

Chapter-III

Political Life and Struggles of the Hajongs

Like many other ethnic groups of North East India, microscopic ethnic groups like Hajongs, Chutia, Dhimal etc. are facing acute identity crisis in recent times. It is held that tribal identity or ethnicity is a community level consciousness and solidarity. The identity formation is the foundation of community solidarity of a tribal community. The Hajongs are jeopardized by identity crisis as a result of frequent migration causing acute identity crisis in their socio-political life. In fact, the growth and development of the Hajongs socio-political life had to confront with many upheavals in the form of revolt and movements against the exploiting systems of the ruling powers in the erstwhile Mymensing District of East Pakistan.

This chapter gives a comprehensive study about the struggles of the Hajongs. The political identity of the Hajong tribe is connected with their struggle for survival in the erstwhile East Bengal since the British period. The entire Partially Excluded Areas of Bengal manifested a number of revolts by the peasants against the exploitation of the zaminders. The Hajong concentrated North Mymensing tribal areas were the centers of all these movements and continued even after the partition of the Indian sub- continent in 1947. It is important to mention here that the independence of the country hardly brought any emancipation to the Hajongs politically. They were under suppression for the second time in the newly created East Pakistan. In fact, after the partition of the Country, the Hajong tribe which remained in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) was displaced massively. They were oppressed and suppressed by the majority groups on the one hand and put atrocities by the Government forces of erstwhile East Pakistan on the other. Finding no shelter, the Hajong tribe along with other communities had left East Pakistan and sought asylum in India as refugee

3. Struggles of the Hajongs: - The weakening of the authority of the Centralised Mughal State was compounded by serious economic crisis. It was further precipitated by the tendency of the Mughal zaminders and jaigirdars to acquire massive wealth from the land

revenue collection through the jaigirdari system, which resulted in the plunder of the countryside. This exploitation continued even after the East India Company took over the revenue administration. From permanent settlement to Ryotwari and Mahalwari settlements, the sole motives behind those settlements were maximization of revenue collection. In fact, the sector which was most affected by the colonial rule was the agriculture. It is important to mention here that even before the formal take over in 1858, Bengal was reeling under pressure of the colonial state to produce more revenue. It resulted not only in thorough transformation of agricultural sector but also reduced many a peasant to mere cultivators, who vented their anger and impoverishment through a series of resistance movements. From 1763 to 1856 there were more than forty rebellions apart from hundred of minor upsurges. Some of the movements like **Sannyasi Bidroho (revolution), Tonko Movements, Hati Kheda Begar Pratha (elephant capturing beggar or free labour system) and Tebhaga** had profound impact on the political life of the Hajongs. There was several exploiting system responsible for the outbreak of these movements among the Hajongs. Some of the exploitative system like **Tonko system, Borga or Adhiar system, Nankar System, Bhawali Protha System** etc.

3.1. Sannyasi Bidroho (Monk Rebellion):- The winning in the battle of Pallasey and Boxar in 1765 by the East India Company has changed the traditional structure of the Indian society. Both these wars paved the way of the East India Company to control the Dewani of the Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Since then the amount of exhortation of Zaminders, Jutdars and Talukdars increased on the poor cultivators. They were supported by the East India Company forces which aggravated the situation. Even during the time of famine of 1770, the poor cultivators were not spared by the Zaminders to pay their revenues on agricultural land. As a result there was a revolt against the inhuman system of landlords and zaminders launched by peasant leaders in different times sporadically or in isolated manner. One of its earliest revolts was known as the '**Sannyasi Bidroho**' or Revolt of the Monks. It is named as Sannyasi because the revolt was driven by the religious spirit.

In fact, it was a peasant's movement in the name of Sanayasis. They revolted under the leadership of oppressed leaders like Mojnu Saha, Nurul

Mohammed, Bowani Pathak, Devi Charan Chaudhury of Durgapur etc.¹ Monju saha organised the peasants to fight against the landlords and British ruler from the ends of Bihar to the entire North Bengal including the Mymensing district. In 1763, the first of its attack occurred when a large number of Sanayasis looted and plundered some business establishment of the East India Company in Dhaka. The oppressed peasants helped the Sanyasis in this attack. The oppression on the peasants reached its extreme stage when the amount payable to the East India Company was increased up to 90 percent by the zaminders. On the other hand, the peasants under the leadership of Sanayasis increased their attack and looted the revenue collection centers of the zaminders of Sherpur, Alapsingh and Zhafarshahi Porogonas in 1773. It has also been reported that they used modern fire arms besides elephants, horses and camels against the oppressor land lords and zaminders.²

