



ISSN: 2582-8169

“Women Empowerment of Adivasi and Rajbansi’s in Tebhaga Movement of North Bengal”

¹ Merina Rahaman ² Dr. Palas Kumar Saha

¹Research Scholar ²Assistant Professor

Department of History

Ram Krishna Dharmarth Foundation (RKDF) University, Ranchi

Received: 28st January, 2023;

Revised: 17th February, 2023

Accepted: 14th May 2023

Abstract: This conference presentation investigates the involvement and function of Rajbansi and Adivasi women in North Bengal's Tebhaga activities. Peasants in Bengal fought for equitable crop distribution and land rights during the Tebhaga movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Given that they made up a sizable portion of the agricultural labour force, women's involvement in this movement was essential. The difficulties experienced by Adivasi and Rajbansi women in the movement are examined in this essay, including sexism, class discrimination, and a lack of resources and access to education. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, women's involvement in the Tebhaga movement had a big impact on the fight for social justice and land rights. The Tebhaga movements' contribution to the socioeconomic advancement of Adivasi and Rajbansi women is also covered in this essay. Overall, the study makes the case that Adivasi and Rajbansi women's involvement in the Tebhaga movements had a significant impact on how the peasant fight in North Bengal was shaped, as well as how women's empowerment in the area.

Keywords: Rajbansi. Adivasi, north Bengal, tebhaga movement, women

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Tebhaga Movements in North Bengal

Bengal had a strong peasant movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s called the Tebhaga movement. Sharecroppers or Bargadars, who were generally impoverished farmers

*Corresponding Author: **Merina Rahaman**

Email: merinarahaman085@gmail.com

and renters with little to no land ownership, were the movement's main leaders. Literally translated as "three parts" or "one-third share," the word "Tebhaga" refers to the demand made by the sharecroppers for an equitable division of agricultural products. Sharecroppers had very little to support themselves and their families before the Tebhaga movement since they had to provide the landlords half or two-thirds of

the agricultural products they produced (Adhikary, 2022).

In 1946, the Nadia region of Bengal saw the beginning of the Tebhaga movement, which swiftly extended to other areas of Bengal, including North Bengal. The movement was especially important in North Bengal since there were many Rajbansi and Adivasi populations there, who were heavily involved in agriculture and often employed as sharecroppers. The movement in North Bengal was distinguished by the involvement of Adivasi and Rajbansi women, who were instrumental in the fight for land rights and equitable crop distribution.

The Tebhaga movement arose in opposition to the repressive methods used by the landowners, who controlled the agricultural industry and took advantage of the sharecroppers for their own gain. The "one-third" formula, which would guarantee that the sharecroppers got a fair share of the agricultural output, was sought by the movement. The zamindari system, a sort of feudal land ownership that was common in Bengal, was to be abolished as part of the campaign (Shyamal, 2014).

In Bengal's history of peasant conflicts, the Tebhaga movement marked a turning point towards organised peasant movements and the mobilisation of disadvantaged groups. The movement also witnessed the birth of a

number of leftist political groups and organisations that backed the sharecroppers' demands and were instrumental in organising and mobilising the masses of peasants (Sengupta & Maitra, 2021).

The role of Adivasi and Rajbansi women in the Tebhaga movements of North Bengal, their difficulties, and the effects of their involvement in the fight for social justice and land rights will all be discussed in the parts that follow.

Adivasi Women's Participation in Tebhaga Movements

In North Bengal's Tebhaga movements, Adivasi women were very important. The Santhals, Oraons, and Mundas, among other Adivasi populations in North Bengal, were heavily involved in agriculture and often employed as sharecroppers. They thus suffered firsthand from the landowners' repressive methods and had a stake in the Tebhaga movement's success. Given that they made up a sizable portion of the agricultural labour force, Adivasi women's involvement in the movement was essential (Lahiri, 2021).

Women actively engaged in the Tebhaga movement and played a vital role in mobilising and organising the peasant masses despite the patriarchal social

structures that were predominant in Adivasi villages. Adivasi women took part in a variety of protest activities, including marches, sit-ins, and rallies, and they often led the movement. Additionally, they were instrumental in the creation of a number of peasant organisations that supported sharecroppers' demands and fought for their rights, including the Kisan Sabha and the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha.

