



Manbhum: Linguistic Exploitation and Deprivation

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ABSTRACT

The very first movement for the mother language in India was the 'language movement of Manbhum'. This movement came into force to protect the mother tongue. Although the movement started in 1912, it was quite slow due to the independence movement. After Orissa was separated from Bihar in 1936, Bihar realized that Manbhum could not be kept in Bihar for much longer. After independence, a strong effort was made to force Hindi language in primary schools in Manbhum. In response, the entire Manbhum became vocal in demanding the formation of a language-based state. Meanwhile, almost 250 new Hindi primary schools sprang up overnight, and work in the courts also started in Hindi. After that, the language movement gained momentum. The period of this movement was marked from 1948 to 1956. The language movement was led by the Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS). This movement spread among all types of people in different parts of the district. 'Tusu Satyagraha' was an important chapter of the language movement of Manbhum. Folk songs like Tusu were skillfully made into political movement. The last stage of this movement was the 'Banga Satyagraha' campaign. From April 20 to May 6, 1956, 1,050 workers, including 10 women, led by Atul Ghosh, marched from Parbirra of Pancha police station to Kolkata and defied the law in Kolkata. As a result, the protesters were imprisoned on May 7. They were released 13 days later. All the protesters were congratulated in a huge public meeting at Deshpriyo Park in Kolkata. They returned to



Purulia by the 20th May Special train. The main feature of this campaign was that the protesters crossed the road singing and playing music in a completely non-violent manner. Moreover, this movement was an all-party conference. Everyone, regardless of party or difference of opinion, joined this movement. After a long debate on 17th August, the 'West Bengal and Bihar Boundary Bill' was passed into law in the Indian Lok Sabha and the decision came into effect on 1st November 1956. As a result, a separate district named 'Purulia' was created on 1st November 1956.

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The Rise of Language Movement at Manbhum:

India's independence on August 15, 1947, after a prolonged period of British rule, was a historic event. At that time, Bengali-speaking Purulia was in the Manbhum district of the Bihar government. As a result, despite the Bengali-speaking majority in the entire Purulia region, the people have been subjected to various forms of oppression by the Bihar government's administrative machinery due to the strong invasion of Hindi culture. As a Gandhian political party, Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS) in Purulia district of south-western district of West Bengal in India had performed a significant role in the process of merger the Bengali-speaking district of Manbhum (with Purulia as its headquarter) from the state of Bihar to newborn state of West Bengal, which came into being after the Partition of Bengal in 1947. It is worth noting that since 1935, the Hindi-speaking leaders of Bihar, through deceit and positional tactics, had been actively trying to reduce the influence of the Bengali language in Purulia, where the Bengali-speaking majority resided. The first step in the Hindi-speaking aggression was the formation of the communally minded 'Manbhum-Bihari Samiti' in 1935 under the presidency of the nationally renowned personality Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The terror of cultural aggression becomes more intense in the language problem. Yet for every person, the innermost true land, like the homeland, is their beloved 'mother language'. That is, the mother tongue is the reflection of the homeland, so it is inalienable. To resist the strategic approach of Hindi language aggression under the leadership of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Manbhum Bengali Samiti was formed under the chairmanship of Purulia's Barrister P. R. Das under the name 'Save Bengali Language'¹. Gradually, the Bihar government's Hindi language aggression took on a terrifying form. A government notification in 1948 announced that no signboards in Bengali script



would be allowed in any educational institution in Manbhum district. They would have to be written in Devanagiri script, i.e. Hindi. Along with this, a notification was issued by the district school inspector that Bengali language would not be used in government-aided schools. Hindi language would be made mandatory. Even in the break time advertisements in cinema halls in Manbhum, it was announced that, Hindi is the mother language of Manbhum². On 28 February 1954, Suchita Kripalini, N. C. Chatterjee and five members of the Lok Sabha requested Prime Minister Nehru to intervene in the matter in protest against the Bihar government's violent suppression of the non-violent and humanitarian language movement that had started in Manbhum, Seraikella and Kharswan demanding the formation of a language-based state³. 'Manbhum Gandhi'; Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta and his competent associate Atul Chandra Ghosh, known as 'Manbhum Keshari', were elected president and secretary respectively of the Manbhum District Congress Committee in 1921. After the demise of Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta in 1935, Atul Chandra Ghosh became the President of the Manbhum District Congress Committee and Bibhutibhushan Dasgupta was elected as the Secretary of the Manbhum District Congress Committee. The Bihar government had started a strong Hindi imperialist movement in the district since independence. Atul Chandra Ghosh tried to remedy this and failed to get the support of the Central Congress. As a result, the Congress broke away and a new political party called 'Lok Sevak Sangh'(LSS) was born under his leadership in Pakbirra village of Pancha police station in Manbhum district⁴. After that, a stronger and continuous struggle against Hindi imperialism started in Manbhum. Along with this, the repression of the Bihar government also continued in full swing.

