



# THE TEBHAGA MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF BIMALA MAJHI IN PEASANT RESISTANCE AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

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## ABSTRACT

In an effort to combat the colonial government's exploitative agricultural system, the Bengali peasants staged the Tebhaga Movement (1946–1947). Focusing on peasant resistance and women's involvement, this article delves into the origins, character, and effect of the movement. The desire for farmers to get two-thirds of the output and the collective techniques used by peasants against landlords are emphasized. The paper also highlights the important role that women had in changing gender norms and rallying rural communities, particularly Bimala Majhi, a grassroots leader. Using an analysis of how class struggle and gender involvement interact, the article contends that the Tebhaga Movement was a watershed moment in the political emancipation of women in India and a factor in the agricultural reforms that followed.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Among the most notable peasant uprisings in late colonial India, the Tebhaga Movement took form in Bengal in 1946 and 1947. It is a product of the highly exploitative agricultural system whereby landless workers, called bargadars, grow crops on landowners' plots of land and are forced to pay half of their harvest as rent. Because they do not have legal title to the land they work and are subject to arbitrary demands and forced evictions, peasants live in a state of dependency, instability, and chronic poverty under this system. As a direct challenge to the existing agricultural hierarchy, the demand for "tebhaga," or two-thirds share of the yield for the farmers, becomes the major purpose of the movement. This movement is a reflection of the peasants' rising consciousness of their economic rights and the need to fight against unfair practices that permeate the rural economy.

A larger framework of political upheaval and growing anti-colonial feeling across India provides the setting in which the movement takes shape. In order to fight for their rights and dismantle landowners' power, peasant groups rally rural communities. So, the Tebhaga Movement is a political protest against colonial domination and feudal exploitation, in addition to an economic battle. Midnapore, Dinajpur, and 24 Parganas are only a few of the areas in Bengal where the peasants have banded together to protest. In this way, they demonstrate agency over their work and the goods they generate by gathering crops on their own and storing them in granaries rather than giving them to landlords. Passive acceptance gives way to aggressive defiance in this kind of resistance.

The involvement of women greatly changes the character and extent of the fight, which is a characteristic of the Tebhaga Movement. As a result, women are more involved in politics and the economy, expanding their spheres of influence outside the home. They stand up to landlords and police, protect harvested crops, and take part in protests. Because of the vital role they play in organizing communities and maintaining collective action, their participation fortifies the movement at the grassroots level. Involvement of women strengthens the movement and questions long-established gender stereotypes in rural communities. As rural women start to exert their agency in public and political domains, it represents a significant juncture in the history of women's empowerment.

When seen in this light, Bimala Majhi's significance shines through. She rises to prominence as a leader at the grassroots level, inspiring and empowering women to join the cause.



Women are driving societal change, and her leadership exemplifies this trend. Local people are becoming more important in influencing major movements. Women get the necessary tools and self-assurance to stand up to patriarchal systems as a result of her work. So, when it comes to collective resistance that tackles gender and class simultaneously, the Tebhaga Movement is a formidable model. A watershed moment in the annals of India's peasant movements, it tackles the issue of economic exploitation while also helping to change social connections more broadly.

### **I. PEASANT RESISTANCE AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TEBHAGA MOVEMENT**

The Tebhaga Movement is not possible without the significant and revolutionary contributions made by women within this larger context of resistance. Their involvement signifies a radical break with conventional gender norms, as women go outside the home and participate in political and economic spheres. The movement gains momentum and prominence when women participate in rallies, processions, and meetings. They protect granaries and harvested harvests against landlords who might try to take them by force. When people are trying to fight police brutality or abusive landlords, it is often women who take the lead in constructing protective lines. Their bravery and commitment serve as an example to the rest of the community, strengthening the resolve of the peasants as a whole.

Additionally, women form coalitions to bolster the cause as a whole. When it comes to defense, mobilization, and communication, these organizations are crucial. To fight back against oppression, they make use of commonplace objects like sticks, sickles, and other household goods. Their involvement shows that resistance may arise from group cohesion and resolve, rather than depending just on official weaponry or institutional authority. Women make a difference in the movement's short-term objectives and the larger societal change process when they fight actively.

Additionally, the Tebhaga Movement's female members are fighting long-established gender stereotypes and hierarchies. Women in rural areas are discouraged from participating in public life and are expected to stay at home to care for children and the house. Yet, the movement opens up new avenues for women to express themselves and stand up for what they believe in. Women develop self-assurance and community recognition when they take part in resistance activities, meetings, and decision-making procedures.



Because it alters the power and participation dynamics in rural community, this transition is more than just symbolic; it has real-world consequences as well. The role of women in social and political transformation is shifting from that of mere observers to that of powerful agents.

The movement's organizational potential is reinforced by the inclusion of women. Their participation strengthens the movement by expanding its reach into more families and communities. At the local level, women often play a pivotal role as connectors in communication networks, disseminating information and rallying support. Their participation shows that the campaign is a community-wide fight, not just an individual one, which gives it more moral power. Embracing inclusivity is crucial for the movement to persist in the face of oppression and obstacles.

