



The Role of Surjapuri People and their Songs in Tebhaga Movement of Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur District: During the Pre-independence Period of India

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ABSTRACT

The Tebhaga Movement was one of the peasant movement of undivided Bengal. The life of the common peasants were disturbed by the oppression and exploitation of the British Servants, Zamindars, Jotdars and Pattanidars for a long time. Peasants were deprived of their fair rights. To get rid of this tyranny and exploitation, the peasants organised and started a mass movement. This movement also took a large form in Islampur subdivision of the present Uttar Dinajpur district. Bataidar movement was going on in this subdivision long before the Tebhaga Movement. The present paper aims to highlight the role of Surjapuri people and their songs during Tebhaga movement. The association of the term 'Surjapuri' with them highlights both its positional significance and linguistic features. In modern times, the Islampur Subdivision still reflects its past as a border area of Bengal. Many Surjapuri men and women of Islampur Subdivision participated extensively in this Tebhaga movement. Although the communist Party had a great contribution in the Tebhaga Movement organised in Bengal, the contribution of the Indian National Congress party was not less in the Tebhaga Movement of Islampur Subdivision. Later many Surjapuri people joined the Communist party.

**Introduction:**

The term Surjapuri has come from Surjapur pargana. Choosing the right name for a place is important because it becomes the destination for so many people. In many cultures, places are termed after significant mythological events, showcasing the importance of those stories within that society. Identifying the source of the Surjapur name is not a straightforward task. At another time, a different kind from the Surya dynasty ruled in this Surjapur pargana. It may also be that the kingdom of Aditya Sur expanded here. There may have been some tribal influence in that region, although it's not impossible. This tribes worshiped the Sun. The history of the region shows that all these reasons may have given the name Surjapur. Prior to 1545, Hindu rulers had control over the area. The philosophy of Sanatani Hinduism was embraced by these rulers. In the Islampur Subdivision, even now, many people actively participate in Chhat puja(Worship of the Sun) each year. It is possible that the name Surjapur is derived from the aforementioned reasons. The belief among residents is strong that the village named Surjapur, which falls under Chakulia police station in Islampur Subdivision, has roots tracing back to before the Mughal period and the establishment of Surjapur pargana.

Surjapur pargana was established in the North eastern part of undivided Purnea district, reflecting the evolution of Surjapuri identity. During the Mughal period, Surjapur pargana was administered by the Sarkar of Tajpur in Bengal Subah. Historically, the eastern part of the Mahananda river was governed by Tajpur Sarkar. According to Francis Buchanan's account, the Surjapur pargana covered an area of 14 or 15 lakhs of bighas, which is equivalent to 5,00000 acres.¹ According to L.s.s.o Malley's Gazetteer, the total area of Surjapur pargana is noted to be 729(4,66,560 acres) square miles.² It is known from the gazetteer of L.S.S.O' Malley that- "According to its chronicles, the founder of the family was Saiyad Khan Dastur, who did good service under the Emperor Humayun in the war against Sher Shah and was rewarded, in A.H.962, i.e., 1545 A.D., by the grant of a sanad conferring on him, together with the title of kanungo, the zamindari of Surjapur, which was formerly held by a Hindu Raja named Sukhdeo".³ On November 1, 1956, the Surjapuri Nation, covering an area of 759 square miles, was incorporated into West Bengal based on the recommendations of the 'State Re-organisation Commission.' The boundary of the Transferred Area includes Thakurganj, Islampur, Chopra, Kishanganj, Goalpokhar, and Karandighi Police stations.⁴ The geographical features and cultural aspects of these areas were formed as Islampur Subdivision. The primary language spoken in the Surjapur pargana is the Surjapuri language. According to a 2011 survey conducted by TASO(Transferred Area Surjapur



Organisation), 3,95,138 individuals in the Islampur Subdivision reported Surjapuri as their mother tongue.⁵

