

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF BARGA SYSTEM ORIGINS AND BARGADARS PROBLEMS IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT:

There is no way to pinpoint the exact beginnings of the barga system. The final settlement reports and any other related publications lack reliable information on this point. In an effort to shed some light on the situation, requests for previous cess revaluation records were filed at the district collectorate. It was discovered that there were no such papers available for any time frame prior to 1911. The report of the Land Revenue Commission, which was established by the administration of Bengal that was not separated in 1938, is the only existing source that covers this topic in some detail. According to paragraph 16, the barga system may have its roots as far back as when the Aryans reached this land and began to practise agriculture. In this article, historical analysis of Barga system origins and bargadars problems in Indian context has been discussed.

Keywords: Barga, Bargadars, India

INTRODUCTION:

In India, sharecropping has been practised since the dawn of time. In the fifth century B.C., Buddhist sharecroppers and monks worked together to produce land for monasteries and universities under half-share agreements. [1]

Buddhism forbade monks from directly engaging in agriculture, although sharecropping was still an option because farming was required for survival. Ancient Hindu legal texts, such as Manu, chapter IV, sloka 166, suggest that non-cultivating landlords sublet their lands in exchange for a portion of the harvest. Chapter XXVI of the Arthashastra of Kautilya, which outlined the land system during the Maurya Empire from 321 to 297 B.C., explains that farmers were employed on share contracts on royal or government fields. While farmers who just contributed their labour received a quarter or a fifth of the output, those who brought their own seeds and cattle received half of the crop. On territories under their direct control, regional governors, chiefs, and revenue collectors used a kind of serfdom that was similar to sharecropping in later decades. These serfs were discovered in Vishnupur, a village in Dinajpur, Bengal, where they paid their Hindu lords a share of the crop. [2]

Since there were many different types of tenancies in place throughout the Mughal era, commodity production and its corollary, individual landholding, must have obviously ruled out any kind of equality in the village, according to Irfan Habib. While there was usually land available, the ability of a cultivator to cultivate a plot or expand the cultivation of wasteland depended on the availability of other resources like seed, animals, and money. It is not unexpected that there were tenants at will and landless cultivators when the peasantry was so diverse. There were *kaljana* cultivators in Bengal in the 18th century who worked the land owned by better-off peasants. There were also *dhanuks*, who husked paddy and picked other peasants' crops. This type of "mild serfdom" implies the existence of various kinds of rents during this time. [3]

ORIGIN OF THE BARGA SYSTEM:

In Bengal, notably in the *khamar*, *nankar*, or *nij* land of the zamindars—revenue collectors for the Mughal empire—their "supervisors" discovered sharecroppers during the 1760s when the East India Company was obtaining the rights to collect land income. Sharecroppers who paid the zamindars half or a third of the harvest were allowed to cultivate these fields, which were given to them as revenue-free land for the zamindar's support. For instance, 22 of the 206 *bighas* of the Kismat Koodlah estate in the Dinajpur district were farmed by sharecroppers, whose output supported the zamindar's household.

On the property of wealthier major *rai*yats in the latter decades of the 18th century, sharecroppers might also be found. These peasants served as agents for the income assessment since they had sizable properties in the villages. Due to their abundance of resources, they were able to lend money to others and act as go-betweens in

grain trades between peasants and market traders or merchants. They had access to resources during a time of scarcity, including animals and tools, which contributed to their privileged position. This made it easier to hire sharecroppers under agreements where the raiyats provided both land and inputs. Due to their ability to influence revenue payments, the leading raiyats may raise rents and income in order to make other cultivators less prosperous. The latter became sharecroppers after being purchased. [4]

In Bengal, non-cultivating tenants sublet their properties to sharecroppers during the same time period, the 1870s. This class of tenants appeared to have a sizable membership. Most people had no basis for this behaviour, which had developed through abuse and was extremely harmful. Some were authorised by the nature of their tenure, where the rent and limitations of their land were defined and determined. The under-tenants managed to get themselves out of debt after being depressed by exorbitant kind rent and usurious returns for cattle, seed, and subsistence advances.

