

Tinbigha Movement in Northern part of West Bengal: A Historical Overview

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Abstract:

After second World war, many countries obtained independence. The borders of each country were fixed. but in some countries, the borders were not fixed geographically. As a result, Border issues became more sensitive. There was a corridor namely Tin-bigha in southern part of North Bengal in West Bengal. The Tin Bigha Corridor, a piece of land belonged to India. This land connects with the Bangladeshi enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota. The Dahagram and Angarpota belonged to Bangladesh that's situated on the border side of West Bengal and Bangladesh. This corridor was leased to Bangladesh in 1992. Three agreement namely Land Boundary Agreement 1974, Land Boundary Agreement protocols 2011, finally Land Boundary Agreement of 2015 has been signed between the two countries-India and Bangladesh, but this border issue has not yet been resolved.

The Tin Bigha area was a fertile agricultural region with a high concentration of peasant cultivators. The government's decision to acquire land for the border fence led to widespread resentment among the peasants, who feared loss of livelihood and displacement. The Tin Bigha movement was a peasant movement that took place in the 1990s in West Bengal, India. The movement was a protest against the acquisition of land by the government for the construction of a border fence along the India-Bangladesh border.

Keywords: Tinbigha Movement, land issues, Border Issues, Boundary Dispute, Enclave problem

Introduction

In the last two decades of the 20th century, there was a stir in Cooch Behar district over 'Tinbigha' issue. Not only this district, this 'Tinbigha' left the country and became the subject of discussion at the national as well as international level. 'Tinbigha' is an undivided land in Mekhliganj subdivision of Cooch Behar district. Its area is 178085 square meters. The road that goes from Mekhliganj city to Kuchlibari, this road has to go 'Tinbigha'. The Tinbigha corridor has been created to connect Dahgram and Angarpota enclaves with the mainland of Bangladesh. People of Bangladesh are traveling by road along this corridor of east-west. As a result, the Bangladesh government is able to exercise its control over two of its territories namely Dahagram and Angarpota Mauza. On the other hand, Indian people can travel freely through the North-South roads. At present, tourists from home and abroad are coming to Tinbigha corridor and are amazed by the corridor. But the tumultuous historical context that was created with this three-bigha corridor in the course of time seems to be gradually fading into oblivion. Before discussing that tumultuous historical context, let us shed some light on the geographical location of the Tinbigha Corridor. As discussed earlier, the Tinbigha corridor is located in Mekhliganj subdivision along the

Bangladesh border on the three sides of this subdivision. Kuchlibari is an area like Kolsi¹ in the subdivision. Bangladesh surrounds Kuchlibari area. The neck part of the pitcher is Tin bigha. The people of the 28 mauzas of Kuchlibari Gram Panchayat communicates with the rest of the country through this narrow stretch: Phulkadabari to the north and Kuchlibari to the south of the Tinbigha Corridor. These are Indian territories. Teesta River flows through the southwest side of Kuchlibari. To the east of the corridor is Panbari of Bangladesh, and to the west are Dahagram and Angarpota, which are enclaves of Bangladesh.

Objective of the Study: The main objectives of the study are

1. To know the boundary dispute issues faced by the two countries- India and Bangladesh
2. To identify the government's role in rehabilitations of miserable people of both countries

Methodology: The study is based on historical, descriptive and analytical in nature. The study is primarily based on secondary sources which includes books, articles, journals, thesis, dissertation, seminar proceedings, and published materials on internet.

Review of Literature:

Khandakar Hasan Mahmud and Md. Mizanur Rahaman (2007) in their article entitled as **India - Bangladesh Enclaves and Present Status of Human Development: A Case Study of Dahagram and Angarpota Enclaves** has given a detail picture of three structure of Enclaves between Bangladesh and India. Their study revealed that the level of human development in the enclave is very poor and on the World Bank's development diamond it shows a clear deprivation in all four dimensions of human rights.

Sanjoy Bhardwaj (2015) in his article entitled as **India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement: Ramifications for India's security** has described the land boundary dispute and its nature between India and Bangladesh. The author has opined that numerous challenges will have to be face when the question of implementation of LBA will arise. He also argued that the exchange of adversely possessed land and successful rehabilitation of the people of the enclaves, giving them full citizenship rights, will be great test for the central as well as state governments.

