

Peal of a Spring Thunder: Adivasis Narratives of Naxalbari Movement in North Bengal, 1967-72

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Introduction

In the summer of 1967, a tiny village on the foothills of the Himalayas was making headlines. Located in the Darjeeling district in West Bengal, Naxalbari lit a fire that would spread across large parts of India and burn till today in the form of the Maoist movement. The peasants of Naxalbari, who mainly worked on tea plantations and on large estates, had for centuries been exploited by the landowning classes and the moneylenders. On March 25, 1967, when one of the sharecroppers in the village tried to till the land from which he had been illegally evicted, the landlord got him brutally beaten up and took away his belongings. Exasperated by the exploitation of the landlords, peasants across the village got together and rose in rebellion.¹

Naxalbari gets its recognition in history and restores the revolutionary essence of Marxism on the Indian soil which had been distorted, corrupted and destroyed by the revisionist semantics of the CPI (Communist Party of India) and the then-nascent CPI(M) (Communist Party of India-Marxist). The movement was termed Naxalite as derivative of 'Naxalbari'— an administrative block comprising about 60 villages in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The first clash was ignited when a sharecropper, Bigul Kisan, was beaten by armed agents of a local *jotedar*. This was followed by violent clashes and the forcible seizure of land and confiscation of foodgrains by the armed units of the Kisan committee which was formed in 1966 in a Revolutionary Kisan meeting, organized in Siliguri. On May 23, 1967, the peasantry retaliated killing an inspector at Jharugaon village. On May 25, in Naxalbari, the police went berserk killing nine women and children. In June, the struggle intensified further, particularly in the areas of Naxalbari, Khoribari and Phansidewa. Firearms and ammunition were snatched

from the jotedars by raiding their houses. People's courts were established and judgments passed. The upheaval in the villages continued till July. The tea garden workers struck works a number of times in support of the peasants.² The movement had a life span of roughly five years (1967-1972), which was spatially sporadic and limited to small areas. In this stance, the questions that concern this paper are: what is the importance of engaging with the Adivasis in the Naxalbari movement? To what extent the ethnic or Adivasi consciousness (owing to Santal Hul or Birsa Munda movement) cater to the mass mobilization in Naxalbari?

The Naxalbari movement has been one of the most sought after peasant movements, carried forward by the urban elites and their likes, hence generating resistance, dissents, as well as hope for the languishing oppressed Adivasi peasantry. Amidst these varying perspectives, I am most concerned with forms of representation of the most secluded and silenced voices of Naxalbari movement, whose history goes undocumented or unheard, as compared to those whose ideas may be represented such as the rural elites and the activists who are non-Adivasis. In addition, the present study would analyse the political significance of Naxalbari movement, which otherwise is termed as 'revolutionary' in the history of peasant, radical or tribal movements. Therefore, based on my examination of primary sources such as structured and unstructured recording of narratives and engaging into discussions with the then participants of Naxalbari movement, I argue that the mass base in the Naxalbari movement comprised Adivasi communities such as Oraon, Munda and Santal tribes whose role has been seriously undermined and underrated in the popular historiography of the said movement.

Naxalbari, ideologically and practically, provided such a base for a revolutionary armed struggle. The mass base of the Naxalbari movement in North Bengal comprised Adivasi settlers from the Central Indian tribal belt namely—Oraon, Munda and Santal tribes.

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The movement reflected Adivasi aspirations for the deliverance of active resistance to the exploitation of the zamindars (landlords) and *jotedars* in the earlier phase of history directing towards the Naxalbari movement, which serves as one of the important landmarks for this study and its analysis.

In this stance, the article revisits the Naxalbari movement of 1967-72, viewing through the lens of Adivasi revolutionaries and their narratives. The Adivasi narratives entail their formative and mass role as reverberating rebellious calls to emulate the violent methods of guerrilla warfare, as well as patronize Marxist-Leninist traditions, in the essence of party ideologies and affiliation to the cause.

