entire study has been divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1 forms the *Introduction* to the thesis. The main focus of the first part of the discussion here has been the question of land rights and landownership and how Company experiments in state making and revenue administration altered the traditional and customary understanding of property rights in land, the effect of which was to last centuries. The choice of Midnapore as the area of study has been rationalised in this thematic context. The chapter incorporates a detailed thematic literature review, an overview of the research agenda, research questions and methods and ends with an overview of the different chapters in this study.

Chapter 2 is titled *Colonial State Making, 'Land to the Zamindar' and the Chuar Rebellion of Midnapore*. In this chapter attempt has been made to pen down a short general history of the district and map the territory of the district, focusing mainly on its frontier nature which affects is demography and culture. Without this, it will be impossible to grasp the resistances not just of the colonial times but also the post-colonial one as well, because the areas covered by the accounts are spread out mainly in the tri-junction of the modern states of Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand. Different types of land tenures prevalent in the district has also been outlined. The first phase of the Chuar rebellion has been discussed as a reaction to the imposition of formal revenue administration in areas not covered by it during the Mughal times, while the second

phase in terms of reaction to the effects of Permanent Settlement. In the final section attempt has been made to analyse the nature of the rebellion in the light of Eric Hobsbawm's concept of banditry and social banditry, Ranajit Guha's analysis on features of peasant insurgency in colonial India and Sudipta Kaviraj's concept of fuzzy and enumerated communities.

Chapter 3 is titled *Agrarian Setting of 20th Century Bengal (1900s-1940s): An Overview of the Rise of the Left, the Road to Tebhaga and the 'Land to the Tiller' logic*. The first part of the discussion highlights the issue of land rights and effects of Permanent Settlement as the single biggest continuity from the colonial to the post-colonial times. It explicitly deals with decline of zamindars and rise of jotedars as a class who along with the moneylenders is cemented as the exploiter class in the agrarian scene of Bengal. Special focus has been placed in providing an overview of the different facets of exploitation and hardships faced by the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. The second part of the chapter deals with the rise of the Communist Party of India in the prevailing circumstances, keeping in mind other dominant political forces of the time like the Indian National Congress and the comparison of policy stance on the agrarian question between them. This is followed by a short account of the Tebhaga movement, creating the backdrop for the future resistances. A brief overview of the revolutionary legacy of Midnapore, spanning the time period 1900 to 1940s has also been provided. In the final section, attempt has been made to reason out the rise of the Left forces at the cost of the Congress using Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'political society' and Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya's concept of 'party society'.

Chapter 4 is titled *Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s: An Overview of the 'Revolutionary' Situation and its Impact on the Students-Youths*. As the title implies, the first part of discussion here is about the socio- economic situation of Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s and how reactions to the situation led to radicalisation of the public mood both in urban and rural settings, culminating in the Naxalbari incident of May, 1967. Special focus has been placed on the birth of CPI (M-L) and Naxal ideology as espoused by Charu Mazumdar, as without it the impact on students and youths cannot be understood in the given volatile context of the decades of turmoil. The chapter has a special section devoted to the student- youth movement in Calcutta surrounding the Presidency College and Presidency Consolidation, as without it the account on the spread of Naxalite upsurge in Midnapore cannot be explained and analysed.

Chapter 5 is titled *The Naxalite Uprising in Midnapore and Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border: Debra, Gopiballavpur and Baharagora*. The exclusive focus here is on the trajectory of the

Naxalite upsurge in the areas. It seeks to comparatively assess the regional profiles of the areas focusing on topography and population along with the nature of land and agriculture, using Census data of the period. Special focus has been placed on the different phases of the upsurge in this region, borrowing heavily from memoirs and interviews of leaders, newspaper reports and articles in the party organs *Liberation* and *Deshabrati*. Different phases of the upsurge from 1968 to 1971 have been discussed in detail starting from mobilisation of people to the repression of the movement. In the last section attempt has been made to provide an analytical account of the upsurge drawing from various reports and accounts of the leaders themselves.

Chapter 6 forms the *Conclusion* to the thesis. The main crux of the discussion here is summarising the research in the light of the research questions raised in the introduction. A basic analysis of the two movements based on prominent theoretical strands of causation, mobilisation and organisation of social movements has been attempted. It also seeks to note the fulfilment of goals raised in the research agenda, shortcomings and scopes for future research.