The present Islampur Subdivision, which is now separate, was previously a part of the undivided Purnea district of Bihar. Before 1956, the political history of Islampur subdivision was centered on Bihar. The social system of Islampur subdivision was based on completely agricultural. This area was included in Surjapur pargana. Most of the land in this pargana was agricultural land. It is known from Mr. Byrne's survey and settlement report-"This would give 74.5 per cent Cultivated or culturable and 25.5 per cent unculturable".⁶ The area became a military base during the Mughal period. " During the Mughal rule Purnea formed a great Military frontier province under the rule of Faujdar, who was nominally subordinate to Subahdar".⁷ In 1770, the British annexed this area to the British Empire. This area was under the ancestral rule of the Nawabs of Khagra(Kishanganj). One of their ancestor, Saiyad Khan Dastur, received this Surjapur pargana from the Mughal Emperor Humayun. Ata Hussain was the Nawab of Khagra when the Permanent Settlement was introduced in 1793 AD. The total revenue of this Surjapur Pargana after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement was Rs 246226.⁸ Before the introduction of Permanent settlement, the land system in this area was known as "Gachabandi System". A certain amount of Land in this area was called "Gach". The owner of the Gach was called "Gachchadar" and the peasants under the Gachdar were called "Gachabandi". Places called Goalgach, Suphalgach and Kalagach etc. exist even today. Most Zamindari system of the present Islampur subdivision was under P.C Lal Choudhary. This zamindari was distributed in return for certain revenue.

Causes of Revolt of the Peasants in Islampur Subdivision:

Several earthquakes occurred in this area in 1897 and 1934 AD. As a result, Peasants had to face huge losses. The "All India Kishan Sabha" movement started across the country. This movement is also known as "Akhil Bharatiya Kishan Sabha". In 1929, under the leadership of Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, this movement took place in the entire Bihar. As a result, the biggest Peasants Movement started in the undivided Purnea district. Bataidar movement started in this district from this movement. The movement demanded half the crop for the sharecroppers and also demanded the receipt of the crop paid. The Zamindars of this area used to collect tax or revenue strictly. Zamindars had 'Kachharibari' as a centre for collection of revenue in Matikhunda, Goalpokhar, Ramganj and Chakulia of the present Islampur Subdivision. If a peasants could not pay the tax or revenue by any reason, they were tortured in various ways. The torturers confiscated Cows, Goats, Land etc of those Peasants . "The Land Revenue



Administration Report of 1916-17 had particularly mentioned that absentee Zamindars in Kishanganj Subdivision had developed a continued tendency to dispossess tenants with a view to obtain enhanced rent or realise various customary abwabs. Certain types of criminal offences were extremely common in Purnea district even as late as 1930-40. It was a routine matter for the Landlord or the Amlas to send for the recalcitrant tenant and to keep him tied up in front of the kutchery as a public exhibit to terrorise other tenants. The tenants used to be forcibly put into various torturous physical punishment and extraction of thumb impression of the poor tenants on blank paper was a common zulum in Purnea ".⁹ In 1936, Shyam Singha and Labit Singha of Betbari village in Islampur Subdivision, despite paying their tax or revenue, Nizamuddin of Pattanidar falsely sued them for tax or revenue.¹⁰ In Kachharibari of Jagtagaon village, their Cows, Goats, Land etc were confiscated. No receipt was given even after payment of tax or revenue to the peasants. In the undivided Purnea district, the Bataidar movement had some success. It is known from 'The Land Revenue Administration Report of 1940-41'- "The tenure holders began to grant receipts in printed forms".¹¹ Despite this, relationship between the zamindars and the common peasants were not good. The peasants were always oppressed. "In the Kishanganj Subdivision the relations between the Landlords and tenants had become extremely strained".¹² When the Tebhaga Movement started in undivided Bengal on the eve of independence, the influence of this movement fell heavily on the present Islampur Subdivision. Many Surjapuri men and women participated in the Tebhaga movement and they struggled against the baton forces of British police, zamindars and Jotdars.

