

Full Length Research Paper

The Role of women in Tebhaga movement in Jalpaiguri District and to preserve their identity

Shyamal Chandra Sarkar

History, Prasannadeb Women's College, affiliated to North Bengal University, Jalpaiguri, Paschimbanga, India.
PIN NO. 735101.

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The roots of the Indian women's movement go back to the 19th century male social reformers who took up issues concerning women and started women's organizations. Women started forming their own organization from the end of the nineteenth century first at the local and then at the national level. In 1946, the two main issues they took up were political rights and reform of personal laws. Women's participation in tebhaga movement broadened the base of the women's movement. Tebhaga movement was one of the great post war peasant agitations in Bengal. It was the most extensive of all the post war agrarian agitation. Women of Bengal played a rather significant role in this movement. After the end of the Second World War, there were a number of educated women who were participating in the various peasant rebellions that were springing up all over the country. The legacy of female nationalists, taking part in the Quit India Movement and accepting prison sentence for the nation, had ignited the flame of protest in the hearts of women. Thus there was seen the active participation of women on par with men in these movements and rebellions of which the Tebhaga movement was one. This movement erupted in 1946 in Bengal on the eve of the withdrawal of the British. Although the tide of Tebhaga receded as fast as it rose, the uprising stands out as one of the most important political events in twentieth century Bengal. Among the unique features of the movement is the large-scale participation of women on par with men. The landless and poor peasant women formed fighting troops called 'Nari Bahini' and took a front rank role in defending the gains of the movement and in countering the repression of the state. Women of Jalpaiguri District also played an active role in this movement. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the role of women in the Tebhaga movement under the leadership of Communists and seeks to throw light on fundamental questions such as why, despite women's demonstrated capacity to organize, struggle and lead progressive movements.

Key words: Tebhaga, exploitation, Nari Bahini, Jotedar, Zamindar, Krishak Sabha, sharecroppers, communist party, justice.

INTRODUCTION

Man and woman are all called men. One cannot run-fast without other. So any universal success depends on the

active role of men and women. The wheel of the civilization could not move continuously without women.

E-mail: shymalchhs@gmail.com. Tel: 09832353625.

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Swami Vivekananda says that – Civilization is like a bird; man and woman is the two wing of the bird. The bird could not fly easily if we cut her one wing. So women's participation is a key component of the civilization. The roots of the Indian women's movement go back to the nineteenth century male social reformers who took up issues concerning women and started women's organizations. Women started forming their own organization from the end of the nineteenth century first at the local and then at the national level. In 1946, the two main issues they took up were political rights and reform of personal laws. Women's participation in tebhaga movement broadened the base of the women's movement. Tebhaga movement was one of the great post war peasant agitations in Bengal. It was the most extensive of all the post war agrarian agitation. Women of Bengal played a rather significant role in this movement. After the end of the Second World War, there were a number of educated women who were participating in the various peasant rebellions that were springing up all over the country. The legacy of female nationalists, taking part in the Quit India Movement and accepting prison sentence for the nation, had ignited the flame of protest in the hearts of women. Thus there was seen the active participation of women on par with men in these movements and rebellions of which the Tebhaga movement was one. This movement erupted in 1946 in Bengal on the eve of the withdrawal of the British. Although the tide of Tebhaga receded as fast as it rose, the uprising stands out as one of the most important political events in twentieth century Bengal. Among the unique features of the movement is the large-scale participation of women on par with men. The landless and poor peasant women formed fighting troops called 'Nari Bahini' and took a front rank role in defending the gains of the movement and in countering the repression of the state. Women of Jalpaiguri district also played an active role in this movement. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the role of women in the Tebhaga movement under the leadership of Communists and seeks to throw light on fundamental questions such as why, despite women's demonstrated capacity to organize, struggle and lead progressive movements.