Outcome of the Research

The entire study has been a humble quest to interconnect thematically, geographically and strategically, two armed resistances separated in timeline by centuries in a frontier district of Bengal. The first question that was raised in this context was whether *land rights* can be considered as the singular theme that links centuries of agrarian history and resistance together in Bengal – From Chuar Rebellion to Naxalbari. At the end, the answer to this question tilts towards the affirmative end.

From accounts of the rebellion, *similarities in strategy* like burning of land deeds, attacks on representative institutions of government, murders, cutting away of crops from the field etc. can be noted. Competitive state building, local justice delivery and grievance redressal are also other common features noted across the different types of resistances stated in this account from early colonial period to the 21st century passing through the nationalist and Naxalite phases. Continuities have been also noted in terms of *areas of resistances* and *participation patterns*.

In the context of *Chuar rebellion*, the questions raised relate to its status as the *first 'conscious' anti-colonial resistance* and its legacy being a *precursor to modern political consciousness* in the district. The answers to both these questions are in the affirmative. The Chuar rebellion was

not pre-political or non -political bred just by spontaneity or lack of consciousness. It was a conscious action on the part of the rebels who tried to take back what they thought was rightfully their own. Acting upon causes of deprivation for redressal is a political act, even if the tendency to equate consciousness with structured, organised actions by modern analysis leaves such resistances out of its purview. Regarding legacy, it has been reiterated all throughout this study that modern resistances need to draw upon past repository and cultivate popular memory to mobilise general public.

It has also been noted in the study that the post-colonial agrarian setting, nature of exploitation and the revolutionary legacy of Midnapore has maintained a continuity from the colonial through the nationalist movements and Tebhaga. It became evident from the account that the nature of exploitation which became the mobilising ground for the 20th century resistances directly follows from the effects of Permanent Settlement which transformed the agrarian structure resulting in the rise of a new exploiter-exploited relationship, the jotedar-moneylender being the former while the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers being the latter. The transition from ‘land to the zamindar’ to ‘land to the tiller’ surrounding the question of land ownership and use, while traversing a timeline of more than a century maintains the thematic continuity connecting the early colonial to the post-colonial.

The *nature of militancy of the district* has been another area of continuity. Even during the Congress days, resistances in this district in all phases of the nationalist movement -from revolutionary terrorism to Quit India Movement -have been quite radical in contrast to other areas.

Regarding the *nature of effect that Naxalbari uprising had on the district and whether the effect was locally generated or imported from the urban centres*, it has been noted that the mobilisation in Debra was locally generated given the existence of local leaders while in Gopiballavpur it was the result of initiative by the local youths who studied in Calcutta like Santosh Rana and the students-youths linked to the Presidency Consolidation. The upsurge in the district though short lived was able to generate a stir, enough to destabilise administration and upset the status quo in the erstwhile calm areas in frontier Bengal-Bihar-Orissa.

The major *impact of the movement* was penetration of the ‘political’ in the areas under study, which leads us to the next set of questions regarding creation of a sense of ‘agency’ in the grassroot section and encouraged popular initiative. The term agency means capability or

power to affect a desired change and development of this capability can be considered specific to time, place and socio-economic context. The radical nature of the time, the popular nature of the politics created the circumstances for creation of agency in a wide variety of subjects. Rural poor rallied with the leaders, local or otherwise, for venting out grievances and seeking solutions. Calls given out by leaders, especially during the mass movement phases, received enthusiastic response. The entire account depicted how a person or group, dubbed Naxalite in popular parlance, became the key feature of the politics of the time. This Naxalite was sometimes a student, sometimes a peasant. He/she was a non-conformist, a rebel-visionary ready to go to extreme violence having a separate philosophy regarding acceptance of death. The overall prevailing political climate of the period and the area created a large number of political subjects as counter figures to state sovereignty. Regarding mobilisation and popular initiative, it is difficult to compartmentalise top-down or bottom-up mobilisation. There is a symbiotic chemistry and an interface of interaction exists between the top and bottom levels. In some cases, initiative was noted from below, while in others from above. For instance, the harvesting movement in Gopiballavpur was initiated by the women of a Mal village.