Adivasi women's involvement in the Tebhaga movement was a challenge to the patriarchal institutions and prevailing gender norms in their communities. Adivasi women have a forum via the movement to proclaim their rights and call for social and economic justice. It also gave women the chance to assume leadership positions within the movement and helped women improve their leadership abilities (S Bandyopadhyay, n.d.). Adivasi women, however, encountered a number of obstacles while trying to join the movement. Lack of access to resources and knowledge was one of the major issues. Adivasi women often did not have easy access to formal education, which made it difficult for them to fully engage in the movement. They had financial difficulties as well, and their roles as housewives and carers often prevented them from joining the movement.

Despite these difficulties, Adivasi women's involvement in the Tebhaga movement had a significant impact on the fight for social justice and land rights. By challenging prevailing gender norms and patriarchal systems, Adivasi women's involvement prepared the stage for the rise of women's leadership in the peasant movement. In addition to giving Adivasi women a voice to demand social and economic justice and express their rights, the movement also aided in their empowerment (West, 2023).

In conclusion, Adivasi women's involvement in North Bengal's Tebhaga activities was a critical component of the peasant fight for social justice and land rights. Adivasi women played a vital part in the movement and helped women take on leadership roles in the peasant movement despite encountering several obstacles. The movement gave Adivasi women a voice to seek social and economic justice and to claim their rights, empowering them and upending patriarchal systems in their communities.

Role of Rajbansi Women in Tebhaga Movements

The Tebhaga movements of North Bengal were significantly influenced by the participation of Rajbansi women. The Rajbansi community, alternatively referred to as the Rajbangshi or Kamtapuri

community, primarily inhabited the northern districts of Bengal and were primarily involved in agricultural pursuits. The individuals who worked as sharecroppers were subject to the exploitative practises of the landlords, and thus had a vested interest in the success of the Tebhaga movement.

The Tebhaga movement witnessed the active involvement of Rajbansi women who played a significant role in its mobilisation and organisation. Women played a significant role in diverse forms of protest, such as demonstrations, rallies, and strikes, in conjunction with their male counterparts. Rajbansi females exhibited significant involvement in the movement, assuming leadership positions in addition to their substantial participation. Their proactive engagement contested the conventionally assigned gender norms and exhibited their resolute commitment to advocate for their entitlements (West, 2023).

The involvement of women from the Rajbansi community in the Tebhaga movement held noteworthy importance in contesting the patriarchal conventions that were deeply ingrained in their society. Within the Rajbansi community, women frequently encountered socio-cultural limitations that restricted them to domestic duties. Nevertheless, the aforementioned movement presented them with a chance to

surpass these constraints and actively participate in political and social endeavours. The participation of Rajbansi women not only facilitated the triumph of the movement but also instigated a transformation in gender relations within their society.

The Tebhaga movement facilitated the empowerment of Rajbansi women to articulate their dissent against the exploitative measures of landlords and advocate for their equitable entitlement to agricultural yields. The act of empowerment enabled the sharecroppers to confront the social and economic disparities that they encountered, thereby drawing attention to their predicament. Through their active involvement in the movement, women belonging to the Rajbansi community exhibited their agency and resolute commitment towards enhancing their socio-economic circumstances (S Bandyopadhyay, n.d.).

Furthermore, the Tebhaga movement served as a platform for Rajbansi women to establish and enhance their own associations and connections. The aforementioned organisations played a pivotal role in galvanising the female populace, disseminating knowledge pertaining to their entitlements, and furnishing a network of assistance within the movement. The establishment of groups led by women facilitated the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and strategies, thereby

augmenting the efficacy of their collaborative endeavours.

It is crucial to recognise that women belonging to the Rajbansi community encountered obstacles in their involvement in the Tebhaga movement. The individuals in question were compelled to address societal biases and contend with opposition emanating from their own social group. The successful resolution of these challenges necessitated a significant amount of fortitude and perseverance (Dutta et al., 2022).

Challenges Faced by Adivasi and Rajbansi Women in Tebhaga Movements

The Tebhaga movements that took place in North Bengal were characterised by noteworthy involvement from women of Adivasi and Rajbansi communities. Nevertheless, their involvement was not devoid of difficulties. The participation and contributions of Adivasi and Rajbansi women were impeded by various hurdles within the movement. These difficulties were both internal and external, and overcoming them often needed tremendous resiliency and tenacity (Fluri & Lehr, 2019). This section will delve into a detailed examination of the challenges encountered by Adivasi and Rajbansi women during the Tebhaga movements.

