

# **Bangladesh: Legendary Peasant Leader (1925-1996) - Brief Biography of Abdus Satter Khan**

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**November 7, 2020, at 4 pm, is the 24<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of comrade Abdus Satter Khan, the lifeblood of the peasant movement in Bangladesh, a people intellectual, the organizer of the liberation war, the founding president of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation and the former coordinator of the Communist Party of Bangladesh-ML.**

Abdus Satter Khan fell on the stage on October 27, 1996 in front of the Dhaka National Press Club after suffering a heart attack while addressing a rally of 15,000 peasants, peasant women, students and youths on anti-Flood Action Plan of World Bank. He was immediately admitted to Dhanmondi Al-Jebel-e-Noor Clinic. Comrade Abdus Satter Khan, the lifeblood of the peasant movement in Bangladesh and a veteran peasant leader, passed away at 8:15 am on November 7, 1996. He was born in 1925 in a noble Jotdar family in remote village called Dashmina of Dashmina police station in the coastal district of Patuakhali in South Bengal. His father's name was Abdul Jabbar Khan and his mother's name was Jabeda Khatun. He lost his father in childhood. In the absence of his father, he was brought up in the love of his uncle Abdul Majid Khan.

He was not educated enough in the conventional education system. He also had a lot of distrust towards the conventional education system. What was taught in the conventional education system that which did not teach the emancipation of the exploited was crystal clear to him.

When he was born, the peasantry of this country was lost due to the oppression of the feudal lords. No one at that time had the courage to look into the eyes of the British-backed Zamindar-Talukdar. The oppression of innocent peasants tormented his tender childhood mind. So one day he joined the then clandestine party, undivided Communist Party of India at the hands of one of his school teachers. He was fascinated by the ideology, aims and objectives of the Communist Party. So, early in his life, he strongly opposed the unjust persecution of the peasantry by the feudal landlords. Sometimes he fought directly against injustice. That is why he had to deal with numerous false cases on behalf of the opposition. He became a member of the East Pakistan Communist Party when India gained independence through a relentless struggle against the British-created Zamindar-Mahajan-Collaborator group and when India was divided into two states, India and Pakistan. In the fifties he employed all his strength in addition to party work to build a peasant movement in his own area. Later he committed himself to expand it at the national level. In the sixties he led the struggle to reduce rents in Patuakhali. During the war of liberation in 1971, he took a stand outside the party thinking and fought a tough fight and built resistance against the Pakistani aggressors. He was one of the members of the seven-member action committee formed at Patuakhali to fight against the Pak aggressors at that time. His courageous and fighting role in the war of liberation and his sharp intellect and foresight are truly admirable and unforgettable. At that time, with his intelligence, he was able to draw the national bourgeois leadership into the struggle committee and put it on the battlefield. After the independence of the country in 1971, he became a member of the Communist

Party of East Bengal and later of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist).

Immediately after the country became independent in 1971, the then Awami League government arrested him conspiratorially on charges of treason. They arrested him and applied poison to his body to temporarily cripple him. As a result, he was paralyzed for a long time. In 1974, the then Awami League government arrested him again on false charges of leading a secret party.

After serving 4 consecutive years in jail, he was released on a writ petition filed in the High Court in 1976. While in jail in 1976, he formed the Bangladesh Krishok Federation due to the prevailing situation in the then Left. In 1986, he re-engaged to strengthen the peasant movement. In 1989, he organized a long march of ten thousand peasants from Dashmina to Patuakhali demanding distribution of Khas land among the landless. In 1980, under his leadership, 3 chars, Charhadi, Charborhan and Charbashbaria respectively in Dashmina police station were occupied by the landless people. The then Ziaur Rahman government with its police force evicting the landless arrested him and imprisoned. In 1972, he filed a writ petition in the High Court and on getting out of jail he reconcentrated building a Khasland movement. In 1983, he went on a 73-hour hunger strike demanding cancellation of the illegal settlement list of Khas lands and formation of a Khasland Allotment Committee in the interest of the real landless. In 1986, he went on a continuous hunger strike demanding distribution of Khas land among the landless. The hunger strike lasted for 87 hours. He again announced a hunger strike in 1991 after the revenue department employees took refuge in dilly-dally over the distribution and settlement of Khasland. This fast lasts for 180 hours for 6 days. In addition to his hunger strike, about 10,000 members of the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha went on strike in front of the Dashmina TNO office. In 1986, he conducted a seminar on 'Farmers and Their Problems, Open Discussion' in the TSC seminar room of Dhaka University. On 14 March 1989, he marched from Barisal to Dhaka with thousands of peasants from the south on the basis of a 7-point demands. Under his leadership, the participants of the long march walked for 6 days with indomitable courage and morale, crossed the 180 km road and arrived at the foot of the Dhaka National Shaheed Minar and after spending the night at the Shaheed Minar on March 19, took position in front of the National Press Club on March 20. This long march is a milestone in the history of the movement of Bangladesh Krishok Federation.