Origin of the movement

The Tebhaga movement was originated in the share cropping system that prevailed in Bengal. By this time a new class of rural exploiters, the jotedars, emerged. They rented out land to landless peasants on the basis of sharing the crops in equal halves. The Jotedars exacted illegally many other privileges. The condition of peasants worsened further by inflationary war time situation and famine. After the Bengal famine in 1943, the 'Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha', which was guided by the Communist Party, called for a mass movement among sharecroppers in September of 1946 to keep 'Tebhaga'

(two-thirds) of the harvest. This demand had figured since the thirties in the programmed of the 'Kishan Sabha', and had also been recognized as just by a government commission which in 1939-1940 had reviewed the miserable state of Bengal's agriculture. Even this British appointed commission, the Floud Commission, had exposed the prevailing system which obliged sharecroppers to relinquish half of their harvest as rent, and on top of that to pay scores of illegal cesses. These sharecroppers were continuously drained of the wealth they produced. Young Communists went out to the countryside to organize peasants to take the harvested crop to their own threshing floor and make the two-thirds share a reality. The slogan, "Adhi noy, Tebhaga chai" (we want two-thirds share not 1/2) rent the sky.¹ They started taking harvested crops to their own yards. They offered only 1/3 crop share to jotedars. This led to innumerable clashes and subsequent arrest, lathi (stick) charges and firing.

The movement began in North Bengal and gradually spread throughout the rest of the Bengal province. It has a history of rural resistance, continuing throughout the whole period of British colonial rule. The Tebhaga uprising in many ways was the culminating point, spreading over large areas of the countryside and expressing the urge of labouring men and women to be liberated from exploitation. A reported 6,000,000 people participated in the Tebhaga movement at its peak.² The movement started during a crucial time of the year, in November, when the 'aman' paddy is harvested. After the staging of gatherings and demonstrations with sticks and red flags, to arouse mass enthusiasm, batches of 'Kishan Sabha' volunteers joined individual share-croppers to cut and stack the paddy crops on the peasants' threshing floors. A challenge thus was posed to the existing rule that all harvested paddy be delivered at the landlord's cutchery or granary. From pocket areas where people's consciousness was relatively high due to earlier campaigns by the 'Kishan Sabha', the Tebhaga movement in no time swept through the countryside like an avalanche, notably in northern Bengal.

During the second stage of the uprising, therefore, the experimental limits set by the leadership at the start were broken by the people themselves. Peasant men and women, many of them Muslims, attacked the granaries of local land-lords or jotedars, to recover stocks of paddy already stored there. The rural structure of oppression was truly shaking, as many landlords fled the villages, some of them disguised in women's clothes. Coinciding with the partially spontaneous nature of the uprising was the principal role that women played in it. Even in areas such as the interior villages of Nandigram, where women were not supposed to participate in cultivation in the field

¹ "Peoples age", August 1946.

² <http://www.manushi.in> Tebhaga Movement. Pdf 21.09.2011.

and where their agricultural tasks were largely "limited" to processing the harvested paddy, women had definite stakes in the success of the Tebhaga campaign. Even more so than their husbands, rural poor women had suffered heavily, inhumanly, from the recent manmade disaster, the Bengal famine of 1943. For these women, the storing of paddy in their own houses, for the first time in their lives, was a revolutionary event. It evoked a tremendous emotional response. It, therefore, is no accident that rural poor women in massive numbers came forward to defend the movement's gains. From the forested area of Sunderbans in the South through the Norail subdivision in Jessore to Dinajpur in the north, village women spontaneously set up their 'Nari Bahini' or semi militia groups, facing rifles with brooms, pestles and knives. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to state that in this towering political event, rural poor women played the leading part.

Nature of the movement

Tebhaga movement was organized mainly by the communist cadres of the Bengal Provincial 'Kishan Sabha'. Under their leadership the barga (sharecropping) peasants got themselves mobilized against the landlord class. But soon leadership also came from below. Tebhaga movement hit nineteen districts of Bengal. However, the movement was most intensely felt in the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Khulna, Mymensingh, Jessore and the 24-Parganas.