External Challenges:

Norms of patriarchy: In both Adivasi and Rajbansi civilizations, patriarchy was highly entrenched, and women were often relegated to responsibilities in the home. Due to the prevalence of this cultural norm, it was difficult for women to break free of their conventional roles and take an active part in the political and social life of their communities.

Lack of education: The inability of Adivasi and Rajbansi women to participate in organised activities was made more difficult by the dearth of educational opportunities available to them. Because of this, they were prevented from taking part in decision-making processes and from assuming leadership responsibilities (Mukherjee, 2016).

Socio-economic challenges: Frequently, women from these communities were confronted with socio-economic challenges, including destitution, a scarcity of resources, and inadequate healthcare facilities. Their movement was restricted, and it was difficult for them to attend meetings, rallies, and protests. These limits made it difficult for them to participate.

Hostile atmosphere: Landlords and the people who supported them often contributed to the creation of a hostile environment for those who took part in Tebhaga movements. Because of this, the

safety and security of Adivasi and Rajbansi women was put in jeopardy, and they ran the possibility of being subjected to physical abuse and harassment (Roy, 2017).

Internal Challenges:

Resistance from within the community:

Women of the Adivasi and Rajbansi groups were met with opposition from members of their own communities. This was a source of contention for them. Some members of the community believed that it was inappropriate for women to participate in political and social activities, and as a result, they tried to discourage women from doing so.

Lack of support from family members:

Women also experienced opposition and a lack of support from their family members, which was another obstacle they had to overcome. It was difficult for many women to engage in the movements because they were expected to discharge domestic tasks and take care of their families. This included taking care of their homes and their children (Pal et al., 2016).

Lack of recognition: In spite of the fact that they made important contributions, Adivasi and Rajbansi women sometimes did not get acknowledgment or credit for their labour. Their efforts were often eclipsed by the leadership, which was controlled by males, which resulted in a lack of representation and visibility for women inside the movements.

Gender-based violence: During the movements, Adivasi and Rajbansi women were frequently the targets of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault. This type of violence was prevalent throughout the movements. It was difficult for women to seek remedy since there were not sufficient protection measures and support structures (Zhang & Li, 2015).

Impact of Adivasi and Rajbansi women in Tebhaga movement

The involvement of women from the Adivasi and Rajbansi communities in the Tebhaga movements in North Bengal had a noteworthy influence on the endeavour for equitable land rights and social justice. Their active participation resulted in favourable transformations and had an enduring influence on diverse facets of the community. The present discourse highlights the significant contributions made by Adivasi and Rajbansi women in the Tebhaga movements.

Challenging Gender Norms: The Adivasi and Rajbansi women have challenged the conventional gender roles and norms that are commonly observed in their respective communities. By actively engaging in social and political movements, they exhibited their agency and capacity to participate in such activities. This phenomenon posed a challenge to the conventional notion that

women ought to be restricted to domestic duties, thereby opening up avenues for enhanced gender parity and empowerment within their respective societies (Judge & Pandey, 2004).

Women's Empowerment: The Tebhaga movements facilitated a forum for Adivasi and Rajbansi women to exercise their agency and advocate for their entitlements, including equitable treatment and financial parity. Women experienced a heightened sense of empowerment and self-confidence as a result of their active involvement. The individuals in question obtained leadership competencies, established their own networks and entities, and played an active role in the decision-making procedures. The process of empowerment had a profound impact on the lives of the women involved, facilitating their ability to confront disparities and assert their individual entitlements (Amal Kumar Patra, 2010).

Redefining Community Dynamics: The Tebhaga movements witnessed a transformation in community dynamics as a result of the active involvement of Adivasi and Rajbansi women. Their participation contested the conventional belief that political and social movements should exclusively involve men. The alteration in gender dynamics resulted in an increased level of inclusiveness and wider involvement in decision-making procedures among their respective communities.

Increased Awareness and Solidarity: The involvement of Adivasi and Rajbansi women resulted in heightened consciousness regarding the challenges encountered by sharecroppers and their associated predicaments, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity. The community's mobilisation and unity were facilitated by their participation in rallies, demonstrations, and strikes. The social movements facilitated a feeling of unity among diverse segments of the population and bolstered the joint expression of underrepresented factions.

