

## The Oriya Paika Rebellion of 1817

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The Britishers under Lord Clive laid the foundation stone of the British Raj in India in the month of April, 1757. Lord Clive's army of some four thousand and odd men overpowered the mighty force of 57000, led by Shiraj Ud-dawla, a young lad of 17. It was because, nature conspired against him along with his hostile general Mir Zafar. A sudden torrential rain had spoiled his explosives, on the eve of that war. Otherwise the 5000 strong loyal Kashmiri soldiers under General Shohanlal could have wrested victory from the hands of the Britishers notwithstanding Mir Zafar's non-co-operation.

The English took over Orissa from the Marhattas in 1803, although the foundation stone for British Rule was laid in 1757 in the neighboring province of Bengal. The Marhattas were no lesser blood-suckers under whose dominion, Orissa's economy crumbled. Plunder by the horse-trotting Marhattas, over and above the "chouth" - the practice of collecting a quarter of the possible income of the cultivable land (notwithstanding constant crop failures due to floods or droughts), crushed the Oriya soul to such an extent that his daily search for a hard-to-get morsel of rice made him to wear a permanent expression of sorrow and despair in his face. Passing of Orissa from the Marhattas to the hands of the English had no reaction in the public mind - who were the least

politically conscious at that point of time. But, however, its impact was soon observed at some level which triggered a heavy reaction as a very natural phenomenon.

The English appointed Col. Harcot and Mr. Melvil the administrators of the Cuttack Division. Their first job was to extract allegiance of numerous small kings or Zamindars in whichever ways possible. In 1804, they snatched the management of the Puri Temple from the hand of the King Mukunda Dev-II, as they had their eyes on the vast landed property and other incomes of the temple. Puri was made capital of Orissa till 1816, after which it was transferred to Cuttack.

From the times the Kings of Orissa were sovereign powers, the custom of "Paikas" was well-established as a mechanism of defence - should the occasion so arise. The Paikas were farmers during peace and formidable mercenaries during war. They enjoyed a vast agricultural land in return for their military service. Such lands were available to these mercenaries from Jaleshwar (in Baleshwar) to Puri. They were of 3 categories; such as (i) Prahari (ii) Banua and (iii) Bhenkias. Praharies were the initial defendants whose job was to watch with swords in their hands. Banuas were adept archers and shooters with country guns. Dhenkias were the swordsmen, far

numerous in strength - who fought in the war-fronts. Because of their highly evolved skill, the kings of Utkal were independent for a long time, even when a single empire did not exist. It is a matter of great regret that no king or any other martial man did try to organize these forces into a single unity that could have safe-guarded the safety of a large Orissan Empire, before or during the English occupation. Had this happened, Orissa would have never been exploited by the Muslims, Marhattas or the English. Also the question of the ill reputations of a poor state (inspite of its vast forest and mineral resources) would have not arisen at all.

The Paikas functioned as farmers and also "Police" during peace-time. The number of crimes was far less in Orissa due to their dutifulness as a naturalized police force. A dishonest English man, Major Fletcher by name, was appointed to manage the estate of king Mukunda Dev. He snatched away the Jagir land of the Paikas. They were deprived of the land they heriditorily enjoyed for generations. Repeated land settlements, new currency policy and deprivation of people of their rights to manufacture salt from sea-water were some of the measures which ruined the means of livelihood of people. The Paikas had now two roads to choose; the first, to sulk in silence and die of starvation and the second, to fight. Borne of martial tribes, their natural instinct drove them in the road to armed confrontation.

Buxi Jagabandhu Vidyadhar Mahapatra Bhramarbar Ray was the General of King Mukund Dev. He was enjoying vast landed properties (without any cess) apart from a small estate (Zamindar) named as "Rodang". In the settlements of 1804 and 1805, it was registered under his name. At that point of time, Sri K.C. Singh, a Bengali, was the Dewan of the Collector of Puri. His own brother Gourahari Singh was the Tahasildar of Rahang estate (a Zamindari,