Rani Mitra Dasgupta, Manikuntala Sen, Renu Chakraborty and other women who had worked as active volunteers of the 'Mahila Atmaraksha Samity' (Women's Self-Defense Organization) during the famine years wanted to bring rural women in to this movement. Although the party was lukewarm in its support for this idea and male peasants suspicious, they found rural women ready to work with them. At first women played a subsidiary role, helping harvest the crops, cooking food for the leaders, acting as lookouts and sounding the alarm to alert their colleagues to danger. As police repression became more brutal and the Communist Party, unprepared for armed struggle, withdrew from active leadership, women formed their own militia the 'Nari Bahini'. Manikuntala Sen and Renu chakraborty told their leader women's problem had to be addressed along with problems of economic exploitation and political oppression.³

First and foremost, meeting times had to be convenient for women.

Secondly, if women were going to play a prominent role in the movement, something had to be done to free them from household work.

Thirdly, something had to be done about the women's complaints that their husbands beat them, drank too much and took away the money they earned through petty trade. It was clear, that the central idea of women's welfare revolved round the attainment of fundamental rights, dignity and respect for women. But male Communist Party of India (CPI) leaders wanted peasant women to be "good comrades" and put the struggle above personal concerns. CPI women argued unsuccessfully for a program that that would encourage peasant women to defy their husband.

Bimala Maji, a widow from the Midnapur district, became a successful organizer of women. She had worked with Manikuntala Sen during the famine to encourage destitute women to form self-help committees. These women's committees obtained paddy, on trust, from landlords, husked, sold it and keep the profits after repaying the landlords. During the Tebhaga campaign the Communist party sent Bimala Maji to nandigram to recruit women for the movement. At first women were reluctant to join but before long Bimala had mobilized women to demand Tebhaga and collect the harvest. Pursued by the police, Bimala went underground. As the police arrested Communist Party and 'Kishan Sabha' leaders, Bimala had to assume more and more responsibility. It was she who made the decision and led peasants to destroy the threshing floor of the jotedars (rich peasants) and sell the landlords share of the harvest. After an extensive search, the police captured her and keep her in a cage for a month until she was tried to 140 offences. She was detained in prison for two and a half years.⁴ Ila Mitra, a veteran communist leader, was popularly known as 'Nacholer Rani' played an active role in Tebhaga movement. She organized landless peasant and sandals women. It was her altruistic contribution to the Tebhaga movement. Sarala Devi was the famous leader of Narail. Broom batellion was formed under the leadership of Sarala Devi. Near about 250/300 poor women were associated with the organization.⁵

When the Dooars plantation area was going through a wave of labour agitation, a major peasant outburst took place in large parts of the Jalpaiguri district and also in adjoining areas of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Malda in North Bengal. With the call for Tebhaga, the district leadership of the CPI and 'Krishak Samiti' began active role for launching the movement. Krishna Binode Roy, the president of BPKS, came to the area in late November, 1946 had meetings with the DKS and union committees and addressed mass meeting in which the significance of the tebhaga call and its links with the solution of the food problem and also the broader struggle for freedom were explained.⁶ Area-wise allocation of work was made

³ http://www.indianetzone.com/7/women_tebhaga_movement.htm
24.9.11.

⁴ http://www.indianetzone.com/7/women_tebhaga_movement.htm
24.9.11.

⁵ *Tebhaga Sangram Rajat Jayanti Swarak Grantha*, p. 110.

⁶ See the report of a Panchagarh meeting addressed by K.B. Roy published in "Swadhinata", 28 November, 1946.

among the leaders and activist like Charu Mazumdar, Biren Pal, Madhab Datta, Biren Neogy, Dipen Roy, Dulal Basu, Nripen Roy, Manoranjan Das Gupta, Hara Ghose, Gurudas Roy and Samar Ganguly. Group meetings, mass meeting, demonstrations, hat squads, peasant marches through the country side and other such forms of both propaganda and mobilization became regular features. Volunteers were recruited, trained and assigned with specific responsibilities and slogan like 'adhi nai tebhaga chai', 'nij kholane dhan tolo', 'jan debo to dhan debo na', 'patit jami dakhol karo', 'Inquilab Zindabad' etc. broke the silence of the winter night (Dasgupta, 1992).⁷ 'Ek bhai', 'ek taka', 'ek lathi' became a major rallying slogan. It signified militant peasant solidarity.⁸

