

Resistance and Protest: Understanding People's Participation in Colonial Movements of Darjeeling Terai

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Abstract: *The history of the freedom movement in Darjeeling Terai remained understudied and also difficult to reconstruct due to the paucity of sources. However, interlinked sources suggest that the region was not immune to the storm of the freedom struggle during the colonial era. The freedom movement of Darjeeling Terai has different currents and trends, some may be called 'mainstream', and others may be 'non-mainstream'. So, in Siliguri or Darjeeling Terai freedom movement did not come suddenly and was definitely not one-centric. Diverse paths and many ideologies united with the same goal of 'freedom', whether 'mainstream' or 'non-mainstream'.*

Keywords: *Sannyasis, British, Baikunthapur, Rajbanshis, Siliguri*

Academically, the anti-colonial movement in Darjeeling Terai remained understudied, even after a good amount of historical research on this region, which has been carried out in the last few decades. Independent scholars, as well as academic institution-based scholars, considered these kinds of themes as quite uninteresting mainly because of the paucity of sources. Although the history of the freedom movement in this small region is difficult to reconstruct, interlinked sources suggest that the region was not immune to the storm of the freedom struggle during the colonial era. Though Darjeeling Terai never came into the limelight before the Chinese invasion of India in 1962, the seeds of the people's discontent were there much before the formal connection of the Company's rule in this region in 1850. There are mainly two reasons behind it: i) geographically, Darjeeling Terai has been closely attached to the border of Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and China on the one hand, and ii) it served as a vital node of communication with the states of Northeast India.

The region's unique geographical location, in terms of ecology, environment, climate, and wildlife diversity, made it a hunting ground for the peoples of different regions, neighbouring states, and countries in pre-colonial and colonial eras. The dense forest, unhealthy conditions, dreaded diseases, and lack of proper communication were the major factors responsible for the socio-political isolation of the rural areas of Terai. However, the urban areas of Terai, i.e., Siliguri, have gradually been turned into an urban centre or halting spot/point since the beginning of the twentieth century due to the rail and road transport system. The participation of the Terai people in mainstream politics and the anti-colonial and nationalist freedom struggle movement has not been studied very well, as said earlier. However, there are available sources that reflect upon their consciousness and suggest active participation in the wars of independence.

The *Sannyasis* and the *Fakirs*:

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the *Sannyasis* and the *Fakirs* came in large numbers into the Darjeeling Terai. However, their place of origin is unknown to us. Majumdar explains that after the battle of Buxar, the defeated soldiers became helpless and tried to leave the place where they were safe and wanted to get rid of the English. But the question was where the soldiers would go. At that time, Oudh was not a safe place for them, and the same applies to Bihar, Odisha and Bengal. Therefore, they had to select a place where the English had no influence, and they decided to stay at the Terai jungle, which was somewhat free from English influence till the 1850s. After taking shelter in Darjeeling Terai, some of these soldiers took service under the Raikats, Koches, and the Bhutanese Kings. They came to be known as *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs*. These people later fought battles against the English in favour of Bhutan, the Raikats and the Koches. Many of them plundered Subah Bengal, making this region their base. Some of them were called the *Giris*. (Majumdar 1977: 86-7). Many of them were engaged in trading activities and commerce with Bhutan through the route of Tibet. A prominent name in such activities is Purnna Giri Gossain, who is better referred to as Puran Giri Gossain in British records. (Majumdar 2009: 5). This is also supported by Dey in his book *Sirajer Putro O Bangsodherder Sandhane* (Dey 2012: 42-7). It is worth noting that the *Sannyasis* came to Bengal primarily to participate in bathing festivals. After passing through the territory of the Nawab of Oudh, they followed a route through northern Bihar and the borders of Nepal Terai. The *Sannyasis* most likely crossed the river Mahananda by several routes. So, it was in the late eighteenth century that eastern Morung or present Terai became the permanent home of the *Sannyasis*, which was at that time under the rule of Sikkim (Majumdar 1984: 42). Moreover, to save from the invasions of the *Sannyasis* and the *Fakirs* (Majumdar 1977: 87) the Sikkim Government provided them land to settle elsewhere in order to keep peace in the region. Some of them were *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* in the true sense, but most of them were not sages or ascetics. The landowners of Purnea, Dinajpur, and Rangpur regarded them as a danger and maintained a safe distance from them. On the other hand, the poor and needy people were much closer to them because they were the friends of the sufferers. The East India Company observed that in the battle of Cooch Behar, Baikunthapur and Bhutan with the English, there were forces composed of hired soldiers from among the *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* (Majumdar 1987: 69). Hamilton also observes that ‘...they [*Sannyasis*] plundered with the utmost barbarity and when pursued went to retire to Morung in the dominations of Nepal, where they found shelter and sale of their booty...Many still reside in Morung’ (see Ghosh 2010: 170). But it is interesting to note that during the struggle of Prithvi Narayan Shah with the Newar king, the *Gossain* and the *Fakir* merchants sided with the Newar *Raja*, Jayprakash. Even Muktananda and *Fakir* Ramdas were sent as emissaries to solicit English help on behalf of the Newar *Raja* in June 1767 against the ambitious Gurkha King, Prithvi Narayan. The Kinlock expedition was accordingly sent against Prithvi Narayan with the hope that adequate concessions for