The question of agency in case of the Chuar rebellion is not as complicated as the Naxalite phase. Though it lacked formal organisation and was not backed by an ideology, both phases of the rebellion saw direct initiative by the aggrieved themselves who took up arms to reclaim what they believed to be rightfully theirs.

The final agenda of the research was a *basic comparative analysis of the two causally and strategically linked resistances using the causation -mobilisation-organisation models of modern theories*. A social movement is generally understood as sustained collective action through which a collective voices their grievances and concerns, formally organised or otherwise, resulting in interest creation and awakening in a large number of people. It is generally oriented towards change, partial or total, in existing system of relationships and norms but can also be about resistance to change and maintaining status quo i.e. counter-attempts which are defensive and restorative rather than initiators of innovative change. Regarding change orientation the Naxalite upsurge belongs to the former while the Chuar rebellion to the latter. Objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership and organisation are important components of a social movement but none are a priori and static. They can be in rudimentary stages in some and well developed in others. The Chuar rebellion does not fit into such well-

defined components as noted in this study while the Naxalite upsurge is fairly systematic in all the components.

Regarding structural conditions and motivational factors that lead to the genesis of a movement, theories like relative deprivation⁹ and strain¹⁰ has been used as reference points for understanding causality. If we try to understand the causes of Chuar rebellion using these frameworks, we may locate it in Gurr's decremental deprivation category. The rebels had been enjoying a kind of customary land use privilege (welfare needs category) for a long time. Due to effects of Company policy, there was a sudden decline in the capability, resulting in frustration or to use Smelser's formulation, strain. As land rights are not only linked to questions of livelihood but also to dignity and status, this loss implied a strain on interpersonal values as well. The Company had not yet grasped the nature of the frontier territory and had no idea about the nature and strategies of native resistances. This made the situation structurally conducive to the rebel coalition which included the local landed elites. The source of the strain or frustration was clear and the rebels directed their frustration-aggression towards that source, with the aim to prevent change in the status-quo regarding land rights. The Naxal upsurge can be understood causally in terms of both aspirational and progressive deprivation. It has been reiterated in the study on many occasions that the socio-economic conditions of the 1950s and 1960s shattered the dreams of a population of a newly independent nation who had aspired towards better existence after two centuries of colonial rule, thereby generating a crisis in all value categories. A number of precipitating factors in terms of policy failures transformed the feelings of deprivation into actions geared towards change.

Some events become the catalytic, precipitating factors for a movement to reach its peak and aid in mass mobilisation. In case of the first phase of Chuar rebellion, the military expedition against Jagannath Dhal and in the second phase, Company actions against Raipur zamindari and zamindari of Rani Shiromani, triggered off the movement. For Naxalbari movement, the defining event was the firing of May, 1967 which unleashed decades of frustration- anger-aggression against the ruling regimes. Weakness and interest conflict within the ruling regime at that point, both at the state and central levels, altered the power equation between the authority and rebels providing the systemic conduciveness for the movement to reach its peak.

⁹ Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

¹⁰ Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

While the stress-strain theories have been useful in locating the causes and interest set linked to any movement, its mobilisation within the larger context can be best analysed using Charles Tilly's mobilisation model which seeks to understand collective action based on variables like interest, organisation, mobilisation, repression/facilitation, opportunity/threat and power. Identification of interests (in both our cases land rights and land use privileges) which in itself is a complex task is the first requirement for mobilisation followed by organisation. Organisation based on common identity (as in both our case caste /tribe solidarity) and extensive internal networks (community networks as in case of Chuar and ideological/party networks in case of the Naxalite) tend to be effective and efficient. Once the interests are identified, organised and mobilised, it automatically draws systemic response which may be repression or facilitation. Repression increases a group's cost of participation while facilitation reduces it. The effect of repression or facilitation depends on the extent of action, the scale of upsurge, power of group in relation to other groups, interests or interactions. Regarding repression it is imperative to note that the state always has the monopoly of coercive force and hence repression becomes the normal reaction against any movement. Often a dual approach of repression and appeasement is resorted to, as was the case in both these resistances.