Tebhaga Movement in Islampur Subdivision :

The present Islampur Subdivision was the border area of Bihar and Bengal. Hence, both of Bihar and Bengal had political influence in this subdivision. This Islampur Subdivision had a special connection with Dinajpur. At the time of starting the Tebhaga movement in Dinajpur, the movement gained momentum in the present Islampur subdivision as well. The intensity of the Tebhaga movement was highest peak in Dinajpur district. As soon as Tebhaga Movement started in Dinajpur, slogans were raised in the village - "Langol Jaar Jami Taar/ Nij Kholane Dhaan Tolo". Comrades such as Bibhuti Guha, Sunil Sen, Haji Mohammad Danesh, Sachindu Chakraborty, Kali Sarkar, Basant Chatterjee formed the Communist party in Dinajpur.¹³ At that time, this party was declared illegal all over India. This movement spread to 22 out of 30 police stations of Dinajpur district. The main demands of the agitators were- two-thirds of the produced crop should be given/ peasants should be given possession of the land/ peasants should be allowed to raise paddy in the fields. The Rajbanshi community had a large participation in Tebhaga movement. The participation of Muslims in the Tebhaga Movement were not



much. Yet, a large participation of Surjapuri Muslims can be seen in Tebhaga Movement of Islampur Subdivision. Famous muslim leader Haji Mohammad Danesh joined this movement whole-heartedly. His house and agitation field were located 4-5 km away from this Subdivision.

At the time of starting the Tebhaga Movement in Dinajpur, 1946. The Surjapuri Rajbanshis and the Surjapuri Muslims in Islampur subdivision (Chopra and Islampur police station) strengthened the Tebhaga Movement. The movement intensified under the leadership of Bacha Munshi in Chopra and Vidhubhushan Nath of the Surjapuri yogi community led the Movement in Islampur town.¹⁴ Also this movement spread all the over Islampur subdivision. Bacha Munshi was one of the leader of the Peasants of Chopra police station, fearlessly protested against the tyranny of the Zamindars. He tried to make the peasants aware by visiting the market. He went into hiding in Nahargachh village of Chopra police station in 1943 and started organising the Communist party. Bacha Munshi also worked extensively with Charu Majumder during the Tebhaga Movement. In 1946, he started a vigorous Tebhaga Movement with many Surjapuri Muslims in this area. Also Dr. Samsuddin Ahmed (Amtala), Golam Rabbani (Dhande Gach), Abdul Alim (Dhande Gach), Mainuddin (Guabari), Majiruddin (Asharubasti) all great personalities participated in Tebhaga Movement in the Chopra police station.¹⁵ At that time there was a rumor in Islampur subdivision (Chopra, Islampur and Goalpokhar) that -"Big powerful Zamindars and strongmen of both Hindu and Muslim community would hire Bihari goons and harvest all the paddy in the fields".¹⁶ As a result, men and women from many peasants families in this subdivision began to volunteer as guards. They also appealed to their relatives for help. Haji Abdul Gani of Bara Patna in Goalpokhar police station played an active role in the Tebhaga Movement.¹⁷

Indian freedom fighter Vidhubhushan Nath (Nandoi village) was a member of the Indian National Congress party. He led the Tebhaga Movement in Islampur police station. He was one of the leaders of this subdivision, who always stood by the farmers and protested injustice and oppression. In 1936, two peasants were imprisoned in P.C Lal's Kachharibari in Jagtagaon. After hearing about this, Vidhubhushan Nath negotiated with the Zamindar and freed the two peasants.¹⁸ He also stood by the oppressed farmers of Vaipoa village and encouraged them. In 1942, Satinath Bhaduri wrote in a letter to Vidhubhushan Nath of Nandoi village that -"No peasants leader should bow down to the tyranny of the Zamindars and file a case against Zamindars in court".¹⁹ This movement had a great impact on the farmers of Darivit, Daspara, Lakkipur, Matbhita, Thokrabari, Marahati etc. Many peasants workers of this Subdivision participated in the Tebhaga Movement in Dinajpur. Bhabesh Singha of Chopra