The Sanyasi revolutionaries organized their activities from the Dorga of Shaha Kamal of Garo Hills.³ They also established hidden centers at Charantala of Northern Sherpur. Besides, KuriGram, Gaibhandha, Chilmari, Roumari of Rangpur District, Mohendragang, Kamarjani, Dewanganj and Jamalpur were the main centres of the Sanyasis of the North East India. The entire tribal areas of the East Bengal and Goalpara were influenced by the revolutionary activities of the Sanyasis. The deep forest areas of Nolitabari, Modhupur, Atia etc. had provided shelter to the refugees. All these activities of Sanyasis become obvious from the works of Sukumar Mitra's 'Bangla Sahitye Bidroher Chitra' (Picture of Revolution in Bengali Literature). He stated that "the zaminder Krishna Chandra Roy of Jangalia of Mymensing district informed the Company that about 5000 Sanyasis had entered the Jafarshahi Paragana and created panic among the Englishmen and zaminders of nearby regions. He also reported that the Sanyasis had captured and looted Rs.1600/- from his collector. Similarly, the zaminders of Alapsingh had also informed the presence of about 3500 Sanyasis to the Company".⁴ Till today the tribal people like Hajong, Koch, Hudi community people gather in each year in the month

¹. Sheikh, E.A. 2000, *Hajong Janoghosti*, Moromi Printers, Goalpara, Assam. P.245.

². Kha, Chaudhury, Amanat Ullah, 1936, *Kochbiharer Itihas*, p.228.

³. Gupta, P 1963, *Mukti Juddhey Adibas*, Monisha Granthalaya, Bankim Chatteerjee Street, Kolikata, p.39.

⁴. Gupta, P 1971, *Jey Sangramer Ses Nei*, (in Bengali) . New Age Printers, Kolkata, p.18.

of 'Baisakh', the first month of Bengali year to commemorate the first stepping by the Sanyasis at Charantala. The thronged tribes raise their voices in favour of Sanyasis. Even they sacrifice Goats, buffalos and pigeons during the time of Kali puja at Charantala. The other places like Konojhora, Sanyasi-Vhita, Sanyasi-Char and Sanyasi-Kata bear the memories of Sanyasi rebellion. The Hajongs feels proud in memorizing the contribution of Bhopal Giri in the Sanyasi Bidroho. F.A. Sachse had stated in his 'District Gazetter of Mymensing' that because of the revolutionary activities, present Jamalpur was known as Sanyasigang till 1845. He stated that,

“as the centre of Sanyasi rebellion Jamalpur was known as Sanyasiganj when in 1845 it became the first Sub-Division of Mymensing”.⁵

It is important to mention here that like the Sanyasis, there was another contemporary revolutionary organization known as '**Fokiri Dal**', an armed force of the Muslims. The main objectives of the organization like the Sanyasis were to plunder and looting the goods from the zaminders and Company and distribute the same to the needy and poor peasants. But they were compared with bandit and plunderer in the 'Koch Biharer Itihas' many a times.⁶ On the contrary, the Sanyasi rebellion was appreciated in the 'Anand Math' of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. However, a number of operations were conducted by the Company to suppress both the Sanyasis and Fokiri Dal. They established one permanent Cantonment at Jamalpur and Mr. Lodge became the first captain of it. It has been reported that the Company military Captain Thomas died on his way to suppress about 3000 members of Sanyasis and Fokiri Dal. The influence of the Sanyasis became weak towards the later part of the 18th century as a result of continuous military operation of the Company forces under the lieutenantships of MacDonald and Mr. Brenan. Despite, the rise of Sanyasis had profound impact on the Hajongs to raise their voice against exploitation.

3.2. Rise of Tipu Sardar:- The rise of Tipu Sardar against the exploitation of peasants in Sherpur had profound impact on the tribal communities like Hudi, Hajongs etc. There were several reasons for the upsurge of peasants of Sherpur in the early part of the 19th

⁵. District-Gazetteer, Mymensing, By-F.A. Sachse, I.C.S., P.148.

⁶. Kha, Chaudhury, Amanat Ullah. op.cit.p.228.

century. In 1820, the entire zamindari system was redistributed among the family members of zaminders of Sherpur. This resulted in the extra expenditure of the zaminders in the establishment of new residential houses and revenue collecting centers. The zaminders increased the rate of revenues to cope with the extra expenditure. The raising of revenue rates was opposed by the tenants vehemently. The tenant leaders like Boksu, Dipchand and Gomanao sought the help of renowned Sufi leader Tipu Sardar of Susang-Durgapur. At the call of Tipu Sardar, many of his followers the 'Paghali Panthi' (One who behaved themselves as mad) tenants and many peasants had joined the revolts. The rebels attacked and occupied the houses and revenue collection centers of the zaminders of Sherpur. The zaminders fled away to Kaliganj and took shelter in the bungalow of Magistrate, Dempia Sahab. Then the peasants including the Hajongs established one tiny independent kingdom at Sherpur and made its capital at the forte of Dolipa, the North of Sherpur. However, the kingdom under the Tipu Sardar continued from 1824 to 1827 A.D. To suppress the revolt of Tipu Sardar, a joint intensive operation was carried out in association with the Magistrate Mr. Dempier, District Magistrate Mr. Danbar with Captain Garret. A large number of rebel leaders were killed and apprehended in the operation. The ring leaders like Boksu, Dipchand and Gomanu escaped and went underground. But Tipu Sardar was arrested in 1827 and sentenced to life imprisonment and died in Andaman jail. Thus, the tribal communities like Hajongs, Hudis took active part in the revolt against zaminders. It has also been reported that about 700 Garos joined hand with the peasant rebels to fight against the Zaminders of Sherpur.⁷

