

# TEBHAGA MOVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF NORTH BENGAL

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## Abstract

Before one year independence of India, *Tebhaga Movement* started against the Joteders and the demand of the peasant was one third share of the whole productive crop. The peasants were called Adhyar, *Bhagchasi* or *Bargade.*, *Tebhaga Movement* made a mass hysteria in North Bengal during the colonial rule. Mainly the indigenous poor and deprived peasant took part in this movement and the educated town-centered Bengali Communist leader organized the movement for the interest of poor cultivator. The movement started at Baliyadandi, Thakurgaon of undivided Dinajpur before partition of India. Though it was not against the British or British rule but the British Government was active to suppress this movement by their administrative power. Gradually, this movement wielded many places in the northern part of Bengal. Bibhuti Guha, Kamparam Singh, Purneswari Barman (a women activist who had died in this movement gunned by the police), Janardan Bhattacharya Danesh Muhammad Hazi etc were taking a great role of this movement. Many movements occurred on the eve of freedom of India against British Government. After the partition of India, the govt. of West Bengal passed the *West Bengal Land Reforms Act* (1955) on paper and in the pen. After twenty years freedom of India in 1967 Naxalbari Movement Started at Naxalbari, (called *Naxalbari Movement*) of Siliguri subdivision, plain area of Darjeeling district in West Bengal on the same theory of *Tebhaga Movement* in the interest of Bengali refugees who were coming from East Pakistan or Bangladesh. The activist launched the Maoist-Leninist view against the indigenous little land holders who belonged to Rajbanshi community called *Joteders*. The leaders of this movement were not sons of the soil. Their view had succeeded and the indigenous people have lost their land, converted into day labour. But the land of northern part Bengal captured by the outsiders

**Key words:** Effect in Famine, Tebhaga Movement, A Peasant Uprising in 1946, Undivided British Bengal, Leadership and a Mass Hysteria

*Tebhaga Movement* that happened to take place in the northern part of undivided Bengal, basically in Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Rangpur is an incident to be remembered even in coming days. Prior to this memorable incident, *Sannyasi Fakir Revolt* (1770) had also taken place in this region. The movement of the farmers during this time has carved out place in history. After the end of the Second World War, when the dependent countries were preparing themselves for achieving independence, India also was not lagging behind this effect. The whole of the world was under the threat of devastation. Brunt of the Second World War was still visible on the face of this world. In this juncture, there was a game of mankind and breaking of the world politics. The whole of India was under stress and in a state of destabilization in the event of defeat of *Azad-Hind-Fouz* of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (1945), Naval-Revolt (1946) in the coastal areas of Western India, visualization of sovereign Pakistan and communal riots in Calcutta, Noakhali and Chittagong. When Mahatma Gandhi failed to contain the communal riot despite his heart and soul effort, *Tebhaga Movement* was started by then. *Tebhaga Movement* (1946) started just before one year of achieving independent of India. But premonition of this historical movement could be traced in the event of farmers' revolution in Dinajpur in the year of 1936-37, against the local *Zamindars*. The Farmers mostly belonged to the landless class of neglected farmers. A majority of them was deprived on many counts. The grievances and

discontent stemmed from the deprivation of the neglected farmers burst out in the form of *Tebhaga Movement*.