In this time, women participant played an active role in this movement. 'Women Self-defense organization' tried to organized women to participate in the movement. The movement shaped a very strong in the month of March. The Polices tried to fire to control the agitation. So many men and women peasant workers died in Thumnia, Thakurgau of Jalpaiguri. A huge number of peasant and workers of dooars participated in the peasant association in Domohoni on 3 March. The movement was spread in the 'Batabari', 'Pagla dewlia bari', 'Newra Majhiali' of Jalpaiguri. The first firing of the movement occurred at the field of Balgobind of 'Newra Majhiali'. The movement was organized under the leadership of Samar Ganguly, Patal Ghosh, Nani Bhowmick and tribal workers Lodhra Buro, Tunia, Funki Munda, Jagannath Oraon, Fagu Oroan, Orjun Oraon headed by. The most important fact is that the tribal women Peko Urain and others were actively participated in this movement.⁹

In the countryside of the dooars, basic production relation existed between jotedars and adhiars. Exploitation and oppression of the adhiars, overwhelmingly tribals – Oraons, Mundas, Santals, etc. – in large parts of the dooars, particularly the parts under mal and Metiali P.S., by the jotedars, mostly Muslims and Rajbansi Hindus but also some Marwaris and immigrant Bengalis knew no limits, and elements of peasant discontent had been accumulating in such areas for over a long time.

The first report on enforcement of tebhaga in Jalpaiguri district came in late November from a village under Panchagarh thana.¹⁰ Thereafter it began to spread to newer and newer areas. An attempt was made to enforce tebhaga on the land of Digen Roy, a big jotedar in Sundardighi Union under Debiganj P.S. on 20 December.

But the jotedar was forewarned. Madhab Datta, Vidya Barman, Chaitu and few other peasant cadres were assaulted by the jotedar's men and arrested by the

police. Local peasants were somewhat taken back by the incident. Next day a cadre meeting attended by Sachin Das Gupta and Biren Neogy, the DKS Secretary, was held. A peasant woman activist stood up and declared that 'there was no going back'. She asserted that 'the tebhaga has to be enforced on the land of this particular jotedar (Dasgupta, 1992)'.¹¹ This roused the morale of the peasant, particularly of the poor peasant and adhiars. Renewed preparations were made on 22 December more than 200 volunteers, both men and women, carrying lathis and red flags with them assembled, collectively harvested the paddy grown on that jotedar's land and carried it from the field not to the latter's kholan but to a place chosen by the peasants for the purpose of threshing. At this time there was no any resistance from the jotedar's side.¹² This was a great victory by the peasant agitations and the movement spread rapidly from one village to another village under Debiganj, Panchagarh, Boda and parts of Kotwali and Rajganj thanas of Jalpaiguri district. Charu Majumdar was one of the great leaders of this movement. Paddy was harvested collectively. After stacking it in the adhiar's place or a common place, the jotedar was asked to come there and receive his one-third share of the crop. The police was also informed. But neither the jotedars nor the police turned up. According to a report submitted by the Sadar Sub-Divisional Officer A.M.S. Mahmood in March 1947, the movement was organized by educated Communist workers of town and outside agitators. Without them there would be no movement in the sub division.¹³

Though the Statesman correspondent covering the movement reported, the peasants were 'moving with a momentum that does not need any aid from outside'. The SDO of Jalpaiguri himself stated that, during the harvest season Communist volunteers in batches visited different localities, established camp in the interior, enlisted local support and they helped the selected adhiars to cut and take away the entire produce from their lands and stack these in places suitable for the purpose of the Communists. One major indicator of the broad peasant awakening was the participation of Rajbansi peasant and adhiar women activist like Sagari Barmani, Purneswari (Buri Ma), wives of peasant cadres of Debiganj area and Tilak Tarini Nandi, Sikha Nandi and a host of militant peasant women activists of Pachagarh area (Dasgupta, 1992).¹⁴ They took part in meetings, processions, paddy harvesting and threshing and even resistance to the police. Once when police came to arrest Biren paul, the DKS Assistant Secretary and some other leaders staying at one place, Tilak Tarini stood on guard with a 'banti'

⁷ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 225.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chattopadhyay, Kunal, *Tebhaga Andoloner Itihas*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, p. 50.