Trans-Himalayan trade and for trade in Terai would be obtained for the Newar Raja. After the Nepal route was virtually closed, it was found that the commodities of Bengal were also conveyed into Tibet through the Terai. (Misra 1985: 33). The *Sannyasis-Fakirs'* attitude towards Prithvi Narayan Shah was presumably for his opinion that they (*Sannyasis-Fakirs*) were sucking all the profits of Nepal. He therefore never allows the *Gossains* and *Fakirs* who used to carry on a highly profitable trade between Bengal, Tibet and Nepal to stay in his country. Rather, they were ruthlessly expelled (Chaudhuri 1960: 40). In this connection it is to be mentioned that in 1766, Myrtle, an English official engaged by the Company in fir trade was killed along with his men by the *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* in the Terai region (Misra 1985: 22). From the above facts it is evident that the entire zone was rife with discontent during the late eighteenth century due to the new land revenue system and commercial policies of the Company, which occasioned serious economic and social dislocation by unseating some established *zamindars*, depeasantizing the settled agricultural communities, endangering the textile and silk industries and ruining the economic interest of the peddlers and itinerant traders. Armed depredations by the *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* within the Company's territory were a regular feature during the 1780-86 and they continued till 1800 (Roy Choudhury 1993: 210). In August 1776, the Fauzdar of Rangpur, Jainal Abedin, sought help from Reja Khan in order to maintain peace and internal security. He further informed him that, despite having a *Kotwal* in Rangpur, it was difficult to pay attention beyond the area of two miles. Reja Khan had written a letter to Warren Hastings, the then-Governor of Bengal, informing him about the helpless condition of security and internal administration of the area. Warren Hastings used forces against the *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* to maintain law and order. The strong measures of suppression of the East India Company had gradually stopped the raids of the *Sannyasis* and *Fakirs* in the region. But in the western part of Baikunthapur, a new problem arose with the progress of Prithvi Narayan Shah and his Gurkha army, who crossed the Mechi River and entered the Terai area of Darjeeling. Prithvi Narayan Shah had earlier made contact with Warren Hastings and expressed his wishes to occupy the Terai region, knowing well about the problem faced by the Company regarding the *Sannyasis*. He had mentioned that the *Sannyasis* would no longer create tensions in the region once it was occupied by the Gurkhas. But Hastings was doubtful and did not agree to the pretext of the Gurkhas to occupy the region by their excuse of eliminating the *Sannyasis*. But very soon the Company became engaged in the Cooch Behar-Bhutan war and could not pay attention towards the activities of Nepal. Taking advantage of the situation, the Gurkhas occupied the region of Terai (Majumdar 1987: 69-71) up to the river Mahananda.

After the British cession of Terai in 1850, it came into prominence and contact with other parts of India. During the Great Revolt of 1857, Yule, the then Commissioner of Bhagalpur, waits in Terai (from the mid of November to the end of December 1857) in a post between Siliguri and Pankhabari to arrest the sepoy who were expected to hide themselves in the dense forest of Terai (Roy Chaudhury 1965: 91). It is said that in early 1858 a good number

of fugitive rebels took refuge in the dense forest of Terai, among them who came subsequently, were the Begum of Lucknow and his son, Brijis Kadr, Nana Sahib, Bala Rao, Mammu Khan, Beni Madho and about fifty more of the principal leaders of the Great Revolt. However, the rebels suffered greatly in Terai due to sickness, and in September 1858, Nana Sahib was said to have fallen victim to Terai fever (Wright 1990: 64) and died. Though by the middle of the nineteenth century, Terai was regarded as one of the parts of India's unknown world, it was gradually explored and brought into the commercial map of the country under British rule.