This is to emphasize the kind of ethnic consciousness associated with the movement, the construction of identity as a particular tribe vis-à-vis the others such as Dhimal or Tharu (who considerably participated in the Naxalbari movement apart from the Adivasi communities); as a single co-unit as Adivasis in a migrated land is a complex process yet crucial to understanding the politics involved in history writing pertaining Naxalbari movement. This is so because the community members are solely not responsible for the identity thrust upon them, marking them as tribes/Adivasis on the one hand and as 'noble savage', and ready to take up arms on the other. This is to relate with the ethnographic studies, or the foreign interaction with the other secluded, marginalized Adivasis in the hinterlands. The quintessential imagery of Adivasis with 'bow and arrow' goes well in hand with the Kol insurrection or the Santal *Ulgulan*. However, drawing an inference from the movements, or revolts from the colonial period in India, wherein tribes such as Gonds, Konds along with Rajput chiefs, aligned together to resist the East India Company in 1857, here some were labelled as 'dangerous savages' while some were not. Likewise, an instance of different tribes, communities marching along the same lines of resistance against the oppressors, was a remarkable conjunction in the array of events that followed in the movement. This would be a marker of Adivasis coming under a singular plank homogeneously, despite being heterogeneous in character and ethnic lines. Moreover, the multiple imaginings as well as realities of Adivasis became a perfect instrument in the hands of the Communist leaders who mobilized them for gaining a mass momentum.

Adivasi Narratives of the Naxalbari Movement in North Bengal, 1967-72

Naxalbari is a part of the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district situated in North Bengal as well as in the strategic fifteen-mile wide corridor which links

the northeastern states with mainland India. It owes its geopolitical sensitive character to its proximity to international borders such that of Nepal, Bangladesh and China. Moreover, given the strategic sensitivity of the area, the local authorities tried keeping a low profile since the election of the U.F. Government in West Bengal in 1967 while also preserving order. However, the period between March and May 1967 several incidents of occupation of land by Adivasis armed with bows and arrows, ploughing small patches of fields as a symbol of "ownership to the tiller" was reported to the police.³

Further, Sumanta Banerjee⁴ advocates that there has been a long tradition of peasant rebellions from the early days of British Rule and the post-1947 era has been a potential rebel. There as been a common thread that runs parallel to these rebellions. In this stance, he asserts that there is a gradual pauperization of the peasant, a slow deterioration from owners of land to the landless, which happens through debt. The insolvent debtor is compelled to give up to his creditor, often a nominal price, a plot which he has no means of tilling, and in some cases surrender himself as a slave. Thus, it could be argued that each such rebellion has the potential for churning within the peasantry a massive revolution to transform the social structure as a whole. Further, prominent Naxalbari revolutionary Kanu Sanyal⁵ in his report on the *terai* agitation emphasizes that the movement and mobilization of the heroic peasants of Siliguri sub-division was not a movement to realise certain demands in the old sense; However, it was a struggle to establish a new political power, the peasants' power in the villages after abolishing feudalism there.⁶

A study of the tribal rebellions is integrally connected with peasant unrest. A large number of peasant uprisings were spearheaded by tribes such as Oraon, Munda, Kol and Santals of Chota Nagpur region. It was the upshot of the brunt that they bore as pauperized peasants and also discriminated as lower class or caste. Therefore, on either side of the societal front, the Adivasis were at the receiving end in a given society. As Sumanta Banerjee argues that the tradition continues which he also cites in the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1967-68:

In mainly South Bihar and of Orissa, a considerable amount of land has virtually passed out of the hands of tribal peasants to the hands of moneylenders or of more efficient farmers who have come and settled from the plains nearby. There are laws intended to prevent alienation; but alienation takes place in spite of laws. What happens is that poor farmer takes a loan at high interest which he is hardly able to repay. He continues to work on his land but produce now belongs to the money lender who secures it at the price below the market rate. And thus, the owner becomes virtually a farm labourer under the money

lender. A legal transfer is not made, the law is circumvented, and the freeman becomes virtually a hired serf. And all this because the moneylender comes to his assistance when no other help is available.⁷