¹⁰ "Swadinata", 29 November, 1946.

¹¹ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 225.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ WBSA Land Revenue Department. Land Revenue Branch. File No. 6M-38/47 B of December -/48 15-107 of which 105 para 4(b).

¹⁴ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 227.

(large fish-cutting curved knife) while the leaders slipped away. In Kharija Berubari under Kotwali thana and several other places militant peasant women chased away armed police with broomsticks, scythes and bantis in their hands.¹⁵

From late November to earlier February the peasants and adhiars in particular remained on the offensive. In the face of unity, sweep and organizational strength of the tebhaga movement many jotedars made a retreat and arrived at compromise. Some jotedars fled to the town. According to the SDO's report, 'the jotedars were on many occasions kept confined in their houses under threat of assault and violence.'¹⁶ For two months or so administrative control over these area was virtually non-existent and the provincial government expressed its serious worry over the 'parallel government' run by the Communists in Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Rangpur and some other parts of the province. The spread of the movement was such that in some localities even elements known as dacoits gave up dacoity and joined the movement. The jotedars sought police help. But for several weeks the police did not dare to enter the strongholds of the tebhaga movement. With the help of children, young Boys and girls and women an elaborate forewarning arrangement was organized.

The jotedars, however, were only binding their time and carried on the conspiracy to smash the movement. Many of the big jotedars in Pachagarh were Muslim and they tried to divide the peasantry along communal line and rouse communal passions. Though they failed to create any communal clash, they succeeded to a certain extent in keeping the Muslim peasants away from the movement. They held confabulations among themselves, raised funds and put increasing pressure on the district administrative officials and the Muslim League government in Bengal for police intervention. But soon an opportunity was provided by a new turn of the movement which, once begun, tended to generate its own momentum that was not anticipated by the leadership. In villages and areas where the Krishak Samity had no previous base or strong organization, the adhiars had stored the paddy in the 'jotedar's kholan' (threshing place). But the success of the movement in the organized areas and also the publication of the Bargadar Bill in January 1947 gave a new impetus to the tebhaga struggle. The adhiars in the organized areas such as parts Kharija Berubari Union under Sadar P.S. and certain areas under Debiganj, Pachagarh and Boda P.S. too, previously untouched by the movement, now on their own and without any directive from the hKishan Sabhah leadership, started what came to be known as the 'Kholan Bhanga andolon'.¹⁷

By late February the situation began to change and the police force was then strengthened. On 1 March, 1947 at Neoramajhilai near Baradighi under Mal P.S. a large number of peasants and tea garden workers carrying lathi, bows and arrows, spears etc. raided the paddy stocks stored in a jotedar's granary. An armed police force was already posted there. A scuffle took place and the peasants snatched away some guns from the police. Thereafter, the police opened fire and killed 5 peasants including one woman.¹⁸ The leadership was taken aback by this incident and displayed utter confusion. Samar Ganguly himself was present at a place very close to the spot where the firing took place. He went to mal which was a few miles away.¹⁹ On that day a huge meeting organized by the Rail Union was being held at Domohoni where many district leaders and also Jyoti Basu, the main speaker at the meeting, were present. Ganguly sent couriers to Domohani seeking advice and instruction from the District leadership. When several leaders along with a large number of rail Union activists and railway workers rushed of Mal and made arrangements for immediate relief and also for carrying the wounded and the dead to Jalpaiguri hospital and thus showed exemplary fraternity, the advice sent by the leadership was two-fold – throw away the snatched guns in wells and Ganguly was to evade arrest.²⁰ The peasant did not expect this brutal attack. But they were not demoralized. In fact, they were incensed and shouted for retaliation.