In September 1946, the *Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha* gave a call to implement through mass struggle the *Floud Commission* (A land revenue commission, 1938) recommendation of *Tebhaga*: Two Third of the crops instead of half of even less, for the share cropper (*Bargadar, Bhag Chasi or Adhyar*) working on land rented from *Jotedar*<sup>1</sup>. The term *Tebhaga* was coined by the local deprived cultivators. The term *Tebhaga* denotes two third shares. The demand of the farmers was that crops produced in the land of any *Zaminder* by the share cropper, be divided into three equal shares of which two shares would be given to the share cropper concerned and the remaining one share would be given to the *Zaminders* concerned. But the *Zaminders* took away half of the product time crops from the share croppers. Therefore the share-croppers are known as *Adhiyar* a local term meant owner of the half of the production. This made them aggrieved. The lion share of production produced with toil and moil of the share-croppers would have gone to the *Zaminder*. Most of the farmers being illiterate and they were cheated on many counts by a class of people. The *Permanent Settlement* in 1793, effected by Lord Cornwallis, the influential sons of the soil of this region took hold of the land who was known as *Zaminder*. A major portion of the farmers became victims of torture inflicted by the local *Zaminders*. Somewhere, the extent of exploitation was intense. Some Land Lord was exception and they took up well-fare measures for the share croppers.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the wave social reformation and education initiated by Rammohan and Vidyasagar enriched only handful of village people. Some of the educated could not tolerate *Zaminders* and *Jotedar's* power of pelf. During the time, the *Zaminder* or Land holders of substantial amount were regarded to be the rich persons in the society. The city people did not hold such amount of property as the *Zaminder's* of the village. Some educated youths of the society wanted to give a blow to the core of the *Zamindari* system. Meanwhile, communism has been imported in India from Russia. In the year 1925, M.N. Roy went to Russia where he was influenced by the Communist Movement. The Communist Movement was also started in our country. Consequently, the communists also took a leading role in the peasant movement. In the year 1939, *Communist Samiti* was formed at Rangpur of British Bengal in India and Communist Movement rolled on. In the year 1930, many revolutionaries were behind the bar for the offence of wagging revolution. In the districts of *Dinajpur* and *Jalpaiguri*, the political activities were also accelerated. In the year 1943, the villages of Bengal were under a great hardship and devastation. There was shortage of food everywhere. But this situation of food shortage was spurious one. Some hoarders and black marketers created this spurious situation. The illiterates and half illiterates' people blamed the village *Zaminders* for this unwanted situation and hardship. In fact, the village local *Zamindes* were hardly to be blamed for the hardship suffered by the village people. On the other hand, the Communist Party had a great role to create the situation of hardship among the Bengal village masses. The activists of revolution instigated the majority of the farmers against the *Zaminders* or land holders.

Resultant of this hardship of artificial food shortage of the village masses, it is the main issue of the *Tebhaga Movement*. The majority of farmers turned into revolutionaries and became reckless. They rent the sky with slogans 'we shall give our lives', but not to the crop produced by us', but not the crops produced by us,' 'Garner the crops in own yards.' (*Rangpur, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri*). Those who sacrificed their lives were from the Rajbanshis, local Muslim Santal, Khen, Kaibrtas of Mahishya origin, Haris and Jugis community. Hordes of peasants joined this movement. A new history came into with the shedding blood of the poor peasants. The leader of the *Tebhaga Movement* in *Dinajpur* were Bibhuti Guha, Gurlal Adikary, Kali Sarkar, Ajit Roy, Sunil Sen Janardan Bhattacharya, Abani Lahiri, Kamparam Singha, Rupnarayan Roy Purneswari Barman fondly called 'Burima.' "Many places of undivided *Dinajpur*, especially of *Thakurgaon Thana* (Now in a district of Bangladesh), Village after village turned into villages of 'Red Flag.' The slogans that rent the air were the slogan of the *Red Flag in Club Jindabad*."<sup>2</sup> During this time Haji Muhammod Danesh, Idu Chowdhuri joined in the movement. His contribution in inspiring the Muslim community to join the peasant movement was great. But a majority of Muslim community people was avering in joining this movement. "The peasant movement started in the month of December 1946. But the path of movement was

not smooth. There were many hindrances on the path of movement. There existed a 'National Samiti' in Dinajpur named *Kshatriya Samiti* of Rajbanshi community."<sup>3</sup>