Sanjib Sarder (2021) in his article titled as **History of Enclave Exchange between India and Bangladesh and the future challenges of Rehabilitation** discusses why the governments of both countries have not been able to solve their problems so far as dispute knowing about the miserable life of the enclave dwellers. He opines that the biggest challenges now to integrate these people, who have been deprived of all basic rights for generation, into the mainstream. He also suggests that proper planning, short term, medium term and long- term development plans are needed to ensure services provided by the state, including food security, housing, health care, employment, transportation and communications.

Rup Kumar Barman (2024) in his book **The Enclave of the India – Bangladesh Border: History, Statelessness and Bilateral Relations** examined the nature of statelessness in the India-Bangladesh enclaves. The book deals with the background and causative factors for the origin and evolution of these in a specific geographical region of pre-colonial North Bengal. The author studies the ways in which colonial intervention in this region created a administrative complications in the enclaves and critically in resolving the boundary disputes. The author explained that India and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) have inherited a different category of experience of statelessness and contested citizenship, particularly in their common border at the Cooch Behar-Rangpur and Jalpaiguri-Panchagarh sectors. The

inhabitants of Indian enclaves (located in Bangladesh) and Bangladeshi enclaves (situated in India) had experienced a miserable life with statelessness, contested citizenship, and violation of human rights.

Discussion and Analysis:

Land Boundary Agreement- 1974:

On May 16, 1974, a land boundary agreement took place between Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This agreement is known as 'Indira-Mujib Pact'. The agreement stated that the southern half of South Berubari Union No. 12 and adjoining enclaves, with an area of approximately 2.64 square miles, shall remain with India, and in return Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves shall be in the hands of Bangladesh. To connect Daha village with Panbari Mauza [Thana-Patgram] of Bangladesh. Therefore, India will lease an area of 178,085 meters near Tinbigha to Bangladesh on a perpetual basis. As a result of this agreement, the Berubari issue was resolved, but the controversy over the lease of the Tinbigha Corridor started. Along with this, India-Bangladesh continues to discuss the terms and conditions of the Three Bigha Corridor lease. Finally, there was a discussion between Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Bangladesh President Hussain Mohammad Ershad. In those discussions, the Indira-Mujib Pact of 1974 was reconsidered and necessary steps were taken for its implementation. Then Indian Foreign Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.R. The 'Tin Bigha Perpetual Lease Terms' were finalized on 7th October 1982 in Samsuddoha. It was signed by the foreign ministers of the two countries.

Let's us look at the terms of the Tinbigha Treaty:

1. The aforesaid area shall be leased in perpetuity to connect Dahagram and Angarpota with Panbari Mauza [Thana-Patgram] so that Bangladesh can exercise sovereignty over Dahagram and Angarpota.
2. India will retain sovereignty over the leased area. The annual rent of the leased area will be one Bangladeshi taka only. However, Bangladesh does not have to pay this tax and the Government of India waives its right to claim this tax.
3. Bangladesh shall have inviolable right and right to use the Perpetual Lease Area for the purposes mentioned in paragraph 1 above.
4. Police, paramilitary and military personnel will have the right to free and unhindered movement of their weapons, ammunition, equipment and supplies within the leased area and will not be required to carry passports or travel documents. Bangladeshi goods can move freely through the leased area. There will also be no need to pay customs duty, tax or any other levy or transit charge.
5. Indian citizens, police, paramilitary and military personnel will have the right to free and unhindered movement of their arms, ammunition, equipment and supplies in both directions within the lease area. Indian goods can move freely through the leased area. The existing road through the middle of the corridor will be used for such traffic. India may, if necessary, construct roads over the leased area or through subsoil for its own use only in such a manner
6. that the movement of citizens and goods of Bangladesh referred to in paragraphs 1 and 4 is not obstructed in any way
7. The two governments will cooperate in erecting permanent signs around the leased area and fencing where necessary.
8. Both India and Bangladesh may lay cables, electric lines, water and sewerage pipes over the leased area or underground without creating any obstacle to the movement of citizens or goods of any of the countries referred to in paragraphs 4 and 5.