Tusu Satyagraha:

The names of prominent figures in the language movement of Manbhum district, including Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta, Atul Chandra Ghosh and his wife Labanyaprabha Ghosh, and their capable eldest son Arun Chandra Ghosh, are still remembered with respect today. The Ghosh family and Bibhutibhushan Dasgupta led the mass movement for the accession of Purulia to Bengal. At the same time, their numerous volunteer forces were active in the villages of Manbhum to strengthen the Satyagraha movement through Tusu songs. MPs Bhajahari Mahato, Jagabandhu Bhattacharya, Madhusudan Mahato, Arun Chandra Ghosh aroused public consciousness in Manbhum by through Tusu songs. The popular folk poet Jagabandhu Bhattacharya expressed his intense anger, resentment and pain towards the cunning aggression of the Hindi-speaking Congressmen in suppressing the Bengali language in the song Tusu. Kanan Bihari Thakur was a true Gandhian by heart. He also strongly protested against the despicable political intentions of the Hindi-speaking Congress. The song Tusu written by him was



personally supported by many liberal Gandhian Hindi-speaking people, in addition to Bengali speakers. The song *Tusu*, written by the ideal Gandhian Arun Chandra Ghosh, was widely circulated during the Bengal annexation of Purulia. During the period of Purulia's accession to Bengal, the folk song 'Tusu' went from being a popular song sincerely loved by the countless Bengali-speaking people of the then Manbhum district of Bihar to becoming a powerful tool of the language movement as a political song. Frederick Engels, or any progressive sociologist in the world, valued this type of folk song or mass song; as a powerful weapon in the struggle against reactionary forces. The Hindi-speaking Congress in the state of Bihar in independent India was quite active as a reactionary force. The erstwhile Revenue Minister of Bihar, K.B. Sahay, had clearly declared that the Satyagrahis had politically carried out *Tusu Satyagraha* in 1954. In order to severely suppress the movement of *Tusu Satyagrahis*, the Bihar government arrested 17 *Tusu Satyagrahis* from the *Tusu* singing group under the 'Security Act' of the Bihar government in February-March 1954. It is worth mentioning that among them were LSS leader Atul Chandra Ghosh, MP Bhajahari Mahato, Labanyaprabha Ghosh, Arun Ghosh, and journalist Ashok Chowdhury⁵.

Persecution of *Tusu Satyagrahis*:

According to the March 1954 issue of the LSS's mouthpiece '*Mukti*', edited by Bibhutibhusan Dasgupta, 23 *Satyagrahis* from five other groups of *Satyagrahis* were sentenced to imprisonment. Lavanyaprabha Ghosh and Hemchandra Mahato were fined one and two-and-a-half shillings respectively. Based on the Bihar Congress government's policy of repression, the court sentenced MP Bhajahari Mahato to another year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1,000 on newly fabricated charges, and popular Purulia MLA Samarendra Ojha to one year's imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1,000. District journalist Ashok Chowdhury was sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000 and to undergo another three months of rigorous imprisonment in default. Atul chandra Ghosh's son Arun chandra Ghosh and four other *Tusu Satyagrahis* were sentenced to 14 months of rigorous imprisonment. Fourteen-year-old Sudhanya Mahato of Madhupur village under Bandowan police station in Purulia was sentenced to nine months of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000 for her involvement in *Tusu Satyagrahis*. Along with this, the entire family in his village was intimidated. In order to create terror among the villagers of Purulia, on March 2, 1954, an armed police force formed under the leadership of a Sub-Deputy Magistrate vandalized the houses of the *Satyagrahis* in Pitidari village of Manbazar police station and showed extreme indecency towards women⁶. In order to further increase the level of terror in the minds of the *Tusu Satyagrahis*, the Bihar government released Atul



Chandra Ghosh, who was sentenced to 9 months in prison, from Hazaribagh jail after serving only one and a half months. On the other hand, his wife Lavanya Prabha and Bhabini Mahato were sent from Purulia jail to Hazaribagh Central jail. The jail authorities physically tortured 100 Tusu Satyagrahis including MLA Samarendra Ojha, Shrish Chandra Banerjee and others in various ways. They were even sent from Purulia jail to the distant Hazaribagh jail.

The Tusu Satyagrahis were subjected to various forms of police repression. Along with this, the Congress government of Bihar played a strategic role in arranging various temptations by providing a grant of 30 lakh rupees in the name of promoting the Hindi language to make the Bengali speaking people particularly interested in Hindi. On March 29, 1954, eminent N. C. Chatterjee raised the demand for a balanced approach to education in the Lok Sabha. In the Lok Sabha, he demanded that the government should withdraw its policy of repression against the Tusu Satyagrahi in Purulia. At that time, at a special event at the Ashutosh Memorial Hall in Kolkata, Linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee clearly stated that the priority of the mother language in the national education system is absolutely essential in all fields. Enthusiasm only in Hindi is harmful to the heritage and unity of entire nation⁷. During that turbulent time in Manbhum, several organizations including the Purulia Bar Association, Manbhum District Bengali Samiti, etc. jointly submitted a memorandum to the State Reorganization Commission.