The sections that follow discuss some of these problems. Sharecropping was practised in Bengal by the middle of the 19th century in a variety of settings, including the zamindars' personal farms, reclaimed land when labour was in short supply, surplus raiyat land, and the property of the zamindars' non-cultivating tenants. There was no question that sharecroppers existed, even though knowledge about them is scattered and more precise in other places, including North Bengal. For instance, it was estimated that sharecroppers without landholdings made up 34% and 39%, respectively, of the farming population in Dinajpur and Rangpur. [5]

There is no concrete historical evidence indicating when this system first appeared in Bengal or when it actually started to have a significant economic impact on the province's tenure structure. The system must have existed in Bengal by the time the state was organized, and a proper system of settlement and assessment of land came into existence during the reign of Maurya Chandragupta, as can be inferred from a reading of paragraphs 16 to 20 of the Land Revenue Commission Report. It should be clear from the fact that the Bengal Tenancy Act, which was passed that year but did not include any particular regulations regarding such cultivators, was not much of a force up to that point. The 1928 revision to the Act leads one to believe that the system developed steadily between 1885 and 1928, becoming a force. Unfortunately, there were no statistics available at the time that would have allowed for an accurate evaluation of this force over time.

Due to the global financial crisis in 1929, the value of p^{ât} fell. So many farmers were unable to pay the zamindars their taxes. Many of the zamindars used loans to pay their taxes to the government. Since many raiyats were unable to pay their taxes, the khas of the zamindars came to own the raiyats' land. Natural calamities, inadequate drainage systems, and poor paddy production were the causes of the cultivators' inability to pay taxes. The zamindars desired that the bargadars cultivate the Khas lands. Bengal saw a rise in the bargadars technique of farming starting in the 1930s. [6]

THE PROBLEMS OF BARGADARS:

Sharecropping is a problem that is not unique to this nation. Additionally, it is not limited to the present. This issue had sprung up in numerous nations at various points in time, and significant changes had been made in relation to it. In fact, if specific socioeconomic pressures operate within the parameters of a specific owner-tenant relationship, then this situation is bound to occur. These instances are numerous throughout the history of mediaeval Europe. For instance, after the collapse of the villac organization in the middle centuries, leases in exchange for a portion of the harvest (bail a part de fruits) started to appear often. Again, share-tenancy was common in mediaeval Italy. There were several more countries that had such leases. A novel type of socioeconomic structure was required by agricultural production as the socioeconomic environment gradually evolved. Undoubtedly, there were significant adjustments, but this system persisted for a very long time and is still in use in many nations today.

Asian nations up till recently. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the socio-economic structure of agriculture in these nations remained unchanged for a very long time. Additionally, issues including population increase, a lack of alternative occupations, an inflexible socioeconomic framework, and an outdated pattern of property ownership all played a role in the problem's expansion. Due to this, we observe that this system has not only persisted in large Asian nations like China and India up until the present but has also expanded throughout periods when other nations had either settled down to the owner-farmer pattern or to community cultivation. In actuality, the crop-sharing system is a global phenomenon that has evolved over time in response to many

socioeconomic, historical, and legal factors. Therefore, a fundamental solution to the issue necessitates a complete shift in the direction of these forces. [7]

Following the First World War's economic depression and suffering in 1928, the issue appears to have grown significantly. In 1929, Bengal's agricultural debt was estimated to be worth Rs 100 crore, compared to Rs 150 crore in Madras. This was influenced by a number of things. The following are examples of these:

- 1) Population growth in agriculture,
- 2) A significant portion of the year was spent with underemployment in the ranks of bargadars.
- 3) Dividing properties into unprofitable parts for the sake of the law of inheritance;
- 4) Constant pressure on land in the absence of any industry.