Mobilisation in any social movement requires resources. Various kinds of resources are identified by theorists like moral resources (legitimacy, solidarity and sympathetic support), cultural resources (knowledge about organisation of specific tasks, tactical and strategic knowhow regarding mobilisation), social organisational resources (network building, coalition formation, information transmission, volunteer recruitment), human resources (labour, experience, skills, expertise, leaders i.e. constituents) and finally material resources (finance, physical capital like equipment, supplies etc).¹¹ In both our cases, all these resources existed in various combinations as evident from accounts in different sections of this study. The Chuar rebellions may not be organised in the modern sense of the term but no resistance is possible without it. Special mention to leadership of the charismatic kind as a resource can be mentioned here. For instance, Jagannath Dhal and Rani Shiromani in case of the Chuar rebellions. Naxal period also witnessed charisma led mobilisation, especially depicted in writings and appeals of Charu Mazumdar.

¹¹ Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization", in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 125-128.

Another important dimension explored in the study was the emotional– sentimental quotient in resistances often ignored by social-scientific theories. Emotions are in itself a resource for movements.¹² Certain emotions are reflex emotions like fear, surprise, anger, disgust, joy, sadness which trigger actions without much deliberation. This can explain the Sonam Wangdi incident of May, 1967. Some of them can even act as counter-resource crippling a movement like fear. This happens during the repressive phase in any movement that reverses its trajectory. Next types are affective bonds like love, trust, respect etc. Trust is an important factor in political arena, as it leads to belief in individuals, organisations and their statements. Belief of rebels in their leaders like Shiromani and of peasants -labourers in the local leaders and youths in Debra, Gopiballavpur and Baharagora was an important mobilisation point. Mood is another resource as without feelings of hope or optimism that a collective action can effect positive transformation, a movement cannot succeed. Complex moral emotions like compassion and empathy are other emotive resources, especially in cases where activists and beneficiaries have minor overlap. The fact that a large number of students left the comforts of their life and embraced hardships in the villages to help build and lead movements to end exploitative relations of the rural poor is the best example of this emotion. The sentiment of the Chuars in relation to status attached to land privileges is another example. Strategy lies in exploiting the right kind of emotions specific to a given movement dynamic.

Thus, we see that the Chuar and the Naxalite resistances are separated by centuries and there is primary difference between the two in terms of change orientation, systematic organisation, existence of ideology and documented strategy. However, the basic elements regarding genesis and causation, mobilisation in relation to political context, reaction to opportunity, threat and repression, resource usage and emotive element appear similar.

The defining tagline of the study as stated in the agenda was *divided by centuries and united by issues and strategies*. From the entire study, this claim stands validated. Issues of land rights, the ‘frontier’ status continuity in terms of geography and economic development, resistance strategies, reactions to repression and state response and finally demography of participation patterns appear continuous. Regarding the Naxalite upsurge in Midnapore, this study has been novel in the sense that it compiled all available accounts ranging from interviews, memoirs and newspaper reports (both Bengali and English versions) thereby providing a one stop destination

¹² See Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, “Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements”, in *The Blackwell Companion*, 413-423.

to understand the trajectory of the movement in the district and supplemented the accounts with census data to help analyse participation patterns by clarifying the demography of the region, locations and land use patterns to understand interconnectedness.

Shortcomings exist in this work given limitation of resources available to an individual for extensive field work, dependence on memoirs, failure to access government intelligence reports and jail records of the Naxalite period that could have enriched the findings. Endeavours in this direction now remain an objective for future attainment. It may be noted here that women participated in large numbers in the district during the Naxal upsurge. However, the dominant narratives on the movement have bypassed such contributions and hence remains a prospective area for future research. Though the study stops with the Naxalite period in Midnapore (1968-1971), continuity of resistance in the area has been noted in the form of Lalgah uprising and issues of *jal-jangal-jamin*. This remains another prospective area of study. Journalistic accounts of the movement exist, but archival silence and non-access makes such studies difficult. Future prospects regarding access to sources can open the arena for a detailed in-depth study of the upsurge. The entire frontier Bengal has untapped research potential in many aspects ranging from sociological and anthropological studies to economic and cultural studies, all of which in turn can be linked to politics.