Therefore, in this stance, the following section aims to assess the socio-political significance, and role of the Central Indian tribes, namely Santal, Oraon, Rajgond and Munda⁸ who have migrated and settled in North Bengal and who also took an important part in the Naxalbari uprising of 1967. Adivasi presence in the said area is a result of socio-economic pressure on them and subsequent migrations. One of the major tribes of this region is the Oraon apart from the Santal and the Munda communities. As for most of these tribes, their original place of habitation is Central India, precisely the Chotanagpur tribal belt. They were coaxed, cajoled and forced to migrate on various occasions by the British colonisers in the nineteenth century. Thus, Munda and Oraon tribes from Chota Nagpur while the Santals from the uplands of Santal Parganas migrated to North Bengal having a strength of 14,000 approximately which increased each year.⁹

Further, B. Foley's report on migration suggests a migration from Santhal Parganas to Midnapore to the neighbouring districts of Bengal. Every year in November they migrated for earthwork and crop cutting etc. Similarly, K.B Saha¹⁰ in his work- *Economics of Rural Bengal*, noted the same pattern of temporary migrations by Santals and Bauris 'with their wives, children and household goods', in the 1930s. Owing to this there has been an absorption of Santals in North Bengal too in the tea plantations while some engaged in agriculture. Moreover, after the annexation of the Terai from Sikkim in 1850, the British began to bring large areas of forest land under cultivation by terracing, irrigating and cropping hill plantations with 'tea, cinchona, cardamoms and oranges'. Further, W.W. Hunter writes of this northward migration as:

A discovery had been made in the north-east frontier Bengal which was destined still further to improve the position of Santals and similar tribes in the west. The tea plant had been found growing wild throughout Assam and the neighbouring provinces. The first attempts at cultivating forbade the hopes of raising it on a large scale. The most fertile provinces in the world lay waste, waiting for inhabitants, when capitalists bethought themselves of the crowded highlands on the west and began to recruit armies of labourers among them.¹¹

However, this was not always a voluntary response, as Hunter's account also suggests that along with other tribes, Santals were coerced and transported to North Bengal and Assam under appalling conditions.¹² Moreover, Belgian Jesuit Fr. L. Knockaert's¹³ report

suggests, not all Santals who found themselves in the northern districts of Bengal earned their livelihoods in tea plantations. A considerable population Santals found in North Bengal were primarily displaced by Santal *Hul* (Rebellion) of 1855 and hence migrated to Jalpaiguri district majorly. Further, apart from some 45 square miles of tea plantations and forest, the rest of the Terai was *Khas* possession of the government and leased out. Since there was no permanent settlement in the area, some 860 *ryoti* titles came into existence under Act X of 1859 and Act VII of 1879.¹⁴

However, the *jotedars* holding these *ryoti* titles illegally allowed their holding under oral agreements known as *thikas* despite the Estate Acquisition Act of 1954. Thus, majority tribes of Siliguri Sub-Division became sharecroppers.¹⁵ Further, A.J Dash notes that 'about 2,900 of the Santals in Siliguri Sub-Division lived in non-tea garden areas and only about 1,000 within tea gardens' in the Darjeeling Gazetteer of 1947.¹⁶ Therefore, by the end of 1960s an estimated 65,000 acres of surplus land still existed which was owned by tea estates and about 19,000 acres of *Khas* and vested land in Naxalbari area of North Bengal. Interestingly, this was the land that provided a politically convenient space that paved way for the mobilization and movement of 1967 in Naxalbari, Kharibari, and Phansidewa. The Delhi weekly, 'Mainstream' reported:

The 'rebels' have made their base mainly among Santhals. Usually the agitators assemble in a body on what they claim to be surplus land owned by a tea garden or a *jotedar*. They take possession of the land formally, even if there are standing crops or share-croppers are settled on the land.¹⁷