The fertility of the land declined because there was no rotation of crops, proper manuring, irrigation, or other scientific methods adopted in advanced countries, leaving agriculture in Bengal in the hands of the most illiterate and resourceless class in society. The lotdars, chakdars, landlords, and their agents used the law of diminishing returns as the fertility of the lands declined. The entire harvest of the land was brought to the landowners' farmyards, where the sharecroppers were offered half of the net yield that had been calculated after many shady adjustments. Even though they were formally handed half of the crop, the sharecroppers were essentially the victims of a brutal and vulgar kind of exploitation. These clever and cunning naibs exploited them to the bone by extorting and exacting various types of charges in kind, which had to be paid for by the sharecroppers from the shares of their produce. They did this by taking advantage of their illiteracy, lack of awareness, resourcelessness, and, in a word, helplessness.

The idea of splitting something evenly existed only in theory. In truth, the jotedars continued to demand money long after this point. In order to increase their own earnings and further squeeze the labor-intensive tenants, the greedy landlords employed erroneous measurements and a double standard when weighing the paddy. For instance, the landowners in the forested Sundarban region on the eastern side of the 24-Parganas district used two different sorts of weights: kena dam (purchasing price) and becha dam (selling price). They were, in other words, openly cheating all the time. Second, by paying back previous consumer loans (karja), the share that the peasants got was frequently further lowered. Many families struggled to make it through the year as a result of the unfair sharecropping system, and they once again relied on the same landlords who so brazenly exploited their labour for loans. Thus, additional injustices were added to their predicament: the karja loans' usurious interest rates were always requested, and repayment in kind was required during harvest, when rice market prices were at their lowest. [8]

After deducting the landlord's half share and any prior debts owed to him, the bargadar in 24-Parganas could rarely survive for more than three to four months on the money he received. And if he owed any money to the landowners or mahajans (moneylenders), it would be challenging for him to escape their grasp. This indicates that the landlords took advantage of a sizable pool of inexpensive, compliant labour.

The sharecropper toiled all through the year, and the 50% crop he received was just enough to cover production costs. In addition, there was perpetual eviction anxiety. The bargadar was forced to take a loan for six months out of the year, which made him live in abject poverty. The sharecropper who applied for a loan by leaving a thumbprint was refused release by the moneylenders. The sharecroppers were forced to pay the doubled cost of agriculture. The sharecroppers suffered financial losses as a result.

The issues faced by sharecroppers in rural Bengal's society, economy, and agricultural system have taken centre stage. These issues were described in the following terms by a peasant leader:

1. Bargadars currently make up the majority of Bengal's peasantry. In actuality, the issues facing the peasantry affect the entire society. 43 percent of people in our country are sharecroppers who rely on them for their livelihood. More or less, 40 lakh families work as sharecroppers or bargainers. Bargadars farm no less than half of our arable land.
2. Before the First World War, it was particularly challenging for the sharecropper to support his family because he only received a half share of the crop. But today, a sharecropper cannot support his family on his salary. Bargadars and their families must have their expenses cut and their income raised in order to survive. In comparison to the other members of the society, their standard of living or level is the worst.

The landowners must cover some costs in order to lower their overall expenses. There isn't any other choice. The proportion of bargadars should be raised concurrently.