Influence on Policy and Land Reforms: The Tebhaga movements exerted a notable impact on policy and land reforms, contributing to the shaping of such policies. The implementation of the "one-third" formula, which guarantees an equitable distribution of agricultural produce for sharecroppers, was a result of the demands made by Adivasi and Rajbansi women, among other participants. The implementation of policy modifications had a discernible effect on the socio-economic circumstances of Adivasi and Rajbansi populations, ameliorating their resource accessibility and mitigating their vulnerability to landlord exploitation.

Legacy of Activism: The enduring impact of activism is evident in the participation of Adivasi and Rajbansi women in the Tebhaga movements, which has left a lasting legacy

within their respective communities. The contributions made by the individuals in question have acted as a source of inspiration for subsequent generations, motivating them to persist in their efforts towards activism and advocacy for the cause of social justice. The social movements facilitated the cultivation of a shared sense of agency and the conviction that effecting change is feasible through collaborative endeavours (Patra, 2011).

Ultimately, the involvement of Adivasi and Rajbansi women in the Tebhaga movements yielded significant effects on diverse facets of the community. Their participation challenged traditional gender roles, empowered women, reconfigured community dynamics, heightened consciousness, impacted policy reforms, and established a sustained heritage of advocacy. The enduring impact of Adivasi and Rajbansi women's involvement in social movements serves as a testament to the fortitude and perseverance of historically marginalised communities in their pursuit of equitable treatment and fairness.

Women's Empowerment Through Tebhaga Movements

The North Bengal Tebhaga movements were a pivotal point in Indian history because they opposed the oppressive feudal system and

cleared the stage for land reform measures. The empowerment of women, especially Adivasi and Rajbansi women, who were instrumental in the fight for social and economic justice, was one of the movements' most prominent results. The following are a few ways that the Tebhaga movements empowered women:

Breaking Social Barriers: The Tebhaga movements questioned societally accepted gender roles and conventions. Women actively took part in protests, marches, and strikes, emancipating themselves from the constraints of their household responsibilities. By participating in political and social issues, women disproved the stereotype that they were only capable of taking care of the home.

Gaining Leadership Experience: The movements gave women the chance to get leadership experience and play active parts in decision-making. Adivasi and Rajbansi women rose to prominence as leaders, coordinating activities, organising demonstrations, and inspiring their communities. They were able to grow in self-assurance, improve their capacity for coordination and communication, and influence the movements' course as a result (Mitra et al., 2018).

Collective Solidarity: The Tebhaga movements helped women feel a feeling of unity and take collective action. Adivasi and

Rajbansi women found strength in their common hardships and experiences by banding together with other women and marginalised communities. Women were able to confront repressive systems and jointly demand their rights because to the movements' cohesion and solidarity.

Land rights advocacy: The Tebhaga movements' main demands were equal distribution of agricultural output and land rights for sharecroppers. Women were instrumental in expressing their economic independence and confronting landlords' abusive behaviours by aggressively promoting these rights. The movements gave women a forum to express their grievances and fight for a fair part of the harvest, which had a significant influence on their socioeconomic status.

Resource Access: The Tebhaga movements helped increase women's access to resources. The efforts and demands of women resulted in modifications to land reform legislation, such as the introduction of the "one-third" formula that provided a more equitable division of agricultural output. This resource transfer improved the economic well-being and decreased the reliance on landlords of women sharecroppers.

Future Generations' Empowerment:

By giving women a feeling of agency and empowerment, the Tebhaga movements had a lasting influence on subsequent generations. Younger generations were

inspired by the involvement of the women from the Adivasi and Rajbansi communities, which motivated them to keep fighting for their rights and addressing social injustices. Women were inspired by the movements to actively participate in socio-political areas and work towards equality, leaving a legacy of empowerment.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the involvement of Rajbansi and Adivasi women in the Tebhaga movements in North Bengal was a significant turning point in India's history of women's emancipation. The movements questioned conventional gender roles, offered chances for leadership growth and group action, and promoted land rights and equitable resource allocation. The movements had broad repercussions, and the strength that women gained as a result of them continues to motivate efforts to advance social justice and gender equality. It is crucial to continue creating places for women to engage in and lead sociopolitical activities in the future and to build on the legacy of the Tebhaga movements. This calls for ongoing efforts to combat patriarchal systems and develop a more just and inclusive society where women may flourish and help shape the future.

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