Diverse Facets of Nationalism: The Age of Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience:

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Siliguri, with the establishment of the plantation economy, emerged as an important colonial economic centre. There was a huge inflow of population from the south and south-eastern parts of Bengal with the development of colonial infrastructure like railways, *kachari*, the hospital, telegraph and post office and other administrative departments. Therefore, due to job opportunities, a considerable number of educated middle-class people have been settled in this area, but their participation in the national movement was not that prominent. Most likely, the middle class depended on the British administrative structure for their existence, which can be counted as the main reason for their aloofness. Many ethnic communities, like Oraons and Mundas, have migrated to this region to work in the tea gardens. The Santhals were, however, recruited as agricultural labourers. The two indigenous groups in the Terai area, like Mechs and Dhimals, were forced to migrate towards Jalpaiguri and Nepal Terai, respectively. They were forced to give up their ethnic culture and living styles with the expansion of railways, the tea industry, and resultant deforestation. On the other hand, the major indigenous people of Terai, i.e. the Rajbanshi *jotedars*, were mostly economically affluent and rich agricultural farmers. They had already reached an understanding with the colonial government. Belonging mostly to the agricultural community, the Rajbanshi *jotedars* did not have the urge to participate in the national movement. For agricultural peasants, their immediate master was the *jotedars*. The *jotedary* system, which prevailed in Terai during the colonial period, in general, provided a strong socio-political structure that did not allow any kind of nationalist feeling. The importance of the Terai, besides having the tea gardens and being a frontier region, was strategically important as the British recruited the Gorkha soldiers who travelled from Nepal to Darjeeling through the Terai. Therefore, the British were keen to take steps to check the growth of the national movement in Terai. Furthermore, Darjeeling was a 'Non-Regulated' area; the Deputy Commissioner had the power to banish any suspected person from the area within the notice of 24 hours. The lawyers of the region, who were basically settlers, did not want to disturb their colonial masters in defending the natives (Basu 1990: 52). Despite these factors, there was a substantial growth of nationalism in this region, though that held quite late and in a scattered form, but it literally moved the people of Terai.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the predominant section of the population of Terai, i.e. the Rajbanshis, were not much affected by the expansion of the tea gardens. In fact, the tea labourers of Terai, namely Oraon, Munda, etc., had migrated from Chotanagpur and Santal Pargans to this region, and deforested the jungles and converted the fallow lands into agricultural ones. On the other hand, a good number of Bengali capitalists had invested in the tea gardens from the first decade of the twentieth century, following the path of the European planters. As a result, there was a tendency to acquire land for tea cultivation. Apart from the Government *khas* land and forest land, most of the agricultural land was in the hands of Rajbanshi *jotedars* (Chaudhury 1985: 49-50). Due to low population density and abundance of land, both the buyers and sellers of the land benefited. Yet the different magazines and periodicals of the Rajbanshis had expressed in numerous articles about the disadvantages and worse effects of tea gardens in the Terai region. There were protests against the establishment and growth of the tea gardens in the writings of the Rajbanshi periodicals, and the reason was mainly the deteriorating economic condition of the community. It is important to cite an example of such writing (in Bengali):

“Teraite ekta nutun sara pariachhe. Nutun cha bagan hoitechhe. Ehate janasadharaner subidha hoibe, r paramukhapekshi hoe thakite hoibe na. Arthalovei kok kinba daye pariyai hok Teraibaseer dristi ekhan arther dike pariachhe. Kajei companyder o jamir avab haitechhe na. Tahara jaler mato artho dhalitechhen Kintu Ami boli; he Teraibasi dhanee bhadramahodayagan, apnader toh arther pipasa mitilo. Kintu oi j; apnader bikrito jomita shata shata krishijibira rahiachhe, jara cha baganer kaj ghunakshareo jane na, nirakshar, langal o garu jorai jader jeebika nirbaher ekmatra sambal ba upai ebong jara purba purush theke dukkho kaster shata nirjatan sajjho kariao apan apan matribhumi ba janmabhumi vitatuku pranpane aglaia dharia rahiachhe- tahader janno kono byabastha kariachhen ki? Cha company hoitechhe. Tader ekhan chiradiner mato janmabhumi ba paitrik bhumir maya kataia ekhaan hoite annotro saria parite hoibe.”¹⁸ (Kshatriya vol-VI, 1332 B.S)