3. It is difficult to comprehend how much interest the bargadars pay on their p^{ât}. A loan can legally have an interest rate of 10%. However, bargadars must use derabari or double bari to pay the interest on the rice. In this manner, the annual interest rate increases from 100% to 300%. The bargadars are ruined by this obsession.
4. Despite a high rate of interest, the owners refuse to approve a loan in order to buy land and crops as a monopoly. The landowner, who is in possession of the land, a plough, bullocks, etc., is currently attempting to convert the sharecroppers into slaves. They refuse to grant a loan without a mortgage because of this. The underfed peasants are compelled to mortgage their home, their land, and all of their possessions. These properties were later sold. And the farmers end up as destitute beggars.
5. For abwabs, less than 50% of people are bargadars. However, the manufacturing rate is extremely low. Bargadars only farm as a result; they have no access to crops.
6. The sharecroppers are not landowners. They are removed from their land at the owners' request. Because of this, they lack motivation or energy to grow the farm or land. Good-quality seeds and fertilisers are not readily available, and fallow lands are not conserved. Production per bigha declines as a result.
7. The landowners receive their fair share of the crops but do not provide a receipt. Bargadars unnecessarily become the oppressed because of this.
8. There are a number of reasons for the inhumane treatment of sharecroppers. Always wanting to consume crops and sell them for a profit, landowners feign crises. They are also engaging in monopolistic land acquisition. Even though there is an adequate supply of things on the market, we suffer today because of their excessive pricing. This monopoly ownership is the root of the problem.

The 24-Parganas district's method for supplying loans was inoperable. Very rarely did sharecroppers receive loans. Barga land produced at a below-average rate. Production costs were higher than in North Bengal. The bargadar was required to buy the cow feed and deliver the poal-bichali (straw) to the owner.

The jotedars implemented the following measures to make the land khas: expresses oral pity for the farmers, perhaps by lending them a small amount of cash or some rice in exchange for their thumbprints on blank paper. After a few days, the land was secretly declared khas by court order without the farmers' knowledge. [9]

They obtained the sharecropping agreement from the villagers by offering a little loan or by demonstrating to the indebted peasants the benefit of registering the land in another's name and creating the patta in their own favor. Even if it was verbally agreed that the peasants would still own the land, after a year or two, this was refuted. The area was renamed Khas. The peasants became adhiyars or bargadars through a number of such plots. In the southern portion of 24-Parganas, the bargadars' situation resembled that of slaves.

The poor bargadars were additionally forced to build embankments or dykes to block the flow of water from reclaimed territory. Less than half of what they charged the jotedar for this purpose was what the naibs of zamindars paid them. The peasant had to give the naib nazrana in exchange for barga and perform unpaid labour (begar) in the butchery. Even the "right of the first night," which required a newlywed bride or daughter to spend the first night of her marriage in the cutchery, was occasionally practised in Kakdwip. [10]

Any sharecropper with 10 bighas of land under cultivation was required to borrow 10 sacks of paddy from the zamindar. Sharecroppers were required to repay with interest at a ratio of 1.5. Even if the bargadar chose not to apply for a loan, he was still required to pay karjabary on two maunds of paddy. Paddy was given in 25" dan and was taken in 27" dan by the zamindars and jotedars. In the event of the sharecropper's passing, the sharecropper's son was not handed land. The zamindars and jotedars did not grant land to sharecroppers in cases of poor cultivation.

SOME OTHER PROBLEMS OF THE BARGADARS:

1. **Deception:** In those days, the land available was more compared to the number of cultivators in the Sundarbans. The agents of other *chakdars* would come and alluring in the min various ways would take the share croppers to the *chakdars* at night by boat. At first they would be offer them house-building and other facilities. Then they would exploit and torture the share croppers.
2. **Sexual exploitation:** The share croppers were forced to take fish, milk, fruit, vegetables and their beautiful wives, daughters and widow sisters to the *naibs* and managers for their enjoyment.