3.3. Revolts of Dubraj Pathor and Janku:-The fall of Tipu Sardar encouraged the colonial powers to adopt more oppressive laws for the zaminders. In 1828, a new law was passed to collect more revenues from the non-taxed land. The law was strongly opposed by the peasants of the Bengal. After a few months later the peasant movements resurrected and started to revolt against the zaminders. In the mean time, in 1831 the court of Magistrate and Military Camps were shifted from Kaliganj to Jamalpur. This provided an opportunity to the escaped Boksu and Dipchand to reorganize the revolt and to fight against zaminders. However, the renewed revolt was run by two Hudi leaders

⁷. Zengsum, Subash 1988, Garo Upojatir Sangkipto Itihas, *Souvenir*, In Promopd, Mankin (ed.), Tribal Welfare Association, Ghy, p.7.

were Dubraj Pathor and Janku. Both the rebel leaders attacked the zaminders of Sherpur and Police Headquarters simultaneously. The peasantry had also snatched away the fire arms from the police and destroyed many police stations. It had been stated in the District Gazetteer of Mymensing that,

“ in 1833 the Sherpur Police Station was looted and fired by the Paghla Panthi rebels under the leadership of Dubraj Pathor and Janku. The rebellion was suppressed by Joint Magistrate Mr. Dampier. But the sudden attack of Dubraj who kidnapped four person of Mr. Dampier from the custody. To suppress the rebel activities, the Deputy Collector of Jamalpur had sent an additional Company 150 force to Sherpur. The military forces under the Captainship of Mr. Seal attacked the rebel secret places at Jolangi of North Goalpara and border regions of Garo Hills and arrested about 4000 rebels. Since then no untoward incident was reported in the region”.⁸

While getting the growing activities of the rebels, the District Magistrate, Mr. Danbar wrote a letter to his superior authority seeking more forces to control the rebels. He stated as, “fresh disturbances of a very serious nature have occurred in Sherpur”.⁹ As per the request, the Company reinforced their military strength at Sherpur and conducted regular raid under the Captainship of Mr. Shill and Lieutenant Young Husband. However, thousands of rebel peasants resisted the attack of the English forces under the leadership of Dubraj Pathor and Janku at Tuglapara, Jolangi, Nolitabari, Haluaghat and Shambaganj, Bokshiganj, Batajor in the North West of Sherpur. After a few days of fierce fighting the rebel forces could not stand in front of the firearms of the English forces. As a result rebel leaders including Kalbhadra and Pandit were arrested and few of them surrendered. Majority of the leaders had left the operation areas and retreated to the Garo Hills. But the English forces could not trace out the whereabouts of Dubraj Pathor and Janku. In fact, this peasant revolts continued from 1829 to 1831 in the Sherpur Paragana. Besides Hajongs, thousands of Hudis, Dhalus and even Muslims peasants took active part in it.

⁸. District-Gazetteer, Mymensing, By-F.A. Sachse, I.C.S. p.164.

⁹. Gupta, P 1971, op.cit. pp.26-27.

3.4. Hati Kheda Beggar Pratha (Elephant Capturing Beggar or Free Labour system):- According to Biren Hajong (2000) the growth and evolution of the social life of the Hajongs had to confront many social confrontations in the form of upheaval and struggle against the ruling powers perpetrated on them. One of such upheaval is known as the Hati Kheda Beggar Pratha or Elephant Capturing Beggar or Free Labour System of the Hajongs. In fact, it was a movement of the Hajongs against the zaminders of Susang and Durgapur. The zaminders of both the Paraganas had brought the Hajongs to capture elephants. Bareh (2001) stated that,

“the zaminders of Koraibari, Mechpara, Sherpur, Susang and Durgapur of erstwhile East Bengal brought the Hajongs to the Garo hills and Mymensing, to cultivate their lands and catch elephants. The Raja of Susang, who earned a considerable income from the elephants of the Garo Hills, employed the Hajongs in the Kheda operation for trapping elephants”.¹⁰

This, however, clearly implies that in earlier days, the Hajongs were probably forest dwellers and were expert in catching elephants for which they were brought to the region by the local Rajas. The elephants captured by the Hajongs were sold at an exorbitant price by the zaminders in Dhaka, Murshidabad and in Delhi. The zaminders not only earned huge income by selling these elephants but also received fame and titles from the Nawab, kings and English people. It has been stated that zaminders used to give some land settlements to the Hajongs with condition that in return they had to render assistance to the zaminders in times of capturing elephants.