Viewed in this background, the tribal mobilizations and movement in North Bengal could be seen with a different lens, that of conscious and emphatic ones. Moreover, the Adivasis in the Naxalbari movement showcased cultural traits¹⁸, zeal and vigour akin to the mobilization process that could be associated with the Santal *Hul* or Kol insurrection. Thus, advocating thrust upon their strong social ties and kinship leading to an attitude of political consciousness that benefited them and paved way for their solidarity. Moreover, there may be sharp distinctions among the tribes i.e. Oraon, Munda, Santal, Ho in the Chhotanagpur belt, but interestingly one gets to observe a sense of solidarity in terms of their primordial ties whether in a protest, or a movement in their new domicile that speaks volumes of their similar ethnic background. However, initially engaging the Adivasis from Dooars area generally comprising of Jalpaiguri district with that of the Adivasis in Darjeeling district who were share-croppers or *adhiaars* was difficult for the erstwhile leaders associated with the movement¹⁹; nonetheless, it was crucial too. The reason it was crucial

was that the area comprised all elements required for the movement; moreover, including similar categories of social and ethnic communities in a single political prism could embolden their cause of popular revolution.

Since the British rule, most of the tribal populations have had a history of resistance against the outsiders (*diku*) for their nefarious acts of encroachment and exploitation. Post-independence too, many with a strong sense of “sons of soil”, have continued to assert their rights. From a critical point of view, one could project the tribes as avowed subaltern revolutionaries for land rights, but nonchalant on their cultural identity. Even where tribal cultural distinctiveness is recognized, depiction usually makes them a culturally quaint object of museum piece value. A survey of tribal movements conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India towards the close of 1976 suggests that tribal unrest assumes an organized character only among the large, homogeneous, literate, landowning tribal communities who have a relatively strong economic base. Such tribes are Oraons, Munda, Santal, Bhil, Gond etc. They have a high incidence of democratic participation.²⁰ Moreover, in Naxalbari too, not every Adivasi took up arms against the *jotedars*, or zamindars, as some were wealthy landowning class in the Darjeeling District.²¹

The primary agitation of 1967 in Naxalbari was impacted by a general political climate prevalent in those times which was further moulded by an orientation of the local political leaders in that region. Abhijit Mazumdar, the son of Charu Mazumdar²² asserted that his father was convinced of the rationale to arm the peasantry for a credible and irresistible struggle. Abhijit Mazumdar further argues that the Tebhaga movement in Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal had failed to bring an impact amongst the peasantry due to disloyal rich peasants. Further, Charu Mazumdar along with Krishna Kumar alias Kanu Sanyal charted out the course of organising the Naxalbari mobilisation and movement. Moreover, to make it a strong movement they engaged the local people that comprised of Adivasis and tribals in general from the Naxalbari block; moreover, they also required the local individuals who could lead the general masses and this included the likes of Jangal Santhal, Kesab Sarkar, Babulal Biswakarma, Kadam Mallik and others who were actively engaged with the Communist Party of India.

One of the major reasons that scholars argue pertaining to the rationale behind the Naxalbari movement could be attributed to incomplete agrarian reforms post-independence. The post-colonial government in India abolished the zamindari system as a constituent of the agrarian reform however, redistribution of land was not executed amidst protests by rich landlords. Further, changes in agrarian reforms, along with improved

agricultural practices resulted in better yields and monetary gains by the landed farmers exclusively. This made them rich financially in a short span of time. However, the neo-rich farmers refused to share their profit with the real tillers of the land and sharecroppers who continued to struggle with their real hard work without any access to profit share along with meagre food. Poverty levels had risen amongst the sharecroppers or *adhiars* which was vented through the Naxalbari movement.²³ Further, an eyewitness to the movement explains the first incident as:

The trigger of the gun was pressed in May 1967. Remembers Sabitri Rao (wife of Punjab Rao, yet another name associated with the Naxalite movement), an eyewitness. One morning, a few of the men went to till the fields and didn't return. We suspected that they had disappeared for a drink. But we got worried and scared when they did not return even the next day. A few others went missing the next day too. The next morning, some of us hid behind the bushes and watched the proceedings. As soon as the men would begin tilling, the police would appear and take them away, telling them that the *jotedar* who owned the land has ordered their arrests. The next morning, many of us gathered in the fields at Borojorujot and decided we won't allow the police to do whatever they pleased. In the confrontation that followed, inspector Sonam Wangdi was killed by bows. No one knows who shot that arrow.²⁴