3. **Paddy stealing:** The paddy of the sharecroppers was not divided on the day of threshing. At night the people of the *jotedars* used to steal some amount of paddy.
4. **Dhama measurement:** The *jotedars'* or landlords' *dhama* was 10seers for 13seers. The sharecroppers' *dhama* was 9seers for 10seers. For the honour of the zamindars their *dhama* was 13seers for 10seers. The sharecroppers and the zamindars would get one *dhama* each. But the zamindars would get 13seers and sharecroppers would get only 9seers.
5. **Contract of cultivation wage:** The land lordship of Hamilton consisted of 1lakh 52 thousand *big has* of Gosaba, Rangabalia and Satjelia. Fifty thousand *big has* of that land was *khas*. The cultivation of that was held under the supervision of the land lord through the contract of cultivation wage by local residents. Infact, that very *k has* land was cultivated by the peasants in 50:50 share. The sharecroppers were made to put their signatures in the contract of cultivation wage for one year.
6. **Kabuliat right:** The zamindars or *jotedars* used to make the sharecroppers put their thumb impressions or signatures on blank paper before offering land. It was called *kabuliat* right. The zamindars or the *jotedars* used to write on the blank papers according to their desire. As a result, if the *bargadars* went against their wishes, they would file a suit against them. Moreover, as they put their thumb impressions or signatures on the blank papers, the zamindars or the *jotedars* would write on them whatever they wished. So, the debt could never be repaid by them.
7. **Hal punah:** *Hal punah* or *halkhata* would take place on the 1st of Aagrahayan or 1st of Baisakh of the Bengali calendar. In the area of Hatgachhi (Sandeshkhali P.S.) Rs 2 to Rs 3 were taken as tax per bigha. If the tax was not paid on the occasion of *halpunah* the land was taken away from the sharecroppers.
8. **Paddy of cow bonta:** For ploughing, the *bargadars* borrowed the bullocks from the land owners and were compelled to give a certain amount of paddy to the land owners in return. This was called paddy of cow *bonta*.
9. **Fines:** In case of a quarrel between the *bargadars*, the *naibs* would give the judgement. The fine imposed was to be realized from the 50 percent share of the *bargadars*.
10. **Exploitation of women by lotdars:** In the Sundarbans, particularly in the Kakdwip area, thenotorious *lotdars* boasted of having turned the entire village into their harems. Even a newly married woman had to sleep with the *lotdar* until she got pregnant, before entering her husband's house.
11. **Places of torture:** For the sharecroppers and other poor villagers, the *cutchery* was a place of utmost repression, torture and intimidation. In case they failed to pay their early rent or legal cess, the peasants were called here and subjected to harsh punishment, like having his breast crushed with a *sheel*, a big flatstone for grinding spices. In some areas villagers were tortured by having a heavy stone yoked to their shoulders, whenever they stepped on the shadow of a feudal lord. Even murders were committed at the *cutchery*. The fear of the *cutchery* was so strong in their minds that they would soil their clothes if they were called to the zamindar's court.
12. **Eviction:** Against this backdrop of severe exploitation of the cultivators by the landlords, the tension between the *lotdars* and *bargadars* began to grow particularly in the 1930s, when large-scale eviction of *bhagchasis* or *bargadars* took place in the south 24-Parganas. On 27 October 1937, the BPKS brought 1,000 peasantsevicted by the Port Canning Company. In Basirhat, Hasnabad, Sandeshkhali, Haroa and Canning police station areas, large number of peasants were evicted.
13. **Population pressure:** The ever-increasing population of 24-Parganas created an explosive situation in the rural areas. By 1944, 72.5 percent of the peasants had become destitute and 75 percent had lost their lands. This large-scale eviction from land in 1943-1944 becomes clear from a specific case of Kalikata union of Canning P.S. area.
14. **Exorbitant interest:** The sharecroppers used to take paddy also from the zamindars and *jotedars* in June-July due to financial crisis and repay it in November-December. They had to pay one sack of paddy for half or one sack of the same. It was called *Derabar* or *Donobari*. That means they had to pay 50 to 100 percent interest in just six-seven months. Coming for an investigation in Kakdwip, the collector of 24-Parganas, M.M. Stuart, was surprised and asked if there was British rule in the place.
15. **Selami:** The term of lease of the sharecroppers ended in the month of Chaitra in the Bengali calendar. The tender was held per *bigha*. The sharecroppers were not given land if they did not give *selami*.