In the initial years farming wet paddy field and capturing wild elephants were conducted by the Hajongs without any confrontations with the zaminders. The problem started when the zaminders wanted to make it obligatory for free labour system, besides capturing elephants. The Hajongs were oppressed by the zaminders when they opposed the free labour system under the Mona Moral Sardar. Besides, the other Hajongs leaders were Moya Morol, Madol Moral, Mala, Hatu, Puru, Khak and Daya Morol of Dhenki village. The Hajongs under these leaders declared movements against

¹⁰. Bareh, H M (ed.), 2001, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Meghalaya*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, p.214.

the free labour system and demanded compensations for the Hajongs those who laid their lives during the process of elephants capturing. The Garos and the Paghal Panthi, the supporters of Tipu Sardar also joined hands with the Hajongs in the movements. Consequently, the Hajongs movements turned into a peasant movement of Susung Paragana. The zaminders flew away to the Netrokona when the rebel peasant attacked Susung and Durgapur.

The peasant revolt turned into a bloody revolt with the death of ring leader Mona Morol of the Hajongs. It is said that Mona Morol was put to death during elephant capturing operations. Another report stated that he was trampled to death under the feet of an elephant when he raised his voice against the free beggar system.¹¹ The situation was aggravated with the death of Mona Moral and both zaminders and Hajong rebels met at Baromary village field in 1989. Promot Gupto (1971) stated that the fight continued about four to five years. In the fight the Hajongs rebels were vanquished and retrograded by the forces of zaminders. It was known that about 40 persons died and 40 to 50 wounded of the zaminders forces. More than 20 Hajongs rebels laid their lives in the fight. About 60 rebels were known to have been injured. The prominent Hajong rebels who died in the fight were Ratia Hajong of Betgora, Mongla of Dhenki, Behari of Langura, Bagha of Sujaru Hadipara, Jogo of Phanda para and Soaram of Vijoypur. Rebels like Mola and Tonglu remained untraced. A number of them were captured during retrogression including Goya Moral of Bhagpara. The captive Hajongs had to face untold torture at the hands of the zaminders forces. Their villages were looted and houses were smashed to the ground with the help of elephants. However, the zaminders forces had to face tough resistance from the women folk of Baoipara and other villages.

Thus, the Hajongs those who were involved in the Hati Kheda Revolt could not withstand the atrocities perpetrated on them by the zaminders. The immediate consequence of the revolt was the migration of a large number of Hajongs of Susung and Durgapur to other safer places. One of such group migrated towards the eastern direction through the deep jungles of Mymensing and Sylhet district and settled in the foot Hills of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Later on, this inhabitat of the Hajongs came

¹¹. Gupta, P]. op. cit. p.28.

to be known as Bongshikunda and Lower Paragana. Similarly, another group of Hajongs had migrated towards western direction and settled in the western parts of Garo Hills and border areas of Goalpara District. Subsequently, beggar system was abolished by the zaminders of Susung Paragana.

3.5. Tonko Movement: - A bulk of aboriginal tribes like Hajong, Dalus, Garos, Hudis and Banais were found in the Sherpur and Susang Paraganas of North Mymensing district. The particular area was known as Partially Excluded Areas of Bengal in respect of general administration. A peculiar land revenue system that existed in the region called 'Tonko System'. The word 'Tonko' was mainly derived from the word 'Taka'¹² which means money. Under the Tonko system the peasants had to pay a certain amount of produce instead of money to the landlords. The amount was always fixed and did not vary according to the produce of the land. For instance, if the contract is that the peasant had to pay 10 maunds of paddy per acre, he will have to pay the stipulated amount whether his produce is 20 maunds per acre or less. Besides, the tenants had no right of occupancy under the system. The aboriginal Hajong peasants of Susang Paragana became the worst victim of the Tonko system.

As a result there was struggle of the peasants against the exploitation of Tonko system. The Tonko movement was started first in the Muslim inhabited Dasal village in Susang under Durgapur Police Station and in Langura of Kalmakanda Police Station in 1937.¹³ Subsequently, the movement spreaded like bonfire in the Haluwaghat, Nolitabari, and Sribordi swept away the whole North Mymensing district. However, it has also been stated that the Tonko Movement's storm centers were Netrokona, Sadar and Jamalpur sub-division of Mymensing. In all these areas the tribals took the produce to their khamar and refused to pay Tonko rent until their demands were met. The peasant leaders like Lalit Sarker Hajong, Bipin Goon, Baikanta Goon, Naryan Mondal, Sachin Hajong, Prasanna Hajong, Ganeswar, Paresh Sarkar, Jehal Hajong, Jameswar Sarkar, Jatin Hajong, Purna Chandra Hajong, Monmohan Hajong, Birat Hajong, Tanuram Hajong, Kangal Das Hajong, Rasendra Hajong, Bisweswar Hajong,

¹² Chakrabarty, D 2000, *Garo Paharer Lal Fool*, Lalgah, Kolkata, p.2.