It was reported that on May 24, 1967,²⁵ one tribal man was killed in the fields of a landlord in Naxalbari block area which was followed by a protest on the succeeding day wherein the police opened fire at the tribals killing eleven of them. This incident was accompanied by massive strikes and hartals in the area as well as in states like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar conjuring the CPI(M) to put up a tough resistance against state repression and landlords. Moreover, there were scattered reports filed in the police stations in Naxalbari area against peasants who occupied or cultivated land those that did not belong to them seizing stocks of rice and paddy from landlords, who were either non-tribals or tribals. One of the interviewees in Budaganj village, Naxalbari, Dhadu Munda admitted in his interview that in 1960s and 1970s the use of bows, arrows and spears were frequent, which now languish at the corner of their house. Munda says:

*Hamre man andolan ka hike kono ni janot rehi. Kanu da man kahle ki andolan me aawa, toh hamin lathi dhair ke geli. Phir uman kahle, lathi nait lana, tir aur dhanush le ke aana*²⁶

(Translation)

We never knew the meaning of *andolan*. Kanu da asked us to join the movement. Initially, we carried lathis, but later they asked us to carry bows and arrows as well.

Dhadu Munda explains that as a participant, he had the least knowledge about the ideological issues or

political parties concerning the movement. He joined the movement as his family was economically exploited by the local *jotedars*, and most of their harvest was paid in form of taxes. He also became involved as a sign of solidarity to all his fellow tribal participants in the movement. As he says,

I didn't know much about the basic ideology of the movement. The ideas of Mao-Tse-Tung, Marx and Lenin were far from my understanding of the situation in Naxalbari. I could not relate to it in the beginning. The stories of Sidhu, Kanu and Birsa Munda were known to me. This is how Kanu da explained to us, gave us classes to understand the situation and carry forward the armed task of retaliating with force.²⁷

He also mentions that the Naxal leaders like Kanu Sanyal, Keshab Sarkar and Khudan Mullick, prepared them for guerrilla tactics, and gave them detailed advice on evading arrests by the state forces such as the police by staying underground.

Likewise, Khemu Singha²⁸ says:

aage sob koi badhua majdoor rehe. Jetna dhan howot rehe, sob zamindar ke jaat rehe. Aekhan jesen teen time kar bhaat khaki milele, usen ni howot rehe. Ek bela khaek milot rehe. Jesen zamindar kar 100 bigha zamin rehe, to baki adhiari man praja rehe. Aage adhiari man ke praja kahat rehe. Toh ehe time me jekhan Kanu babu man Naxalbari me aalen, uman aawaz laagale ki- jekar longol jamin ukar- Bangla me kahat rehe- longol taar jomi jaar.

(Translation)

In those times most of the peasants were *adhiars*. Most of the grain stock was paid as taxes to the *jotedars*. This was the time when Kanu babu and his comrades came into our villages and raised the slogan-land to the tiller.

He explains the reasons behind a huge following in the *andolan* because; the *jotedars* always treated the Adivasi *adhiar* as his *praja* or 'subject', in their landed state. The conditions were appalling as most of the *adhiars*, did not get enough grains to feed their families. Moreover, the *zamindars* forced them to quit the tenancy if they took a dislike to that particular person. Therefore, the rhetorical slogan that Kanu Sanyal and other leaders gave was- *Langol jaar jomi taar* - meaning 'land to the tiller'. In the year 1967, leaders like Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal held meetings in every village under the Naxalbari block highlighting the oppression of *jotedars*, stating that only an *andolan* could rid them of this problem. A meeting was held in the village Budaganj, Naxalbari in 1967, where the leaders asked the Adivasis to take away the harvest stockpiled in the local *jotedar's* house. Consequently, all Adivasi men used to assemble and forcefully take away the harvested stock of the wealthy *jotedars* and distribute amongst the people of the village. In this regard Khemu Singha says:

There was a *jotedar* known as Paul Kujur. The *adhiars* were going to confiscate the rice grains from his house. He was informed about this act; therefore, he stockpiled the grains and transferred it to the second floor of his house. When the *adhiars* arrived at his house, he opened fire at them. Some *adhiars* were seriously injured. After this incident, the *adhiars* planned to carry arms with them, along with their bows and arrows.²⁹

Singha explains that after the first police firing in Prasadujote, Naxalbari, arms were put to use. Those *jotedars*, who did not have arms and ammunition, surrendered to the Kisan Samitis along with their grain stock. But as the police were heavily deployed in all the villages to keep vigilance, it became difficult to carry out Naxalite activities. As Singha says:

I was about 16 years old, in the year 1967. I started attending the rallies of the parties in an active manner. In 1968, I was underground, as the police were arresting all those actively engaged in the *andolan*. I and some other activists killed a police informant in the village and went underground. There were numerous such police camps, such as in Birsinghjote and Magurjan that we had attacked and taken away rifles from. We relentlessly killed *jotedars*, who oppressed the villagers, with the only thought in mind that they are our exploiters and killing them would help us establish our *raij*³⁰. Moreover, in a meeting in Lakhijote, the party decided that more *janta* should be included in the *andolan*, or else it would not survive. This is where the party had different opinions. The same morning the *mahila* comrades were given the task of guarding the meeting, but due to certain reasons they could not do their duty. There was a police *gherao*, but we escaped. The police then killed three Adivasi peasants on that day. It is true that most of the oppressed were Adivasis in the village and they were the ones who readily took up arms, as well as became active in the *andolan*. Most of the boys in my group were Adivasis. The Adivasis involved in the *andolan* were Santals, Mundas, Oraons and Kisan. Simone Toppo from Phansidewa was an active comrade, who was killed in a CRPF firing in Birsinghjote, while I escaped unhurt. After 1968 I was arrested and spent seven years in jail; the officials lodged me in three jails - Bardhman jail, Bhagalpur jail and Siliguri jail.³¹

It was in this light that Adivasis worked fundamentally different from the Naxalism that sprouted in the back alleys of places such as Kharagpur or Bolpur. It would be pertinent to note that the Adivasis of Naxalbari engaged in the movement in tandem with their traditional identities and values in addition "made perceptive connection between their actions"³² and their cultural heroes such as Birsa Munda, Sido Kanu, Chand and Bhairab. A statement of the Bihar State Co-Ordination committee of Communist Revolutionaries highlighted this perception as- "let every Adivasi rise and fight the way the great Birsa, the great Siddu and Kannu fought against foreign oppressors".³³

Further, Jangal Santhal, the then president of Siliguri Sub-Divisional Krishak Samiti and a prominent leader of the Naxalbari Movement sent a message through Kishan Chatterjee, then a student leader of North Bengal and expressed that:

As the peasants of Naxalbari have launched a struggle to liberate themselves from the yoke of the age-old rule and exploitation by their feudal masters, the reactionary feudal elements and the agents of the ruling classes are frightened and their newspapers are ceaselessly spreading lies and slanders to disrupt their struggle. The so-called people's United Front Government have unmistakably taken the sides of the *jotedar* and landlords. With the help of the police and the military and in the same, old Congress style, they oppress and the peasantry who have started this great struggle for realizing their just demands and dole out advice to the peasantry- who are exploited in every way possible- to solve their problem with the help of bourgeois laws. And this same "progressive" United Front government is firing upon peasants and workers to defend the interests of *jotedars*, landlords and the bourgeoisie. Those so-called revolutionaries, that is, those fashionable revolutionaries who have so long told us that path to liberation of the exploited people of India is indeed the path of revolution, but who have, in practice, been pursuing the revisionist path, sing today the same tune as the reactionaries, call this struggle of the Naxalbari peasants "adventurist" and oppose this struggle in the same old reactionary way.³⁴

Moreover, Jangal Santhal asserts that the inner road to liberation is dismantling the "yoke of the exploiting classes" and appeals the people to "organize struggles of the exploited masses" and set up "thousands of Naxalbaris" across the region to march onward while paving way for the exploited to end in victory.³⁵