9. The Deputy Commissioners of Rangpur [Bangladesh] and Cooch Behar [India] will be entrusted with the execution of the terms of the lease. In case of disagreement on any matter, they will inform their respective governments for settlement of the matter.

If a Bangladeshi Indian citizen is involved in any criminal activity in the leased area, the law enforcement agencies of the concerned person's home country will take action in accordance with the national law of that country. If nationals of the both countries are involved in any incidents in the leased areas, the law enforcement agencies present at the scene will take necessary measures to restore law and order; immediate action will be taken to immediately contact the law enforcement agencies of the other country. In that case any Indian national apprehended by law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh shall be immediately handed over to the Indian side and similarly any Bangladeshi national apprehended by Indian law enforcement agencies shall be forthwith handed over to Bangladeshi side. The remaining share of the leased area will be held by India.

Key points:

The Land Boundary Agreement was signed on May 16, 1974 to solve the problems in the complex border demarcation. Bangladesh allowed the agreement, but India didn't. Because it was related to seceding territory as well as indicating those areas on the ground. Under the 1974 agreement, India would retain half of Berubari Union No. Twelve. Bangladesh would keep the Dahagram as well as Angarpota enclaves. India would lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh the so-called "Tin Bigha Corridor" to attached Dahagram and Angarpota to the Bangla mainland. The 1974 LBA was implemented in full - even though India did not support it except for three issues related to un-demarcated land boundary of approximately 6.1 kilometers in three sectors: - like A. Daikhata-56 (West Bengal), B. Muhuri River-Belonia (Tripura) and C. Lathitila- Dumabari (Assam); exchange of enclaves. India did not support this agreement for the last 3 decades. This agreement Objectives is proposed to exchange of possessions as well as enclaves. Land Boundary Agreement protocols 2011 Key points: this are

1. The 2011 Protocol was a revision to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement between two countries.
2. The protocol was built in order to address the long-standing land boundary matters between the India and Bangladesh.
3. The protocol attempts to the exchange of enclaves and address humanitarian issues.
4. The protocol was implemented through a sketch map. That was jointly prepared as well as agreed upon in August 2011.

Land Boundary Agreement 2015:

Key points:

1. **Enclaves Exchange:** India transferred 111(one hundred eleven) enclaves to Bangladesh as well as Bangladesh transferred 51 (fifty -one) enclaves to India.
2. **Citizenship:** According to agreement granted citizenship to enclave residents in the state where they lived. And also gave them the option to choose citizenship in either country.
3. **Possession of land:** India received 2,777.038 acres of land from Bangladesh. And transferred 2,267.682 acres of land to Bangladesh. Unresolved issues: The Land boundary agreement to unresolved three issues.

Factors behind the Tinbigha Movement:

There were some important factors behind the Tin Bigha movement:

Land acquisition: The government's decision to acquire land without providing adequate compensation or rehabilitation led to widespread resentment

Lack of consensus: The government did not consult with the affected communities before acquiring their land, leading to feelings of marginalization and exclusion

Economic insecurity: The loss of land and livelihoods threatened the economic security of the affected communities

Key issues of the Tin Bigha Movement:

The Tin Bigha corridor is problematic. we found that there are some problematic issues:

Initial protests (1990-1991): Peasants and landless labourers began protesting against the land acquisition, blocking roads and demonstrating in front of government offices.

Police oppression (1991): The police responded to the protests with force, leading to injuries and arrests of many people.

Constriction of the Tin Bigha Krishi Bachao Committee (1991): A committee was formed to coordinate the protests and negotiate with the government.

Long march and gherao (1992): The Protesters marched from Tin Bigha to Kolkata and gheraoed (surrounded) the state secretariat, demanding a meeting with the chief minister.

Effect of the Movement Partial success: The government agreed to provide some compensation and rehabilitation to the affected communities.

Increased consciousness: The movement raised awareness about the issues faced by peasants and landless labourers in India.

Empowerment of marginalized communities: The movement empowered marginalized communities to assert their rights and challenge government decisions.

Conclusion:

The Tin Bigha movement was a significant peasant movement in India that highlighted the issues faced by peasants and landless labourers. The movement achieved partial success and raised awareness about the importance of consultation, adequate compensation, and rehabilitation. The movement also empowered marginalized communities to assert their rights and also challenged government decision.

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