snatched from the king of Khurda by Marhattas - which naturally passed into the English hands who occupied Cuttack without any Marhatta resistance). After the settlement of 1806, Sri K.C. Singh ordered that Sri Buxi should deposit his cess (for Rodang) with him, rather than paying it directly to the Collector. Sri Singh collected this cess of Rodang and showed it as that of the areas under "Rahang and etc." As a result, dishonest Gourahari registered the Rodanga estate under the name of a close relative of his in the Settlement of 1909. this was again purchased by his brother Dewan K.C. Singh after a year. Buxi filed a protest with the Government of Bengal - the final authority. He got a reply in 1941 that he has to prove it in a court of law in Calcutta failing which his authority over "Rodang" could not be restored. Buxi was penniless at that time and had no means to go to Calcutta and fight a case by paying heavy fees to the lawyers, in addition to the required court fees. There was also a provision under the British rule that a person can file a case without court-fees after proving himself as a "Pauper". Buxi thought it to be below his dignity to do so. He also never expected justice from the British who had joined hands with the dishonest Bengalis, in their quest for power.

When the Paikas revolted, Buxi Jagabandhu was their natural leader. In March of 1817, about 400 Kandha tribals of Ghumusar area came marching towards Khurda. The Paikas of Khurda joined them. They first attacked the police station of Banpur and burnt all government quarters. They also killed 100 men and looted fifteen thousand rupees from the government treasury. When they were marching towards Khurda, people from adjoining villages joined with them in great numbers. All government officials fled Khurda which was completely devastated.

On receiving this information at Cuttack, two platoons of soldiers were sent, one each to

Khurda and Pipili. On the 1st of April, 1817 the Collector of Cuttack marched towards Khurda with 60 Sepoys. When they were at Gangaparha, on their way to Khurda, the Paikas intercepted them with grenade attacks. The Collector fled to Balakati and was trying to escape at night from there. He was attacked by the Paikas. Bruised by them, he escaped to Cuttack losing his tents, ammunitions and elephants to the Paikas.

The despatch sent to Khurda were defeated and their leader was killed by the Paikas. The despatch sent to Pipili was defeated too. The police station at Pipili was looted. On the 9th April, fifty of the soldiers sent to Puri were ordered to march to Khurda. On reaching Khurda they promulgated martial law. On the same date, a gang of Paikas reached Puri and burnt the government quarters along with the Puri Court. Unable to resist this attack, the English fled to Cuttack on 18.04.1817. Gajapati Mukund Dev also co-operated with the Paikas. The Pandas of the temple announced that the English rule had been thwarted and the Gajapati's reign had been restored. The entire south Orissa was now under the control of the Baghis.

Subsequently, with possibly fresh despatches there was another fight between the English forces and Paikas in Puri. The Paikas lost in this fight. Mukunda Dev was captured when he was trying to flee. After this, the Paikas avoided frontal attack and resorted to gorilla warfare, hiding in forests.

When the Paika captured Sarang-garh of Cuttack, the Kings of Kanika and Kujanga had co-operated with them. Narayan Paramguru and Bamadev Pattajyotish were the leaders of the Paikas of Kanika and Kujanga. Hence the English marched towards Kujanga in September, 1817. They first occupied Paradip and then went to Nuagarh. About 2000 Paikas fought bravely

against them, but lost. The King of Kujanga surrendered and was imprisoned in the Barabati Fort for one year. Paramguru and Pattajyotish were banished to the Andamans. English soldiers from Pipili reached Gopa and defeated the Paikas. Karunakar Sardar, their leader was arrested and imprisoned. Sporadic resistances at other places were also quelled. Paikas went underground and kept their resistance alive from jungles. In the year 1818, the English recruited a special force to search and kill or arrest them. This continued till 1826. In the absence of any short of Logistic Support, Gorilla welfare had to cease some day and so it did.

Mukunda Dev, who was captured while fleeing, was kept in prison where he died soon in the month of November, 1817. From the month of May, 1817, two Judges were appointed to try the offenders (?) of the Paikas' Rebellion. History has not kept the account of the numerous Paikas and their leaders who were hanged, imprisoned or deported. The Britishers occupied Orissa in 1803. The Paikas rose in revolt against them in 1817. They could not have succeeded with the dire lack support from the public whose back bone was broken under long exploitations. Yet, History must correct itself to record the Paikas' Rebellion (1817-26) as the First War of Indian Independence which was fought 40 years before the Sepoys' Rebellion (1857).

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