participated in this movement.²⁰ Khiya Singha, a resident of Thukrabari village, was one of the women leader of the Tebhaga Movement. During the movement, she took responsible for getting women involved in politics and raising funds.²¹ Jogen Chandra Singha was associated with this movement.²² Brave and valiant women like Dhairjeswari Singha of Bashbari, Dhakeswari Singha of Betbari, Rangila Singha of Birnakundi joined the Tebhaga Movement in Islampur Subdivision.²³ At this movement, Dhairjeswari Singha showed courage by snatching the guns of the suppressors of the movement. Dhakeswari Singha was a very brave women, she never backed down from the movement.

Songs of the Tebhaga in Islampur Subdivision:

There are slogans and songs associated with the Tebhaga Movement. The agitators used to encourage and motivate themselves through the slogans and songs. One of the slogans of the Tebhaga Movement was-" Langol Jaar Jami Taar/Nij Kholane Dhaan Tolo". The agitators used to promote various activities of the movement through songs. Dr. Partha Sen collected the songs of the Tebhaga Movement, while interviewing the participants of the Tebhaga Movement.

Songs collected from Bacha Munshi -

পারই আর নি রহিমি আধহিাল(Parai Aar Ni Rahim Aadhihaal)

আর নি রহিমি আধহিাল (Aar Ni Rahim Aadhihaal)

সারা বছরে হাল চাষ করে, (Sara Bachhare Haal Chaas Kare),

কিছু পাওয়া যায় না (Kichhu Pawa Jaay Naa)

তাকি কুলা ধরে মেয়ে ছেনে শুদ্ধ (Dhaki Kula Dhare Meye Chhele Shuddha)

ঘরে চলে যাই (Ghare Chale Jaai)

সারা বছর আবাদ করে (Sara Bachhar Aabaad Kare)

কিছু পাওয়া যায় না-(Kichhu Pawa Jaay Naa -)

এটা খালি ও দিককার জঞ্জাল(Aata Khaali O Dikkar Janjaal)

পারই আর নি রহিমি আধহিাল²⁴(Parai Aar Ni Rahim Aadhihaal.)



Songs collected from Bhabesh Singha -

ও করি কৃষক ভাই (O Kire Krishak Bhai)

এইবার বাঙাছে হামরা কৃষক সমিতি পুলশিরে লড়াই (Aibar Bangechhi Hamra Krishak Samiti Pulisher Larai)

কারো ভাঙছি হাতরে কৃষক ভাই(Karo Bhangichhe Haatre Krishak Bhai)

কারো ভাঙছি দাঁত। (Karo Bhangichhe Daat)

ছাম গাহনিলা ফলে দলি পুলশিরে মাথাত। (Chham Gahinla Fele Dilo Pulisher Mathat)

শুনরে ভাই গোপন কাহিনী (Shunre Bhai Gopan Kahini)

পুলশি খালে বড় খাসি (Pulish Khale Baro Khasi)

ধনীর মরত দিয়া লাঠি (Dhanir Marat Diya Laathi)

কৃষকরে মাল বশে গেছে (Krishaker Maal Beshi Gechhe)

জল পান খাওয়ার চুরার হাড়ি⁵ (Jalpan Khawar Churar Haari)

Conclusion: Historically, the Purnea district was considered a border area of Bengal. The Tebhaga movement had a significant impact on the agrarian landscape in the Islampur Subdivision. So Bengal and Bihar were influenced by these revolutionaries. The Tebhaga movement across Bengal was primarily organised by the Communist party members. As a result, the Communist party's foundation was established in Bengal, which has governed the region for a long time. The undivided Communist party, which played a crucial role in India's political landscape, was formed in Islampur in 1958 AD.

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