Bangladesh Kishani Sabha was born on 27 January 1990 under his patronage. On December 27, 1991, a large gathering of 15,000 people announced the occupation of 4 chars of Khasland of Dashmina police station. He did not stop his movement by occupying 4 chars. He focused on inventing new strategies to re-occupy and sustain new Khaslands. Due to his extraordinary thinking and ability to make quick decisions at the right time, many more chars were later captured in Bhola and Patuakhali districts in 1995-96. Due to his deep knowledge of land, this movement has spread to different regions day by day. In Satkhira District, 9 shrimp farms are occupied by landless people. Landless members of the organization are occupying Khasland in different areas of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Kurigram in North Bengal. On 25 October 1992, a seminar on World Bank's anti-Flood Action Plan was held at the TSC auditorium of Dhaka University on his initiative. On 11 and 12 April 1992, a large gathering of 16,000 peasants was held in front of the Dhaka Press Club under his leadership. In early 1992, the Bangladesh Adivasi Samiti of the country was formed on his initiative. On 27 November 1993, on her special initiative, two more organizations, the Bangladesh Floating Workers Union and the Bangladesh Floating Women Workers Union, were formed with the floating workers of the city. He was convinced that a united struggle for rights could be formed between the peasantry of the village and the floating male and female workers of the city who had been evicted from the village.

He called for a national assembly in Dhaka in 1995 to give a national shape to the Khasland movement and to accelerate the peasant movement. The gathering was attended by thousands of peasants, indigenous men and women, floating men and women of the city, cultural activists and

student activists. He suffered a heart attack while delivering a speech at the rally. On 27 October 1996, a huge rally was held in front of the Dhaka National Press Club led by Satter Khan to demand the cancellation of the Flood Action Plan. It was at this public gathering that Comrade Abdus Satter Khan gave the last speech of his life. Only 10 days after this mass gathering, his grand death happened.

Comrade Abdus Satter Khan visited Europe 3 times in his long political life. He first visited France in 1986. He gained a thorough knowledge of the life of the peasants in France. He also spoke at several seminars in France. In 1986, he spoke at a seminar on Khasland in the Netherlands. In this seminar, he said, "We are not poor, we have been made poor." In 1993, he returned to France. In France, he spoke at the first conference on the Flood Action Plan. "We don't need your help because your help is not reaching our farmers," he told foreign journalists in an interview. Only a handful of people's pockets get heavy. These writings of his are recorded in Kishan-Kishani, the mouthpiece of the organization published on his initiative.

Abdus Satter Khan dreamed of forming an independent front of professional organizations during his lifetime. In view of this, 6 mass organizations have been practicing as a political alliance for a long time with a common vision. These 6 organizations are: Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, Bangladesh Adivasi Samiti, Bangladesh Floating Workers Union, Bangladesh Floating Women Workers Union, Bangladesh Rural Intellectuals Front, Ganachchaya Cultural Center.

Abdus Satter Khan was involved in some social work besides his political activities. The first high school was established in his own area Dashmina on his own initiative. His role behind the establishment of Dashmina ART College is also undeniable. The contribution made by Comrade Satter Khan in his long political life will be passed on to the next generation.

### **Bangladesh Krishok Federation**

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