¹³ Gupto, P. op. cit., p.56.

Nayan Hajong, Kalaram Banai, Gomuti Banai etc. took active part in the Tonko movement.¹⁴ It is important to note that all the Tonko leaders were under the influence of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha or the communist leaders. Moni Singh became the prominent leader of Tonko movement in Mymensing district.

As a result of prolonged agitation by the peasants, the Fazlul Haque Ministry made certain modifications in the Tonko system by reducing the amount of Tonko crops in 1938.¹⁵ In fact, the Government limited the landlords demand to 5 to 9 maunds of paddy in per acre or its equivalent in money. It also acknowledged the tenancy right of the peasants. This obviously meant that when in the per acre average produce is supposed to have 15 to 20 maunds in one crop in a year, the peasants under Tonko system had to pay as rent as per prevailing price of paddy something like Rs. 12/- to Rs. 20/- per acre. Whereas ordinary tenants in the same area paid the maximum rent Rs. 4/- only per acre.¹⁶ Again in 1946, the Kisan Sabha raised the demand of reduction of Tonko into much lower money-rent, so that the tenants could benefit from rising agricultural prices. Besides, the money rent had another advantage, in case of dispute it could be deposited at the police station.

However, the Tonko movement took a militant turn in the tribal areas of North Mymensing. The movement was so intensive that the Special Correspondent of The Statesmen described the situation in this area thus:

“the vigorous drive was started against the communists and the guilty Hajong and to recover the missing rifles. But the country is difficult, dotted with scrubs covered with hillocks,...looking for a Hajong in this is like looking for a needle in haystacks. The man take to the hills during the day and return to the village at night to eat...some Hajong men have been arrested but one rifle is still

¹⁴ . Hajong, B 2000, *The Hajongs and Their Struggles*, Hawakhana, Tura, Meghalaya. P.68.

¹⁵ . Biswas, Girban. R 2002, *Peasant Movement in North East India (1946-1950)*, Regency publications, New Delhi, p. 61.

¹⁶ . Hajong, B. op.cit., p.60.

*missing...The women stay on in the villages and scold the police when they come. Fearlessly they go the bazars to sell their wares.”*¹⁷

In November, 1946 the Governor of Bengal paid a sudden visit to the Susang areas of Mymensing district. Following his visit, Mr. Bastin, who was known to be a tribal expert, was transferred as the DM of Mymensing in December, 1946. It is said that Mr. Bastin was brought there to suppress the growing militant peasant movement. The police and armed forces were reinforced. Notices were served to the peasants to clear up land revenues, Tonko paddy and other debts of zaminders. Warrants were issued against the Kisan Sabha leaders. The peasant leaders stood against the steps of Mr. Bastin and reiterated that they were ready to pay the land revenues in money instead of paddy. The insurgent peasants resolved that they will not yield to the pressure of the landlords and raised the slogan '*jaan dibo tobu dhan dibona*' (we will sacrifice our lives but paddy will not be given). The movement took its extreme turn with the incident of village Boheratuli where Rashmoni, women militant leader and Surendra Hajong died by the bullets of the police. Both of them became the first martyrs of the Hajongs in the history of Tonko movement.¹⁸ Mr. Bastin took all possible retaliatory measures to vanquish the Tonko movement and to arrest their ring leaders. Every day and night of January and February of 1947, Mr. Bastin in association with Eastern Frontiers Rifles raided tribal villages committing barbaric atrocities on the villagers. They arrested suspected persons, molested women, looted their ornaments, money and paddy. Even they burnt and destroyed houses in the villages. It was estimated that about 200 villages were raided, 100 houses were burnt to ashes, 4 persons killed and 80 persons were wounded. As a result a Non-Official Enquiry Committee was formed to study the reign of terror of Mr. Bastin. The committee consisted of a few senior citizens and lawyers like Snehansu Acharya and Mr. Jyoti Basu, Probhat Dasgupta and other members. However, on the 19th February 1947, the members of the committee was arrested and taken to Bongaon police camp. Later on they were restricted to enter the Partially Excluded Areas of Mymensing district

¹⁷. Tribal Unrest in North East Bengal, *The Statesman*, 25th March, 1947, quoted by Sunil Sen., *Peasant Movement in India*. p.120.