[Free English translation: There is a new change in Terai. New tea gardens are opened. The common people will benefit, and they will not be dependent on others. Either out of greed for money or due to compulsion, the people of Terai have sided towards money. So, there is no absence of land for tea garden companies. They are circulating money like water..... But I say that you, the rich *bhadramahodayagan* of Terai, have already fulfilled your thirst for money. But there are many agricultural labourers who are cultivating the land and attached to it as their ancestral homeland without any knowledge about the work in the tea garden, those who only depend on plough and cattle, *bhadramahodayagan* have you thought of any alternative subsistence for them? With the expansion of the tea gardens, they

have to leave their motherland and migrate to some other places for their livelihood.]

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Rajbanshi *jotedars* had sold their lands to the newly rising Bengali capitalist class, who were tea garden owners, as a result of which the Rajbanshi cultivators had become landless. Actually, the then Rajbanshi social leaders wanted to detach their community from the tea gardens by propagating their tradition, aristocracy and pride (Guha 1986: 42). Again, it is found that due to the expansion of the tea gardens in the Terai, there was a huge cutting down of trees and clearing of jungles. As a result of the deforestation in this region, the ecological balance has been significantly disturbed. Monsoon and rainfall had decreased. Due to the huge transfer of agricultural lands to the tea garden owners, and the resultant decreasing rainfall, the Rajbanshi *jotedars* had expressed their discontent regarding the deforestation and disturbed ecological balance to the British Colonial Authority in the revenue bid meeting (Mitra 1927: 7). Moreover, the incident as mentioned earlier proves the fact that the Rajbanshis of the Terai were considerable aware and concerned about the environment issues of the region. It is interesting to note that such an incident of environmental awareness and a protest meeting for it had occurred in the early twentieth century, and it was the only protest against the Colonial Government in the entire north Bengal till that period. On the other hand, the British Government had also shown eagerness to maintain the ecological balance, leading them to decide to deforest to a limited extent for the tea garden expansion and to forbid the construction of brick houses in the Terai and hills. The construction of houses was restricted, and passages to channel water were built. In fact, the British clearly understood that deforestation would lead to less rainfall and their policy of green colonialism in terms of tea gardens would also decline (Ganguli 2002: 451).

During the days of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the entire Darjeeling district, including the Terai region, remained almost silent. However, some activities were noticed in the Darjeeling hills under the leadership of Dalbahadur Giri, who was the first to deliver a lecture in favour of the movement among the Nepali communities. He was also known as '*Parbatya Gandhi*'. In Siliguri, some persons also tried to break the 144 under the leadership of Sieu Mangal Singh. The people of Terai, irrespective of their ethnic and linguistic individualities, had participated and raised their voices against the British, and they were arrested. To felicitate these unknown freedom fighters, a meeting was held in front of the Siliguri court, which was spontaneously attended by the people of the region. Further, when the national leaders were put on trial in Siliguri court and transferred from Jalpaiguri to Siliguri prison, the town station of Siliguri was filled with many people who were eager to take a look at their leaders, with the spirit of nationalism (Majumdar 1973: 26). Due to Chittaranjan Das's illness Gandhiji took the responsibility to visit him in Darjeeling in 1925 and on his way back to Jalpaiguri on 9th June Gandhiji received hospitality at Sieu Mangal Singh's house (Ghatak 1389 B.S: 27). At that time Gandhiji addressed a meeting held in Tilak Maidan (now known as Kanchanjunga Stadium)

describing the objectives of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The people of Terai soon became engrossed by a song:

*“Gandhi Raja ailoo dyashe,
Larai kare Shyal Dase.
Porio na reshmi churi
R bilaitee saree.”* (Chaudhury 1983: 5)

[Note: Shyal Dase here refers to C.R. Das]

[Free English translation: Gandhi Raja came into our country; C.R. Das is fighting with the British Government. Do not wear colourful fine bangles and discard foreign *sarees*.]