The national organization i.e. *Khatriya Samiti* was comprised of the local *Rajbanshi-Kshatriya Zaminders*. This '*Kshatriya Samiti*' tried to utmost to prevent the '*Red Flag*' movement, the reason being that most of *Zaminders* of this region same community. They thought the main leaders of this movement were outsiders. These outsiders would usurp the power of uniting the poor peasants of Rajbanshi Community. Consequently, the local *Rajbanshi Zaminders* gradually became powerless and landless. This is the cause of local *Zaminder's* for being the opponents of staunch kind of the '*Tebhaga Movement*'. The man considered to be pioneer of uniting the peasants of this region was Panchanan Burma (1866-1935) of Rajbanshi Community. "Through rectification of the tenant law, Panchanan Burma wanted the ownership of the farming land to the farmers who is tiling the early of this movement. After a long time, this responsibility had been carried out by the Left Front Government in West Bengal."<sup>4</sup> He was the man who first thought about the affliction, poverty and sufferings of the local peasants. As a result, he was expelled from the *Coochbehar* kingdom by the king of *Coochbehar* who was rather influence by instigating words. However, the reason of expulsion of Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma was not clear at all. He never disclosed the fact anywhere. Different scholars express their views about the expulsion of Panchanan Burma from *Coochbehar state*. He formed '*Krisak Samiti*' and '*Kshatriya Bank*' for the interest of the peasants. He passed away in the year 1935CE. But taking place of the communist movement went for a long time. After a long period of this formation of movement, the Communist Party stood by the poor peasants. The leading role was taken by Charuchandra Mazumdar Maidandighi, Boda, *Debinganj* and *Panchangarh* (Now in *Panchagarh District of Bangladesh*) in Undivided Jalpaiguri district. Harikanta Barman was local leader in Rangpur (Now in Bangladesh). Since 1944, the Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah took up the cause of creating a new country for Muslims. In the year 1945-46, A.K. Fazlul Haque prepared for forming a different party comprising Muslims tenants and farmers. The Muslim stayed away from the '*Tebhaga Movement*'. Meanwhile, about fifty thousand people died due to famine. There was effort to overcome the grave effect of the famine from the side of the British Empire. Gorachand Barman initiated communist movement in the area of Kaliganj Police Station and the police made an arrest warrant.

While in hideout, he died. Gradually the peasant of undivided Dinajpur district, Patiram, Hili, Chirir Bandar, Balurghat, Raiganj, Parbatipur, Baliyadangi, Thumni, Atoari and also many other places. On second February 1946 farmers lost lives in the gun fire of the police at Rani Sankail when the farmers were arrested, the policemen were hedged by the farmers under the leadership of one Rajbanshi young lady named by Bhandani Barmani. They snatched away the fire-arms from the O.C. and other police officers and made them confined. Meanwhile the process of the election of the *Krishak Sabha* was started in this time. In the election, Kamparam Singha a Rajbanshi communist leader was elected in a huge margin. "The North Bengal base was principally among Rajbanshis ... Mostly *Adhyar* and poor peasant, but also including some Big Joteders and *Zaminder* among home organization along class lines had already undercut a previous Sanskritizin movement claiming *Kshatriya* status though the Communist Rupnarayan Roy had won the Dinajpur Seat in 1946, defeating both Congress and *Kshatriya Samiti* candidate."<sup>5</sup>

The districts of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, former Princely state of Coochbehar, North and south Dinajpur and Malda of West Bengal, Katihar, Purnea, Araria and Kishanganj of Bihar, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Chirang, Darang, barpeta, Baxa, Udalguri, Kamrup, Naogaon, sonitpur, Cachar etc. of Assam, and Western part of Meghalaya also, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Rangpur, Bogra, Gaibandha, Nelpamari, Lalmanir Hat, Kurigram, Mymensingh, Sherpur, Jaipur hat, Chapai Nawabganj, Pabna, Rajshahi, etc. of Bangladesh, Jhapa, Morang and Sunsuri of Nepal have a large number of population belonging to Rajbanshis who might comprise the largest community in terms of diverse population in these places. In North Bengal especially undivided Rangpur and Dinajpur, the original inhabitants are Rajbanshi and Nasyasekh Muslims and other sons of the soil as Teli, Tanti, Nath-Jugi, Mali, Sodgope, Kumar, Khen, Gangai, Kaibarta, Hari, etc. During the British Empire in India and then came on the Santals, Mundas, Oraons etc., in those district. The Upper Caste Hindu gentlemen or newly educated persons called Bhadraklok have come from outside or lower part of Bengal. Naturally during the *Tebhaga Movement* most of the Joteders, and