¹⁸. Hajong, B. op.cit., p.73.

under the Bengal Special Power Ordinance. The win and loss of the Baheratoli incident becomes obvious from the comments of the Priest of Bhalukpara that,

*“Baheratoli was a drawn game, but this one is definitely a winning fight for the insurgents both from the point of loss of lives and arms”.*¹⁹

The militant peasants continued their struggles in newly formed East Pakistan. Thousands of aboriginals of Susung, Dugapur, Haluwaghat and Nalitabari expressed their allegiance to the newly born state and demanded the abolition of Tonko system. On behalf of the Kisan Sabha, Jameswar and Chandra Sarkar Hajong submitted a memorandum demanding abolition of Tonko system to the first Governor of East Pakistan who visited Partially Excluded Area of North Mymensing in 1948. On the contrary, it was found that the policies of the Muslim League were more oppressive. The Government became more aggressive to the agitation of the aboriginal peasants. Ansar Bahani, a para military force was organized to help the police, landlords and administration. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that the country might be free and independent but the legacy of rule was the feudal and foreign pattern.

The peasant reiterated their demand of abolition of Tonko and zamindari system more emphatically. Since January 1949, there were rallies and meetings in every bazaars (market) and villages on their demand. In February 4, 1949 about 15 Hajong Tonko peasants including the Mongol chand Hajong lost their life in the Langura haat (market) clash with the police. A number of women including Shanka Moni were also wounded in the Clash. When Shanka Moni’s husband came to rescue her while she was lying wounded in the field, she replied in Hajong language that,

“Muke Na Cha, Sokruke Maar, Ola rokto La” (Don’t gaze at me, kill the enemies, bring their blood).²⁰

Similarly, about 40 men, women and children of tribals were killed while they were sleeping in Jagirpara village of Kolmakanda. Since the early part of 1950, the East

¹⁹. Gupto, P. op. cit., p. 119.

²⁰. Ibid., p. 122.

Pakistani Government used communal riot as a tool to suppress the militant Tonko movement. However, Tonko movement came to an end with the adoption of 'Agricultural Reforms Act' by the Government in 1950. The Tonko movement took 60 lives of the Hajongs, Dalus and other tribals. It must be mentioned that the movement which had grass root support and organization could not withstand the repression of the state as it was limited to ethnic minority community's movement.(Appendix-III).

3.6. Tebhaga:- Apart from the Tonko movement, there was another Borgdar (share croppers) or Adhiar system. The movement as a whole was known as Tebhaga movement of the peasants because the peasants were agitating to pay one-third of the produce instead of half. Besides, in this system the peasants till the lands of the landlords without any occupancy rights. It becomes obvious that the Tonko and Tebhaga are two different movements were going on simultaneously. The movement was so extensive and spreaded all over undivided Bengal in comparison to the Tonko movement. Even the movement was going on in different parts of Assam including undivided Goalpara district, Surma valley and Sylhet. A few scholars stated that the Tebhaga movement originated in Surma valley in the early part of 1930.²¹

However, it is important to note that like the Tonko, the seeds of Tebhaga were also sown in the tribes inhabited regions of Bengal in 1920-21.²² The Hajongs of Mymensing district, the Rajbongshi communities of Dinajpur and Santhal of Rajshahi regions took active part in the movement. Besides, the movement swept away the regions of Garos, Dalus, Banais, Hudis of North Mymensing district. Both Hindus and Muslims equally participated in the movement. Muslim inhabited Dasal village was the strong centre of Tebhaga movement. The plain areas of Mymensing including Kishorganj, Tangail, Jamalpur and Netrokona became the nerve centre of the movement. The peasants raised slogans like, '*the share of the peasants is not half, rather one-third*', '*cut the paddy quickly*' and '*Nij khamare Dhan Tolo*'.²³

²¹. Biswas, Girban. R. op.cit., p.7.

²². Sheikh, E.A, op.cit., p-257.

²³. Ibid.,

In fact, the Tebhaga movement turned into a mass movement with the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936. There were many sessions and conferences of the Kisan Sabha to deal with the problem of the peasants and to organise Tebhaga. The Bengal Provincial Kisan Conference which was held in March, 1937 at Patrasayer village of Bakura district was regarded as the starting point of Tebhaga movement in an organized way. Keeping in mind the intensity of the movement, the newly formed Fazlul Haque Ministry constituted an expert committee to report on the problem of the peasants in 1938. The Committee which was later on known as the Flood Commission reported the Tebhaga (one-third) as the legitimate claim of the peasants and suggested to abolish the zamindari system in 1940. Besides, the Commission recommended that,

*“all bargaders should be declared to be tenants. We also recommend that the share of crop legally recoverable from them should be one-third instead of half.”*²⁴

However, the demand of the peasant was not met by the authorities. Consequently, there were increased militant movements against the landlords. The 6th session of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha held at Nolitabari in May, 1943 had profound impact on the Tebhaga movement. Similarly, the landmark All India kisan Conference was held at Netrokona town in April, 1945. Thousands of Hajong, Garo, Dhalu and Banai aboriginal kisans participated in the conference from the North Mymensing district. After independence, the Tebhaga movement reached its climax in 1949-50. The Peasants could not succeed their demand in East Pakistan. The Government took communal violence to suppress the Tebhaga movement under Kisan Sabha.