The Tebhaga Movement's female participants also show how gender and class interact in agricultural battles. Because of gender inequality, women endure social exclusion in addition to economic exploitation in peasant homes. They are able to tackle both of these aspects at once because to their participation in the movement. Collective resistance is a powerful tool for women to fight patriarchal conventions that limit their agency and agency in society, as well as the power of landlords. The movement takes on new significance as it faces a double threat, marking a watershed point in the fight for peasant resistance and the emancipation of women.

Therefore, the Tebhaga Movement is a potent illustration of the ability of collective resistance to alter social systems and provide voice to oppressed communities. Demonstrating that all segments of society must be engaged in order to bring about significant social change, the active engagement of women amplifies the movement's power, reach, and influence. The bravery, structure, and will of women are important in determining the course of the Tebhaga Movement, which is a fight for economic justice and a watershed moment in the fight for gender parity and societal change.

## **II. ROLE OF BIMALA MAJHI AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVEMENT**

A key figure in the Tebhaga Movement's mobilization of rural Bengali peasants, especially women, Bimala Majhi rises to prominence as a grassroots leader. She forms strong bonds with rural residents and has firsthand knowledge of the hardships faced by sharecroppers due



to her humble origins. She becomes a leader at the grassroots level by helping to organize meetings, raise awareness about the need for tebhaga, and rally the peasants to fight back against landlords' oppressive tactics. She boosts the movement's morale by reassuring the villages of their worth and encouraging them to band together for a shared goal. A major contribution she makes is her skill in reaching out to rural women and enlisting their support in the fight.

When it comes to including women in the movement and helping them become active participants, Bimala Majhi is important. She advocates for women to participate in resistance actions like as rallies and demonstrations, rather than staying at home and doing housework. She helps galvanize the women into action, and soon they are banding together to protect crops, fight landlord meddling, and rally support for the cause. As a result of her guidance, women in the community begin to see themselves as powerful and integral to the fight, which ultimately elevates their social standing. Her efforts to bring women together and encourage their active engagement will help the movement grow from the ground up and include more people.

She takes part in active resistance against tyrannical powers in addition to mobilizing others to do likewise. Standing shoulder to shoulder with peasants in conflicts with landowners and authorities, she exemplifies leadership by example. Her unwavering resolve motivates others to persevere in the face of persecution and danger. As a result of her encouragement, women gain confidence and start to fight back against economic exploitation and societal constraints. An essential step toward women's empowerment is the visibility that women receive in public and political spheres via her efforts. Under her guidance, underrepresented groups have the potential to become agents of change, and regular people may have a huge impact as part of larger social movements.

Bimala Majhi discusses larger societal challenges impacting rural society, going beyond the specific setting of the Tebhaga Movement. For women who experience various types of marginalization, she stresses the significance of justice, dignity, and equality. She shows in her art that she knows that social change and economic hardship go hand in hand. She helps challenge long-established gender conventions and promote a more fair social structure by urging women to be active participants and to stand up for their rights.



Thus, her impact goes beyond the movement and shapes rural communities' social transformation over the long haul.

Initiating a larger social shift in rural areas and elevating agricultural concerns to the center of political debate are two of the most important contributions of the Tebhaga Movement. It affirms peasants' rights to their harvest and criticizes the oppressive sharecropping system. As the peasants band together to fight injustice and tyranny, the movement shows how powerful collective action can be. Additionally, it has a significant impact on how land reforms and laws that safeguard farmers' interests are shaped in the future. The movement helps create a more fair agricultural system by drawing attention to the necessity of equal distribution of resources.

Concurrently, the movement is very important for social change, especially when it comes to women's involvement. With the support of influential women like Bimala Majhi, the movement is being expanded to include a larger fight for gender parity and self-determination. It breaks down barriers between the sexes and opens doors for women to run for office. This shift paves the path for more women to get involved in future movements and alters societal views, both of which have long-term effects.

Accordingly, the Tebhaga Movement is a watershed moment in India's peasant uprising and social revolution. Bimala Majhi's story exemplifies how grassroots leadership can inspire and mobilize whole communities to make a difference. Her work, together with those of other women and peasants, will guarantee that the movement's legacy of defiance, strength, and fight for justice will endure.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

As a powerful declaration of rights by oppressed farmers against an oppressive agricultural system, the Tebhaga Movement is a watershed moment in the annals of India's peasant movements. It exemplifies the peasants' awakening to the need for economic justice and their capacity to mobilize collective resistance. Agrarian reforms and policy shifts may be built around the desire for a fair share of production, which simultaneously undermines landlord power. Concurrently, women's involvement elevates the movement as a whole, as they become vital allies in the fight. Through their participation, the movement expands into a larger social movement that questions and fights against conventional gender norms and



inequality. Bimala Majhi's leadership bolsters this change even more since she rallies women and encourages them to be active in resistance and decision-making. Class struggle and women's empowerment meet in the Tebhaga Movement. As a long-lasting example of resistance and transformation, it shows that oppressed communities may bring about real social change by banding together and fighting for their rights.

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