Another major incident of indiscriminate firing by a police party led by the Sadar SDO himself on a group of peasants and tea garden workers took place on 4th April, 1947 at village Mahabari situated near Mangalbari hat (chalsa area) under Matiali P.S.. Nine persons including one thirteen year old boy were killed and a few others were seriously injured. One of them died the next day. Among those killed and injured, – jitia Oraon and Natai Nagesia were workers of Odlabari tea garden and thus a new kind of workers-peasant alliance was forged in blood.

Name of the peasant and workers killed in police firing:

Police firing at Mathachukla (Neora Majhiali near Baradighi) under Mal P.S. on 1 March, 1947.

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Maharani Oraon | (Peasant woman) |
| 2. Sukhu Oraon | |
| 3. Bacchu Oraon | Two brothers |
| 4. Budhu Oraon | |
| 5. One Santal | Name not known |

Police firing at Mahabari (near Mangalbari Hat, Chalsa)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ WBSA Land Revenue Department. Land Revenue Branch. File No. 6M-38/47 B of December -/48 15-107 of which 105 para 4(e).

¹⁷ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 228.

¹⁸ "The statesman", 3 March, 1947; People's Age, 23 March 1947; Swadhinata, 7 March 1947; Nationalist, 3 March, 1947.

¹⁹ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 235.

²⁰ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 235.

under Matiali P.S. on 4 April 1947.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. One local peasant woman | Name not known |
| 2. Murla Oraon | |
| 3. Jitia Oraon | Worker, Oodlabari T.E. |
| 4. Lachu Oraon | |
| 5. Natai Oraon | Worker, Oodlabari T.E. |
| 6. Chama Oraon | Owner of 5 acres of land |
| 7. Pola Oraun | |
| 8. Era Patras(Turi) | |
| 9. Bhulu Oraun | |
| 10. Name not known ²¹ | |

Following this incident the police repression which had earlier been unleashed was intensified. By late February, 1947 Section 144 had been in force in as many as eleven police stations – Kotwali (Sadar), Pachagarh, Boda, Debiganj, Rajganj, Tetulia, Mainaguri, Patgram, Mal, Matiali and Nagrakata.²² By the end of April criminal cases were lodged against more than 1,000 persons, more than 200 leaders and peasant and workers including D.P. Ghosh, the Secretary of the 'Cha bagan Mazdur Union' were in jail and arrest warrants were issued against 250 leaders and activists.²³ Here it deserves mention that though the town middle class people were by and large apathetic to the tebhaga struggle and some even overly hostile to it, at least sections of them reacted against the brutality of police repression. It was also possible to organize a successful students' strike and hold a students' demonstration in Jalpaiguri town in protest against the police firing. Even Forward Blocist student leaders like Sm. Aruna Sanyal paid homage to the peasant and worker martyrs.²⁴ A Civil Liberties Committee was formed with Subodh Sen as a leading organizer.

Despite all these, the tebhaga movement in general and the peasant-worker upsurge amounting to a rebellion in the Oodlabari-Damdim-Chalsa area received a most serious set-back. Massive state repression was certainly a major factor. But explanation of the set-back in terms of repression and terror alone is not adequate. That the movement, even at its height, remained in a state of isolation from most of the rural areas in the district and from Rajbanshi Hindu and Muslim peasants in the Dooars as well as from the masses of urban population, was much more important. But no less important was the transformation in the political climate of the province in general and Jalpaiguri district in particular.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVEMENT

The movement reflected the development of the political

²¹ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 248

²² "The Statesman", 3 March 1947.

²³ "Swadhinata", 1 and 2 May 1947.