3.7. Nankar System: - The Nankar system may be compared with the slave system of the middle ages. The system is also known as the Beggar or Chakran system and the Nankari tenants were called as ‘Beggari Tenant or family slaves’. Under the Nankar system the tenants were given certain amount of land to occupy without rent. In return the tenants had to give free labour in the houses of zaminders for 5 to 7 fixed days in a month. Besides, the Nankar tenants were compelled to render free labour on the occasion

²⁴. Ibid., p.257.

of festivals and other ceremonies if he had been asked for. It may be pointed out that the Nankar tenants had no right on the Nankar land to sell or to transfer the same to others. In the absence of Nankar tenant, the widow or his children were forced to render free labour in the houses of zaminders. In fact, the practice of Nankar system reminds us the Commuty System of Chotta Nagpur, Ghosti System of Orissa and Dudung System of North East Frontier²⁵ of India.

It is to be noted that the Nankar system was much prevalent among the Hudis of Sherpur Paraganas of East Bengal. The Hudis were regarded as a small sub-tribe of the Hajongs.²⁶ The Nankar or rendering free labour in the houses of zaminders was the hereditary occupation of the Hudis. Promoto Gupto (1963) stated regarding the nature of free labour system that,

*“the nankar tenants come to the zaminders house in small or big groups in every 7, 14 and 21 days interval and register their names in the records maintained by the in-charge of all works. They performed all household works including cleaning of utensils, washing clothes, pulling Pankhas (fans), cleaning of compounds, roads, ponds, playgrounds, maintaining gardens and watching the houses day and night”.*²⁷

Besides, the Nankar tenants were used by the zaminders during clashes especially at the time of forcible occupation of land from rebel tenants. However, in return the Hudi tenants had to face socio-economic oppression in the hands of the zaminders. Even they were deprived of the status of a Napit (barber) or Dhubi (washerman) and forbidden to enter the kitchen and temples of zaminders. As a consequence, there was a movement by the Nankar Hudi tenants against the exploitative Nankar system in 1937-38. The movement continued till 1942 in the Sherpur Paraganas. The movement got its momentum under the leaderships of Dubraj Pathor and Janku. The social worker like Sudhindra Dhamey of Charandua Gaon played a formidable role in the

²⁵. Gupta, P, op. cit., pp-50-51.

²⁶. Sheikh, E.A, op.cit., p-261.

²⁷. Gupta, P, op. cit., p-51

Nankar agitation. Besides, leaders like Rabi Niyogi, Himanta Bhattacharya and Jiten Sen contributed in abolishing Nankar system.

3.8. Bhawali Pratha (System):- This is peculiar revenue extracting system was found prevalent in the Hajong inhabited Partially Excluded Areas of the Mymensing District. The system of revenue collection was rare even during the Mughal and British period. In fact, the Bhawali Pratha was in practiced in the Northern Sherpur Paragana by the Talluqdars especially in the Dhanshiel, Bhotpur, Khanduli and in Jinaigati. Under the system the tenant had to pay revenue on his particular plot of land under occupation in money as well as in goods. This shows that there were two different kind of revenue system on the same plot of land. For instance, in those days the tenants had to pay revenue of Rs. 4/- for one acre of land and one pair of goats and two bunches of Malbhog (banana). The payment of money revenue could be paid in installments. But in the case of goods revenue was forced to pay in a single day. Besides, the tenants were compelled by the zaminders to pay some additional money, goods and render free labour during festivals and ceremonies. However, there was a strong movement against the Bhawali system by the Rajbongshi and Hajong tenants in 1937-38. The name of Dinesh Sarkar, Ramu Nag, Joychand Koilash, Bolai Sarkar may be mentioned for their contribution in abolishing anti tenants Bhawali system in 1939. It is important to mention here that the Bhawali movement was mainly involved with the Rajbongshi peasants of Sherpur Paragana, but it was turned into a peasant movement in the region subsequently.

3.9. Khamar Pratha (System):- The Khamar Protha (system) is another exploitative device of the zaminders or landlords against which peasants including the Hajongs revolted against it. Since the beginning of the zaminndery system, the zaminders, landlords and Talluqdars reserved some best quality fertile paddy lands for them called 'Khas Khamar'. This Khamar may be compared with the farm house of modern days. Biren Hajong (2000) stated that a big or small khamar consisted of fifty or hundreds acres of land.²⁸ The land of the khamar was given to the tenants to till in Borga or Adiar or contact system. They had to collect their crops in the khamar of zaminders after separating grains from the straws. The Borgadars had to leave due share of the landlords

²⁸. Hajong, B. op. cit., p.63.

in the khamar itself. It is important to mention here that the landlords used to provide money at a high rate of interest and bear other expenditure to the Borgadars . They had to return the crops on these interests to the landlords. Consequently, the Borgaders had to leave all the crops in the khamar of the landlords. Thus, the khamar system was run by the zaminders in such a way that whole Borgadars or Adiards peasants were transformed into landless tenants and cheap labour of the khamar.