Conclusion

The article has sought to understand the primacy of revolutionary potential of Adivasis, taking one beyond the dominant polarization of modes of subjectivities, in the historiography of Adivasis in Left radicalism. It takes one forward to consider the discursive level, exploring the character of Adivasi communities, not to make it homogenous and make available exposure, that provokes the socio-cultural dimensions of narratives, memory of individuals as well as that of the community. Moreover, it could be argued that there has been a common reason that guides these rebellions. Thus, the study has been attempted to fill the void in popular historiography pertaining Adivasis' role in the Naxalbari movement of 1967 while also explaining their nature of resistance and not merely analysing their trait or the stereotypical engagement of them "ready to take up arms" and revolt; thus, it has steered clear from terming it an indigenous or

a tribal movement owing to the fact that there were other tribes and communities involved.

Interviews and oral narration as research methods have been employed and are primary sources used in the study. Further, an engagement of literature suggests that the main ideologue of the *Andolan* was Charu Mazumdar, while Kanu Sanyal being the prime organizer and mobilizer of the party activities in the course of the movement. Jangal Santhal, a prominent leader amongst the Adivasi people was the prime executor of the party-based activities. The interviews also suggest that the mass base of the *Andolan* consisted heavily by the local Adivasi people largely. Tribal culture, traditions and conventions were a significant tool in getting the Adivasi people involved. The Adivasis were actively engaged in the movement but their role was undermined in leadership roles barring few names such as Shanti Munda and Jangal Santhal. However, their role was crucial in bridging the gap between the non-Adivasi leaders with the Adivasi mass most prominently in Naxalbari area. For instance, Kanu Sanyal lived in an Adivasi village in Sebdellajote, Naxalbari to understand the psyche of the people, and mould their activities accordingly.³⁶ Most importantly, the movement also brought to the fore the tea garden Adivasi labourers on a single plank to participate in the day to day activities of the Naxalbari movement. Khemu Singha exclaims that this was one of the most significant steps taken by the leaders, as in the history of North Bengal which had seen the Tebhaga movement in the past, had not witnessed this particular act.

Further, the period 1967 has been taken as a landmark into account for the study, as the interplay of the volatile situation created by the Naxalbari movement, and the role played by Adivasi peasants who were the *adhiars* too, in the wake of growing discernments against the *jotedars*. It was after a gap of two decades of the Tebhaga movement, that the Adivasis irrespective of being peasants or plantation labour came forward to co-join the Naxalbari movement. Their egalitarian social organization was very conducive to mass mobilization. The Adivasis of North Bengal- the tea plantation labourers or the peasants, worked closely during the Tebhaga movement of 1945-46. Local leaders such as Charu Mazumdar got actively engaged in the process of involving the Adivasis of the tea estates, concerning hartals and *dharnas*. Further, one can argue that the causes of oppression in central India pertaining Adivasis were different as compared to Adivasi experiences, situations of the migrant Adivasis in Bengal or Assam. In this stance, it can be asserted that the Adivasis in the Naxalbari movement underline a unique phase and history of revolution in Indian radical movement/s.