Sometime after Gandhiji visited Darjeeling on 16th June, C.R. Das expired in Darjeeling and his dead body was brought to Sukna station, and from Sukna station to Siliguri town station. A huge crowd gathered, and irrespective of their diverse ethnicities and creeds, displayed a nationalistic and anti-colonial spirit. A stationary shop was established during this period in Siliguri under the name of C.R. Das better known as ‘*Deshbandhu Bhandar*’ (Ghatak 1389 B.S: 27) During the Non-Cooperation Movement another important leader, emerged from Terai, was Laban Singha, popularly known as ‘*Swadesi Dacoit*’ (Ghosh and Das 2009: 64). His naming was prompted by his character of leading dacoity in the residence of rich *jotedars* and *Mahajans* and distributing the booties among the poor and needy (Majumdar 1973: 28). It is still a mystery that where exactly Laban Singha used to live. He tried to create a strong public opinion among the Rajbhanshis against the colonial rule in and around the Atharkhai region. By attacking the convoys of the British, looting the British treasury, taking away the money that the British used to send to Darjeeling from Siliguri, and attacking those who suddenly became rich by exploiting the common people, he made his anti-colonial stance very clear in Terai. Police tried for a long time but could not get a grip on Laban Singha. Finally, the British captured Laban Singha by recruiting several spies in the Matigara-Atharkhai region. He was captured in 1924, and the trial began in the Siliguri Court. Without providing any proper legal system, he was hanged quickly in the same year in the Siliguri Jail (Dasgupta 1420 B.S: 36).

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-1932, though, affected the Darjeeling district and Terai area much later, but the initial impact was not absent. Ghosh, in an interview with the freedom fighter Samarendra Dutta Roy, got information that there were 65 members from Darjeeling who participated in a meeting during the Civil Disobedience Movement in Calcutta. They were under the leadership of Sieu Mangal Shing. However, most of them were residents of Kalimpong (Ghosh and Das 2009: 65).

Besides these, there was Nagendra Nath Roy from Tarbandha, better known as ‘*Tarbandha Gandhi*’, Harshabardhan Das of Phansidewa, Pathar Singha of Thikni Kata *jote*, who also contributed to and participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement (Chaudhury 1985: 58). The 1930s (8th May 1934) witnessed the rise of extremism in the national movement

of Darjeeling. One incident of revolutionary extremism, i.e., an attempt to murder Sir John Anderson, the then Governor of Bengal, in the Racecourse Ground near Lebong of Darjeeling, created a nationalistic sensation among the people of Terai (Ghosh and Das 2009: 66). Despite the severe police investigation, they were unable to arrest the major suspects, namely Ujjal Majumdar and Monoranjan Banerjee. They were successful in escaping from Siliguri by train named North Bengal Express to Calcutta (Bose 1984: 15). They were later arrested by the police. However, this incident led to different forms of repercussion in the town of Siliguri, mainly conducted by the police. The police organized raids and searches in the residences of Lakhinarayan Majumdar, the then President of the Siliguri Union Board, Annanda Charan Bagchi, Bhagabati Lal Agarwala, Sieu Mangal Singh and others (Ghosh and Das 2009: 67). Furthermore, Bengali youths both girls and boys within the age of 14-40 were forcefully given 'Identity Cards' which were red, yellow and white. The holders of the red cards had to appear at the police station every day. White card holders were the least suspect, but the yellow card holders were required to appear before the police station once a week (Bose 1984: 15). Birendra Roy Sarkar, the then secretary of the '*Terai Jotedars Samittee*' had strongly protested against this system and on 14th May 1934, Siliguri Bar Association and a group of Rajbanshi people had organized a protest meeting. In the early thirties of the past century (1931), Sieu Mangal Singh and Satin Sen of Barishal had claimed to form the Darjeeling District Congress of Siliguri. Since the Darjeeling Congress Committee was already formed in 1925 at Kalimpong, the establishment of a separate branch in Siliguri led to differences between the two sections of the Congress Committee in the district of Darjeeling. Ultimately, in November 1931, the leadership of Provincial Bengal approved the Siliguri office as the headquarter of the Congress Committee in Darjeeling district (Ghosh and Das 2009: 58-67). Nevertheless, in spite of the above differences, opinions and circumstances, one important incident occurred in the Matigara areas of Terai during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Sieu Mangal Singh, the pioneer Congress leader and freedom fighter of Terai, delivered his lecture in favour of the Indian freedom struggle in the Matigara *hat*. The poor peasants and the tea workers of Terai generally used to follow his lecture silently, but one day these peace-loving people revolted and looted the *goddis* of the *Mahajans*. Though there was no violent political motivation behind this incident, a large number of police were posted, and many male and female workers were arrested, and they were put in jail for a long time (Majumdar 1973: 27).