The khamar system was much prevalent in the Mymensing district of East Bengal. In the wake of First World War, the khamar system had created havoc among the poor peasants of Mymensing district. Subsequently, the Hajongs, Dalu, Koch, Banai even Muslims peasants revolted against the khamar system.

3.10. Kher (Straw) Revolution: - The kher (Straw) revolution is also contemporary to other revolution of the Mymensing district of East Bengal started by the Hajongs. According to the system the Borgadars or contract croppers had to collect their crops in the khamar of the landlords and had to leave due share of the crops of landlords along with straws in the khamar. The tenants were not given the share of straws to use as fodder for their cattle. As a result, the tenants demanded their due share of straws and which turned into kher revolution.²⁹ However, not much is known about the revolution except called as Kher revolution of Kishorganj of the Mymensing district.

3.11. Movement against Forest Reserve: - There were vast areas covered by the forest in the Mymensing district. These forest areas were khas unoccupied forest. The aboriginal communities like Hajongs used to collect firewood and cut trees for household purposes since time immemorial. But the zaminders began to declare these unoccupied khas forests as reserve forest and began to collect some royalties or taxes from the peasants. Even fees were imposed for grazing cattle and buffalos in the reserve forest land. The aggrieved peasants raised movements against the Reserved Forest land system by the zaminders. A number of peasants of Bhoratpur, Langura, Koraitola, Daudhara etc were arrested.³⁰

²⁹ . Gupta, P. op.cit. p. 63.

³⁰ . Ibid.

3.12. Birth of Pakistan and Bangladesh: - The birth of Pakistan in 1947 and later on Bangladesh in 1971 has brought untold miseries to the political life of the Hajongs in the Partially Excluded Areas of North Mymensing district. All the tribes inhabited in the Partially Excluded Areas demanded for incorporation of their land with the Indian union. Besides, their demand to create an independent ‘**Adhistan**’ for tribals had created havoc in the political life of the Hajongs. Both the demands were overtly denied despite repeated representation to the Boundary Commission under the Chairmanship of Cyrel Radcliffe. As a consequence, the bifurcation of Hajong inhabited North Mymensing and South Garo Hills had disintegrated the political life of the Hajongs. The newly created Pakistan Government could not take into confidence the tribes of the Partially Exclude Areas. They were alleged as supporter of India and enemy of Pakistan. A large number of Hajong, Garo and other tribes had left East Pakistan to avoid inhuman atrocities during the years of 1947, 1950, 1964, 1965 and 1971. The properties of aboriginal tribes were encroached by enacting separate Acts like Enemy/Vested Property Act. 1972.³¹

During the freedom struggle of Bangladesh, the Hajongs also sacrificed for the cause of Sadin Bangla (independent Bangladesh). But till then majority of the tribes including Hajongs had migrated to India. This becomes vivid from the recent Census Report conducted on Adivashis (tribes) states that .05 per cent Hajongs are living in Bangladesh. According to Kartik Hajong,

“the Hajongs were a warrior tribe since ancient time. The entire North Mymensing, parts of Assam and Garo Hills was the concentration of the Hajong tribe. They were driven out by the (Babus)Britishers helped by the zaminders from their aboriginal land. The Hajongs were deprived of their legitimate demand for annexation of their land with the Indian Union. They could not enjoy the taste of independence for a single moment. Regrettably, the Hajongs were sold out to another foreign country for living a life of slave. Our peasant leaders were arrested and put behind the bar without any trial. Majority of the Hajongs had left and migrated to India to avoid torture of the

³¹. Sheikh, E.A. op.cit., p.259.

*East Pakistani police in different phases. This was done for some vested interest of communities causing political marginalization of the Hajongs”.*³²

Thus, the struggles of the Hajongs against the Hati Kheda Beggar system, Tonko and Te-Bhaga, Nankar and other anti zamindery system were responsible for the displacement and mass exodus of the Hajongs from the erstwhile East Pakistan.

*“a prolonged bloody struggle of the peasantry of North Mymensing region Tonko and zamindery system had come to an end. The anti-kisan and Tonko system was abolished but insurgent peasants most of whom were Hajongs who gave their blood and laid their lives in the agitation could not enjoy the benefit of the abolition of the exploiting system, as they had to abandon their hearth and home in East Pakistan and had to take shelter in India and had to start a impoverished miserable life”.*³³

The mass migration of the Hajongs was the big hurdles in the growth and development of political life in the rehabilitated areas of North East India. Politically they became the most oppressed tribes in the wake of independence not only in present Bangladesh but also in different North Eastern states. In fact, the mass migration from the East Pakistan and their rehabilitation in different North Eastern states disintegrated the community as a whole.

³². Interviewee-K. Hajong (45), Laskar Para, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya.

³³. Hajong, B. op.cit pp. 98-99.