Notes

1. Adrija Roychowdhury, *51 Years of Naxalbari: How a Peasant Uprising Triggered a Pan-India Political Movement*, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, May 25, 2018.
2. An interview with Khudan Mallick on 4.12.14 at village Budaganj, Naxalbari Block, District Darjeeling, West Bengal. Khudan Mallick was a popular Naxalbari Movement's peasant organizer and one of the CPI(ML) delegates to have visited China in 1967. Interviewer- Bipasha Rosy Lakra.
3. *What Happened at Naxalbari and Why?*, *The Hindu*, June 12, 1967.
4. Banerjee, Sumanta, *In the Wake of Naxalbari—A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*. Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980.
5. Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the Peasant Movement in the Terai Region*, Volume 2, No.1, Liberation, November 1968, pp-28-53.
6. Paul, Bappaditya, *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014.
7. Ibid. p.1.
8. It should be noted that, there are other tribes as well in the region, going by the district Gazetteer by O'Malley; Mundas were considerable in the Siliguri sub-division. However, the Santal and Oraon population count was more in the Naxalbari agitation. They not only comprised of the peasant class, but the *Chai Bagan Shramik*, of Naxalbari administrative block, district Darjeeling, West Bengal.
9. L.S.S. O'Malley, *L.S.S. Bengal District Gazetteers- Darjeeling*. Delhi: Logos Press, 1999.
10. K.B Saha, *Economics of Rural Bengal*, Calcutta: Chatterjee & Co., Ltd., 1930.
11. Hunter, W.W, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*-Volume I, New York: Leypoldt & Holt, 1868. pp. 255-256.
12. Edward Duyker, *op.cit.* p. 4.
13. L. Knockaert, *Further Progress Among the Santals*, Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press, 1916.
14. A. Bhattacharya, *Naxalbari Reportage-V: The Land System*, *Mainstream*, August 26, 1967. Pp. 15-16.
15. Ibid. p. 49.
16. A. J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1947.
17. A. Bhattacharya, *Naxalbari Reportage II: The Root of the Unrest*, *Mainstream*, July 15, 1967.
18. This involves the employment of Adivasi songs during the peak times of the Naxalbari Movement. This was highlighted during the interview with Shanti Munda on December 2, 2014 at Sebdellajote, Hatighisa, Naxalbari, West Bengal.
19. An interview with Khudan Mallick on 4. 12. 2014 at village-Budaganj, Naxalbari Block, West Bengal. He was one of the popular leaders of the Naxalbari Movement and passed away in 2017.
20. K. S. Singh, *Tribal Movements in India*, Volume 2, Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2006.
21. An interview conducted with Lachu Oraon, expresses that he was aware of the ongoing Naxalbari movement-1967, but refused to participate as he is a zamindar, and he sought lack of reason to get involved or participate. The interview took place at village- Neemtala, New Rangia, district Darjeeling, West Bengal on 3. 12. 2014.
22. An interview with Abhijit Mazumdar at Hakimpara, Siliguri, district Darjeeling on 2.12.2014.
23. Prabhash K. Dutta, *50 Years of Naxalbari Movement: Classic Case of Fight for Right Cause with Wrong Means*, *The Indian Express*, India Today, New Delhi, 25 May 2017.
24. Mouparna Bandopadhyay, *It Happened in Naxalbari*, *The Financial Express*, Naxalbari, District Darjeeling, West Bengal, June 30, 2009.
25. Dhruvo Jyoti, *Spring Thunder to Bloody Rebellion: Key Dates in History of Naxal-Maoist Movement*, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 25 May 2017. Also see, Suvojit Bagchi, *Naxalbari, the Bengal Village Where 50 Years of a Movement is Celebrated*, *The Hindu*, 13 May 2017.
26. An interview with Dhadu Munda, village-Budaganj, Naxalbari administration block, Siliguri on 04.12.2014.
27. Ibid.
28. Khemu Singha is the husband of Lila Kisan- An Adivasi Naxalbari movement revolutionary. Moreover, Khemu Singha was an active participant too in the movement. The interview was conducted on 04.12.2014.
29. Ibid.
30. 'Raij' is a Sadri term essentially meaning a system of authority.
31. Ibid. p.11. An interview with Khemu Singha on 4.12.2014 at Village-Budaganj, Naxalbari, West Bengal.
32. Edward Duyker, *Naxalism and Santal Cultural Rationalizations*, in *Tribal Guerrillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987. p.117.
33. 'On the Struggle of the Adivasi People Against Oppression and Exploitation' (Statement of the Bihar State Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, June 12, 1968).
34. *Interview with a Revolutionary- Jangal Santhal*, Liberation (Editor- Sushital Ray Choudhury), Volume I, No.2, December 1967.
35. Ibid.
36. An interview with Noni Munda, at village-Sebdellajote, Hatighisa, Naxalbari on 2.12.2014. Noni Munda did not actively participate in the movement but is a living witness to the activities of the Naxalbari movement since its inception. She is contemporary to Shanti Munda and is her neighbour at Sebdellajote, Naxalbari.