²⁴ Dasgupta, Ranajit (1992). *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1869 – 1947*, Oxford University Press, p. 236.

consciousness of the poor peasants and tribal sharecroppers and it may safely be opined that it marked a turning point in the history of agrarian movements in India. In some places the Tebhaga movement made such headway that the peasants declared their zone as tebhaga elaka or liberated area and 'tebhaga committees' were set up for the governance of the area locally. Under the tebhaga pressure many of the landholders withdrew their litigation filed against the tebhaga activists and came to terms with them. Such tebhaga areas were established in Jessore, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri. Extensive tebhaga areas were established later in Midnapur and 24-Parganas. All these developments led the government to initiate a bill in the Legislative Assembly in early 1947. The bill intended to reform the barga system in the country in the light of the latest agrarian unrest. But other political developments handicapped the government to get the 'Barga Bill' enacted into a law. The partition of Bengal and the promises of the new government led to the suspension of the movement. The Tebhaga struggle was successful in so far as it has been estimated that about 40% of the sharecropping peasants got Tebhaga right granted willingly by the landholders.²⁵ The struggle also led to the abolition or reduction of unjust and illegal exaction in the name of 'abwabs'. But the movement had limited success in East Bengal districts. There was another spate of tebhaga movement in these districts in 1948-50. The government attributed the movement to the Indian agents, an allegation, which the general people tended to believe and thus refrained themselves from participating in the movement. But the movement had definitely influenced the passage of the EAST bengal state acquisition and tenancy act of 1950. Though the struggle did not achieve immediate success so long as success is measured by the actual implementation of tebhaga of the gross produce as rent but what looks like a failure in the eyes of one spectator may well take on appearance of the redeeming sacrifice of pioneers who laid the foundation for a better tomorrow.

Conclusion

The history of the Tebhaga movement is especially important for a history of women in the district. The Communist cadres and 'Kishan Sabha' were content to have women play a secondary role in the movement. They helped harvest the paddy, carried it to the threshing floor, and sounded the alarm when enemies approached. As the movement became more militant and police repression more violent, the leaders of the movement lagged behind their followers. This was when peasant women stepped forward to play a significant role and formed the 'naribahini'. Thus there was a strong connection between the increasingly spontaneous

²⁵ http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/T_0103.HTM 22.9.11.



Figure 1. New light is entering through the opening door.

character of the uprising and the more and more prominent role played by women.

The participation of women in Tebhaga movement in all regions of Bengal was the glorious achievements in the history of women empowerment. Not only that, they also tried to fight against Patriarchy society for establish equality in society. A G.B, meeting of party members, was held at the party office of Atwari of West Thakur gaun in 1944. When the District Secretary delivering his speech at this meeting, a woman (who was wife of a L.C. member) stood-up and asked him –“Comrade! Gharer loktake marar rine (Ine) achhe ki partyte? Hamar gharer Comrade ta hamak maribe kyan? Bichar chai”. (Comrade! there was any law in party to beat the house wife? Why my husband flog me? Want to justice). As a result, an ordinance was issued in Party law and declares that ‘it will be prohibiting to beating the wife’.²⁶ Local Women Self-Defense Organization demanded the equal education facilities for their children’s and ‘teaching of fried-rice making’ for self-reliant (Chattopadhyay, 2006).²⁷

Women bear almost all responsibility for meeting basic

needs of the family, yet are systematically denied the resources, information and freedom of action they need to fulfill this responsibility. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers. In modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition, etc. The current President of India and Prime Minister of Paschimbangas is women.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence , necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status.

Now the time is change. Every-one can take the education. Higher education is open for all. But poverty and social superstition are the most obstacles for women to take higher education. So there is need for helping hand from the Government, Social reformers and kind men. But the attitude, aims and Self-determination is the most important factor to taking the higher education for increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. R. N. Tagore says that –

Stand the out-side from the own self. Could get response in heart from the world humanity.

So it is necessary to opening door of mind for entering the new knowledge. The following picture shows that the new light is entering house through the opening door to make lighting the gloomy house (Figure 1). There is an imperative need for education among women. The day will come when men would recognize woman. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect ‘comradeship’, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race.

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