State Reorganisation Commission (SRC):

The memorandum provided detailed information about how the people of Manbhum and Dhalbhum were incorporated into the new province against their will during the formation of Bihar and Orissa provinces from the time of Mughal Emperor Akbar until 1912. The memorandum also stated that Manbhum and Dhalbhum have cultural similarities and the Bengali language has formed these two regions in one. Consequently, in the interest of language culture; Manbhum, Dhalbhum subdivision of Singhbhum district should be incorporated into West Bengal. When Nibaran's son Bibhutibhushan Dasgupta was the editor of the LSS's mouthpiece '*Mukti*', he published the infamy of the Congress government in Bihar in the December 13, 1954 issue of the newspaper in large letters. The misdeeds of the SRC, Bihar government and Congress, such as: taking signatures by misleading people on the form titled 'We will stay in Bihar', the drive for fake signatures, police coercion to propagate in favor of Hindi imperialism, excessive arbitrariness of the inspectors and police officers, the arbitrariness and tyranny of the people and the rule of anarchy were going on.



MP Chaitan Majhi gave a valuable speech in the Lok Sabha in Delhi on December 20, 1955, on the decisions of the State Reorganization Commission (SRC). Chaitan Majhi won the tribal seat from the constituencies of South Manbhum and Dalbhum by a huge margin as the LSS representative. Numerous well-educated and literate people of the entire Bengali-speaking region of the then Manbhum region became agitated in the Tusu Satyagraha movement regarding the accession of Purulia to Bengal. Therefore, the Bihar government sentenced many Satyagrahis from 6 months to one year under the 'Bihar Maintenance of Public Order' Act⁸. Blind boys were sentenced, and even women were not acquitted in fabricated cases. Along with this, all the prisoners had to endure inhuman torture. In the meantime, with great anger, the Bihar government, in favor of Hindi language, had used goons to loot public property and physically torture Bengali-speaking people in areas like Jhalda, Chandil, etc. On January 18, 1956, Atul Ghosh informed the Indian Prime Minister Nehru about the miserable situation of that anarchy in his message. A bandh was observed on January 21, 1956, in protest against the chauvinism sponsored by the Congress government of Bihar. Along with this, many socially conscious families also observed 'Arandhan Divas'. That evening, public leader Atul Chandra Ghosh led a huge public meeting at the Rasmela Maidan in Purulia Town. Purulia, which loved the Bengali language, became increasingly rebellious. At that time, West Bengal Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, after discussing with Bihar Chief Minister Krishna Singh, issued a joint statement on January 23, 1956. They said that a new province called 'Purba Pradesh' would be formed by merging West Bengal and Bihar. Needless to say, the intellectual leaders of the entire Bengal were outraged by that stubborn decision. A historic conference was held throughout Bengal at the Senate Hall in Kolkata.

Banga Satyagraha and Birth of a New District:

With an innovative and striking-struggling spirit; Purulia's historic march for Bengal accession or the 'Banga Satyagraha' began from Pakabira village in Pancha police station of Purulia. On the 20th of April in the scorching summer of 1956, 1050 people started the Kolkata campaign from Purulia⁹; it was led by Labanyaprabha and her husband Atul Ghosh. A large number of people participated in the march along with MPs Bhajahari Mahato and Chaitan Majhi, Bibhutibhushan Dasgupta, Arun Chandra Ghosh. The marchers marched towards Kolkata singing popular Tusu songs accompanied by the instruments viz. madal, khol, kartal and so on. As planned, the marchers reached Kolkata on Sunday afternoon, May 6, 1956, and held a public meeting at the Kolkata Maidan. On May 7, 1956, the Satyagrahi marchers were arrested for violating Section 144. After the arrest, the satyagrahis were first lodged in the Calcutta Presidency Jail and later in the Alipore Central Jail. Embarrassed by the various repercussions of the



continuous protests of the Purulia Language Movement, the then Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy rushed to the highest echelons of Delhi on May 3, 1956, for special consultation. Then, returning to Calcutta, he rejected the proposal of 'Bangla Bihar annexation' in the cabinet. Then, on August 16, 1956, the 'Land Transfer Bill' was passed with the consent of the Lok Sabha. It was decided that sixteen police stations of Purulia Sadar and some parts of Purnia would be included in West Bengal from November 1, 1956. On the recommendation of the State Reorganization Commission, Manbhum district of Bihar was divided into three parts¹⁰. The northern part was occupied by the agricultural and sandalwood industries, while the Hindi belt of Dhanbad was left in Bihar despite being Bengali speaking. A new district, Dhanbad, was formed. The mineral regions of Jharia and Katras were added to Dhanbad. The southwestern part of Dhanbhum was added to the new subdivision of Seraikella in Singhbhum district. The areas of Torang, Patkum, Chandil, and Patmada were added to it. Out of the 21 thanas of Manbhum district in Bihar, 16 thanas were mainly barren, rough, arid areas. Consequently, the district Purulia was formed from them. Therefore, since the time of the accession of Purulia to West Bengal, this district has been plagued by drought.

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