Zaminders were from the Community of Rajbanshis. But most of the Rajbanshi peasants unknowingly took active part in the Tebhaga Movement imbued by the Communist influence and ideology. The local Joteders and Zaminders opposed this movement tooth and nail. Rajini Barman of Thakurgaon composed many songs on *Tebhaga Movement*. Later on he succumbed to the police bullet.

“Oh! My peasant- brothers

Now we from the Krishak Samiti,

Fight, Fight with police

Oh! My peasant brothers,”<sup>6</sup>

This is snatch of the songs he composed on the *Tebhaga Movement* and used any *Palatiyagan* (a kind of popular Folk drama) during this time.

The class of people that was affected most was the *Jotedars* class of farming masses. After partition of the country, The *Tebhaga Movement* come an ended. During the partition of country, the rancor and enmity increased between the Hindus and the Muslims. A Majority of the people involved in *Tebhaga Movement* crossed over to India leaving their hearth and home. And still a great majority stayed back in East Pakistan or Bangladesh, were the people belonging to Rajbanshi or others Hindu community on. Even after this, during the independence struggle of Bangladesh and onward the process of crossing over India was on and is still on. Most spectacular is that most of the Rajbanshis took active part in *Tebhaga Movement*. Now, they have settled in the sand-banks of rivers, or congested areas of many small or big town and villages in India. The haunting question is ‘where had gone their *Tebhaga Movement*? Where had gone their *Zaminderi*? ‘The Hindu peasants in India and the Muslims peasants in Pakistan including the poor common people are in a state of hopelessness. Where is their land? Where is their happiness and prosperity? The only thing that remains is the message of hope and faith!”<sup>7</sup>

*Tebhaga Movement* cannot be said as the movement against the British. The condition of the descendants of the people taken part in the Tebhaga Movement is worse and reprehensible. Most of them are eking out their livelihood as share cropper or daily wage earners. Till today, they are living in wretched condition with having no any socio-economic development. As for the Landlord or Zaminder, they went into oblivion. The economic condition of the farmers is not well and many villages are in jeopardy till now. “But was it the ultimate result of *Tebhaga Movement*?”<sup>8</sup> After 20 years of partition of the country, occurred a movement centering the land in Naxalbari of Darjeeling district, The Maoist-Leninist launched a movement against the local *Joteders* and *Zaminders*. It is known as *Naxalbari Movement* in 1967. In this movement also the *Tebhaga* stalwarts viz Charu Mazumder, Kanu Sanyal with their leading role created a mass hysteria among the simple common folks of this place against the local *Joteder*’s. It comes under the purview of suspect that the main agenda of the movement was to destroy the power and pelf of local *Joteders* belonging to Rajbanshi Community and other sons of the soil. The mission and vision of this *Naxalbari Movement* is successful. Because a little land holders or *Joteders* has been destroyed but the community of the leading leaders of this movement captured this land and they were not related of this land, came from outside, gradually seeking political powers and became rich man. But the Rajbanshi who are the sons of the soil of this land (All over North Bengal including Siliguri subdivision) lost every things- land, home and hearth. *The Naxalbari Movement* became a history, known to national and international level. But, the inner policy of this movement was a great blunder of Rajbanshi Community. And, perhaps if a question is put regarding the persons who took the leading part in Movement of *Naxalbari* how far had they attached to land? Perhaps be not. The land of the localities has been possessed totally by the outsiders and is being still possessed.

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