Mass Participation in the Quit India Movement:

The people of Terai were immensely enthusiastic and courageous to participate in the Quit India Movement. But there is a little controversy regarding the starting date of the Quit India Movement in Siliguri sub-division¹. Though on the eve of the movement, the British

¹ The popular writers like Nirmal Chandra Chudhuri (*Swadhinata Sangramae Rajbanshi Samproday*, Uttarbanga Annusandhan Samiti, Jalpaiguri, 1985, p. 58) and Bijay Chandra Ghatak

Government arrested Sieu Mangal Singh and Brijendranath Basu Roy Choudhury on 16th August 1942. After the arrest of the primary leaders, Bireswar Majumdar, Pratul Maitra, Dhirendranath Roy and many others took over the charges to organize the Quit India Movement in Siliguri. On 9th (or 8th) September 1942 (Ghosh and Das 2009: 99-100) Charu Majumder, Bireswar Majumdar took the leadership to organize a procession (Souvenir 2009: 116) of 1000 men and women shouting slogans ‘*Engraj Bharat Charo*’ (English Leave India), ‘*Union Jack Nipat Jao*’ (Union Jack Decline) etc., in Siliguri town. The procession went around the town, and then the protesters gathered at the Siliguri police station. The procession turned violent gradually as some men in the rally carried *lathis* and bamboo sticks and others started to throw stones and bricks at the police station. The situation further deteriorated and, therefore, the then Sub Divisional Officer K.K. Ghosh ordered fire to be fired at the crowd (Basu 1990: 66-7). The Government Officials said that in this incident, 4 persons were killed, and 14 persons were wounded (Raychaudhury 1993: 39). But according to an eyewitness of the incident, 7 or 8 people were killed by the police (Basu 1990: 67). Among those the body of Chabila Singha and Mahabir Singha were identified and the people who were wounded in this incident were Kartik Ghosh, Hajari Beniya, Mahadev Banedial and many others. Haridas Majumdar, Manmohun Roy, Santosh Kumar Das, Sabitri Sengupta, Baradakanta Bhattacharjee, K. N. Chatterjee (Babupara), Asutosh Biswas, Bijaykrishna Ghosh (Deshbandhupara), Sunil Kumar Mukherjee (Millan Pally), Adhir Kumar Sanyal and Nirmal Bhusan Roy (Mahananda Para), Chittadayal Chakrobatri (Hakimpara), Dr. Brojendranath Basu Roy Choudhury’s daughter Sita Basu Roy Choudhury, Kalidasi Sengupta, Dr. Gopal Chandra Ghosh and many others had participated in this rally against the British during Quit India Movement at Siliguri. Among the students of Siliguri Boys’ High School who participated in this rally, Dilip Kumar Roy Sarkar, Upendranath Das, and Dipendranath Roy are prominent names (Ghosh and Das 2009: 100). Besides these names, there were Chaitanya Sannyasi and his wife Abueshwari Sannyasi of Mallaguri, Tarkchandra Roy Sarkar, Amritalal Roy Sarkar and Balendranath Roy Sarkar of Kharibari, Kunjalal Malakar of Atharkhai, Chandrakanta Singha and others who had participated from the Terai region in the Quit India Movement (Chaudhury 1985: 58).

The Era of World War II:

Meanwhile, there was the outbreak of World War II, which was followed by the Bengal Famine in 1943. The Colonial Government tried to enact a law by which food grains could be collected (procurement) from the *jotedars* of the Terai to provide the famine-stricken areas. The *jotedars* of Terai at this time became very angry, and they protested against the colonial government as they were the worst sufferers of this decision. In this situation, to

(*Siliguri Sahorer Itibritoo*, Jaghreetee Press, Jalpaiguri, 1389 B.S, p. 28) said that the Quit India Movement in Siliguri was started on 05.09.1942, but the print media states that it was started on 09.09.1942 (*Amrito Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, Dated: 15th September, 1942).