PAUPERISATION OF THE PEASANTRY:

To rob the peasants of their final possessions, the jotedars and lotdars forged fictitious sale documents and handwritten notes in Chandanpiri, Loyalgunge, Budakhali, Burul, Hasnabad, Sandeshkhali, and other areas of the 24-Parganas. They surrendered women's honour for the carnal pleasure of their captors because they had no other option. The peasants of Loyalgunge, Chandanpiri, Budhakali, and Kakdwip police station were poor due to floods in 1942 and starvation in 1943. The lotdars, jotedars, and mahajans seized this chance to begin a horrific tyranny. For instance, Basanta Mondal of Chandanpiri did a good deed by donating merely 1 maund of khesari and 5 maunds of paddy. Many of the villagers became slaves for one or one and a half years in exchange for just one or two maunds of paddy as they started to sell themselves in the market. For a maund of paddy to rescue their children, many poor women gave their bodies up night after night to feed the lust of the tyrants. The burden on the cultivators rose as the tendency of the zamindars and jotedars to live in towns started to rise. [11]

THE DEBT TRAP:

The peasant's annual budget was always in deficit, so he had to turn to moneylenders for his food and other necessities. According to the Ishaque Report of the government of Bengal, the amount of agricultural indebtedness in undivided Bengal climbed from Rs 100 crore in 1930 to Rs 150 crore in 1944–1945. According to the Report on Rural Indebtedness of 1946, farmers made up 10.93% of debtors in Bengal, followed by owner-cultivators, who made up 47.44%, sharecroppers, who made up 6.19%, and agricultural labourers, who made up 11.59%. First, when it came to providing loans to the peasantry, the government and cooperatives did the least. Second, among the peasantry, including sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, a group of wealthy peasants formed as the main creditor. Let's now look at the loans' collateral. [12]

DOUBLE BURDEN ON WOMEN:

Poor women were doubly constrained in social aspects as well. Both men and women were obligated to wed the partner that their families had chosen. Early on, boys and girls would become engaged. However, marriage traditions were particularly harsh for women. The bride-price system, in which the bride was given away in exchange for money and/or goods, was popular among the rural poor. Similar to trading or exchanging cattle or any other product, she was traded. Poor women were frequently subjected to a less stringent application of the seclusion (purdah) regime than their upper-class sisters. Despite having reduced restrictions on their mobility, they were nonetheless subjected to tremendous oppression. All villagers were required to kneel and show respect to the landowner, but women were also expected to submissively follow their own husbands' orders. He was the one who had the power to correct her or whip her for the least mistake at home. His wife was his property, suitable for childbearing but devoid of any human rights. Due to their status as members of the oppressed peasantry and as members of the second sex, rural women experienced double oppression and exploitation. [13]

SECONDARY STRUCTURES OF EXPLOITATION—BEGGAR:

As a beggar, one could be forced to engage in a variety of tasks. For instance, Buni Oraon, a sharecropper in Jalpaiguri, had to perform several agricultural tasks in addition to digging water channels and building grain storage facilities. Begar promised a steady supply of free labour, especially during times of crisis when there was a great need for agricultural labour and day labourers were the most expensive to hire. Crop productivity depends on the timing of specific processes. For example, harvesting must be completed before rains destroy standing crops, and ploughing must be done when the ground is wet. [14]

CONCLUSION:

Women assisted in meal preparation in the homes of the landowners while working as servants. Children were occasionally needed to assist. Due to the sexual division of labour in rural areas, where women's range of outside-the-home activities was constrained by their social and religious position, women's labour took on specific shapes. The majority of the labour required to transform the land's harvest into foodstuffs or commodities that could be sold was done by women inside the family courtyard. The landlord purchased this type of women's labour at a discount. The latdar or chakdar was responsible for oversight when government funding was made available for mending river embankments. [15] The work was completed by peasants, sharecroppers, and field labourers from the community. However, they did not receive the wage set by the government. After two or four months, the landlord in charge of the labour forced them to accept the pitiful wage.

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