protect themselves, the *jotedars* of Terai formed the '*Terai Mangal Samiti*'. The first elected President of the *Samiti* was Digendranath Roy Sarkar from Siliguri, and Nagendranath Roy Sarkar from Tarbandha became the Secretary. Besides, Amar Roy from Ambari, Tarakchandra Roy Sarkar from Kharibari and many others became the members of the '*Terai Mangal Samiti*' (Chaudhury 1985: 59). *Samiti* created a harmonious relationship between the *jotedars* and the tenants or agricultural labourers and it became a successful project as the Tebhaga Movement proved not very effective in the Terai region of Darjeeling district (Ghosh and Das 2009: 99-100). Mukherji observes that the first peasant committee, under the inspiration of the communist workers, was established in the Terai in a place called Patharghata in 1946. Even as the Tebhaga Movement came to an end in Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur districts, this newly established committee under the leadership of the three brothers Atin, Nripen and Souren Bose and Bandhan Oraon asked for two-thirds share of crops for the *adhiars* on the *khamar* of Bhagwan Dayal Singh, a big *jotedar* who hails from Uttar Pradesh. The police was called, seven arrests were made, and the leaders were forced to sign a bond under section 107 of the Indian Penal Code undertaking to refrain from such activity in that region (Mukherji 1987: 1614) On the other hand, according to Kalipada Dhar, a veteran fighter of Terai states that the Tebhaga Movement was restricted up to Kamlabagan and Phansidewa areas in Terai (Ghosh and Das 2009: 81). But the official records declares that Tebhaga Movement was organized by the communists in December 1946 and it had spread to Union numbers 4, 5 and 6 of the Siliguri town, and Bagdogra and Naxalbari under Kharibari *thana* (Das 2002: 151).

Due to the feudal structure of the social and economic system and scanty population, the growth of the national movement and its participation were not so strong before the 1942 Quit India Movement. In the Siliguri *thana* and in the nearby areas, the participants were mostly from the middle class. There were also women and participants from the lower classes, like workers, peasants, which is remarkable. During the time of the Quit India Movement, there were many freedom fighters who sacrificed themselves for independence. It, however, revealed the growth of political unity and served as a preparation ground for further movement in the Terai.

On the other hand, in the northern part of the river Mahananda in Terai, there was a wide extent of tea gardens. The access to the tea gardens for the freedom fighters was difficult, and due to strong vigilance by the *bagan chaukidars*, no secret political activities could be done in the small tea gardens of Terai. Even some of the planters used to keep '*gunddabahinee*' to ruthlessly eliminate any attempt to organize any political movement in the tea gardens. The 'North Bengal Mounted Rifles', a regiment maintained by the British planters, was unceremoniously disbanded on 14th August 1947, i.e., the day before Indian Independence (Bhowmik 1981: 139).

Due to the power and pressure of the European tea planters on the administration, there was no way for any black man to become a Sub-Divisional Head. Despite all these restrictions, one day, a white manager of a tea garden in Terai was beaten by a Bengali

doctor with a bunch of sticks in protest against his boundless arrogance. A case was filed against the doctor in the sub-divisional court, and he was sentenced in the trial (Chaudhury 1985: 53). However, the late formation of the INC and the Communist Party of India's wings in Terai was responsible for the delay in organizing any political movements in this area. Moreover, the Congress Committee of Siliguri was dominated by the Indian Tea Planters and rich *jotedars* of Terai. These influential *jotedars* and tea planters did not allow the INC activists to perform any political activities in the tea gardens as well as the agricultural belt in Terai, as they were performing in Assam and the Dooars region. This certainly indicates the difference in attitude of the INC based on class cooperation during the colonial period. The so-called Bengali *bhadralok* class of Siliguri town, particularly for their superior mentality, kept themselves aloof from the Rajbanshis and the labourers of the tea garden (Majumdar 1973: 17-18). During the mid-forties of the past century, the communist cadres of Terai were engaged to mobilize the peasants and the tea workers under one umbrella. Among them, Bhupen Bhowmik and the three Bose brothers were prominent. At that time, forty workers and their families of a European tea garden of Terai named Ganggaram were evicted, and the evicted families of the said garden appealed to the communist cadres of Terai for help. But no such help, even a protest was made by the communists against the authority of the said garden (Roy 1987: 146). This incident indicates that till the Independence of India, the communists could not hold strong roots in the rural areas of Terai. Though after this incident, Bhupen Bhowmik, with the help of a *sardar*, Jaladhar by name, tried to form a union for the workers of Merry View Tea Estate. But the management of the garden came to know all these secret developments, and they took some measures against the participants. Sabrati Mia, a leading initiator in this respect, was suspended immediately and was driven out of the garden. The commissions of *Sardar* Jaladhar for his supplying coolie in the garden were stopped, and he was told not to enter the garden in the near future (Roy 1987: 147). Thus, the effort to form a union in the tea garden areas of Terai could not be materialized. In the meantime, the General Election came closer, and the Siliguri Bidhan Sabha was formed by incorporating Rajganj of Jalpaiguri and the Siliguri *thana* region. A peasant leader of the Tebhaga movement, Radha Mohan Barman, contested in the election in favour of the Communist Party of India against the INC candidate of Jalpaiguri, Raja Prasanna Dev Raikat. Raja Prasanna Dev Raikat won the election, but it allowed the communists to form a '*Kisan Samiti*' in the Darjeeling Terai. This type of incident in the Terai created ideological differences among the communist cadres in the later period, and a group led by Charu Majumder, Kanu Sanyal and many others shaped a historic Naxalbari Movement in the Terai after Chinese aggression in 1962 (Bose 1403 B.S: 10).

All references to the *Sannyasi* uprising during the pre-Independence period were products of either nationalist sentiments or the response to imperialism. The *Sannyasi* resistance, which basically originated in the northern part of Bengal, was the first in the long chain of freedom struggles against the British subjugation and imperialism (Misra 2023: 14). The

historians respectfully ignored the significance of the event as patriotism; rather, they studied this just as an agrarian unrest. After 1857, the Indian freedom struggle gained its momentum in two different ways; one was led by the nationalist revolutionaries and the other by the Indian National Congress based on 'Peace, Prayer and Petition'. In northern Bengal, the *Anushilan Samiti*, *Kshatriya Samiti*, *Brati Samiti*, and a few other revolutionary organizations were actively engaged in the Indian freedom struggle. Their branches were active in Malda, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Dinajpur. In Terai, some revolutionaries like Satyendranath Majumder, Mohanbabu, Jadubabu were actively engaged with *Anushilan Samiti*, though there was no official branch in Terai (Dasgupta 1420 B.S: 34). On this occasion, one incident should be mentioned here. In April 1908, Jatindranath Mukherjee (popularly known as Bagha Jatin), on his way to Darjeeling, confronted and beat four police officers at Siliguri Town Station, when these four police officers were making fun of a thirsty passenger, who was searching for water. Jatindranath solely handled and laid the four officials on the platform within a few minutes, and Captain Murphy, Lieutenant Somerville somehow managed to escape. Later, they ran away to the court for the filing of a case against Jatindranath (Ghosh 1986: 15-16). The Swadeshi movement against the partition of Bengal received a positive response in several regions of North Bengal. With the formation of several National Schools, Cooperative Banks, Technical Schools and boycotting the foreign goods, the movement gained its mass character under the leadership of Binay Kumar Sarkar, Akshay Kumar Maitreya, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Girija Nath Roy, etc., in other parts of Northern Bengal, but not so much in Terai. In the 1920s, the freedom movement, at least in this region, had developed some special character. The organizational activities of the Indian National Congress in this part of Bengal started not before the 1920s, and even after the 1930s, their organization was not well connected with the masses. It is clear from the government records of the late 1920s and 1930s that a good number of Rajbanshis and various ethnic communities spontaneously participated in the freedom movement against the British without having any connection to mainstream politics.

The freedom movement of Siliguri has different currents and trends, some may be called 'mainstream' currents i.e., the movement led by Indian National Congress under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi and others may be 'non-mainstream' i.e., led by Laban Singh's agitation, a local Rajbanshi leader against the oppression of colonial rule or movement led by some ordinary leaders against the operation and injustice meted out to labourers in the tea estates of Terai or leaders like Satyendranath Majumder, once a Gandhian follower adopted a revolutionary method and sent to Cellular Jail of Andaman, and for that matter, Tebhaga movement by some poor peasants against the landlord or *joteders*, *mahajans* or colonial administration. So, in Siliguri, the freedom movement did not come suddenly and was not one-centric. Diverse paths and many ideologies united with the same goal of 'freedom', whether 'mainstream' or 'non-mainstream'. Not following the mainstream movements does not negate the fact that the Terai region has not courageously fought the battle for patriotism or nationalism. And even with the mainstream movements in the

region, there always existed a parallel movement, which adopted indigenous methods and techniques in its protest against the imperialist force. Antonio Gramsci mentioned, when there are big movements, there are also some small movements, which historians either ignored or did not know about. Erick Strokes also observes that ignoring the 'root' of the movement and the 'branch' of the movement, especially those who are moving secretly, remain ignored in mainstream historical writing.

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