

Khurda Paik Rebellion - The First Independence War of India

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The year 1817 was a landmark in the history of Orissa. It was remarkable for the outbreak of a rebellion in which mostly Paiks (the warrior community of Orissa) of Khurda had ventured to root out the English rule by armed rebellion. Though this resistance movement of Oriyas have been recorded by the British historians as "Paik Rebellion" in fact it was the first Independence war of India which originated in Khurda soil and spread to other parts of Orissa in 1817 prior to the outbreak of historical sepoy mutiny of 1857.

Regarding the distinct nature and character of Paiks, the British Commissioner of enquiry into the causes of "Paik Rebellion" Mr. Walter Ewer records his views in his report of 1818 as follows :

"Now there is no need of assistance of Paiks at Khurda. It is dangerous to keep them in British armed forces. Thus they should be treated and dealt as common Ryots and land revenue and other taxes should be collected from them. They must be deprived of their former Jagir lands (Rent free lands given to the Paiks for their military service to the state.) Within a short period of time the name of Paik has already been forgotten. But still now where the Paiks are living they have retained their previous aggressive nature. In order to break their poisonous teeth the British Police must be highly alert to keep the Paiks under their control for a pretty long period, unless the Paik community is ruined completely the British rule cannot run smoothly."

The British historian Mr. George Toynbee writes regarding the furious situation prevailed due to the outbreak of Paik Rebellion at Khurda which shook the very root of the British administration. He states as follows.

"The rising was a veritable storm that burst with such relentless fury as to threaten the expulsion of the British, if not from the whole of Orissa, at least from the territory of Khurda."

Historical backdrop of Paik Rebellion

Before occupying Orissa, the Britishers had already occupied the whole of Bengal in the north and the Oriya district of Ganjam in the South. So it became easy for the Englishmen to attack Orissa from three sides. The British armed force advanced from Madras on 8th September 1803 and arrived at Puri on 16th September enroute Manikpatna. With the help of Fate Mohemmed of Malud (recruited by Marathas as the watchman) Colonel Harcourt reached at Narasinghpatna after two days crossing the Chilika lake. The Britishers did not face any resistance while occupying Narasinghpatna and Puri. After occupying Jagannath temple of Puri Colonel Harcourt proceeded to Cuttack crushing the feeble resistance of Marathas near Atharnala and Jagannath Sadak. The Maratha soldiers fled away to Khurda jungle being defeated by the British force. Colonel Harcourt arrived at Cuttack enroute Barangagada crossing the river Kathajodi.

Under the able command of Captain Morgan a detachment of British troop arrived at Jampada of Balesore sea shore by ship and occupied the Maratha fort. Another detachment of British troop reached at Balesore enroute Medinapur under the command of Colonel Forgusson and joined the previous troop stationed at Balesore. This joint troops proceeded from Balesore to Cuttack and joined the soldiers of colonel Harcourt and occupied the Barabati fort defeating the Marathas. In this way Orissa was occupied by the Britishers in the year 1803. Colonel Harcourt and Mr. W.L. Melville being the English administrators executed documents of agreement with the native zamindars and Gadjat kings not to interfere in their affairs on the condition that they would pay the taxes to the Britishers in time. Using the policy of divide and rule the Britishers became the ruler of the whole country except the territory of Khurda.

In 1804 AD the English soldiers seized the fort of Khurda for three weeks and razed it to the ground by canon firing. They proclaimed Raja Mukund Dev-II as rebel and dethroned and made him a prisoner of war. Raja Mukunda Dev-II submitted an appeal to the British authority stating that as per the instruction of Jayee Rajguru he had fought with them and he was in no way responsible for the battle. Considering the appeal the Britishers pardoned him and offered him the responsibility of managing the temple of Jagannath. He was also ordered to remain at Puri. Jayee Rajguru being the kingpin of Khurda Rebellion of 1804 was sentenced to death and was hanged in a banyan tree at Baghitota of Medinpur. The gruesome murder of Jayee Rajguru by the British authority caused much discontent among the Paiks of Khurda.

Socio-Economic Causes of Paik Rebellion

After Khurda came under the British rule in 1805 A.D. a number of short-term revenue settlements were effected between 1805 and

1817. The imposition of tax on the rent free Jagir lands of the Paiks, the depreciation of cowry currency, the arbitrary assessment of land revenue caused a great hardship to the ryots of Khurda. In this connection William Trower, the Collector of Cuttack wrote in his report as follows :

"Besides regular land revenue, the ryots were over burdened with many unauthorised abwabs and impositions. The demands were nearly arbitrary and certainly oppressive."

Similarly Walter Ewer, the Commissioner of enquiry into the causes of Paik Rebellion confessed in this report that "The taxation on the ryots in 1815-16 was as high as twice the Jama of 1804-1805. It is now well known and generally admitted that previous to insurrection, Khurda was becoming strikingly depopulated. At least 5,000 to 6,000 families of ryots had deserted. The miserable remnants after dispossessing themselves of their little all, their clothes, furnitures, cooking utensils and sometimes even their wives and children existed of course in a state of desperate misery and irritation."

At that time chiefly the Bengalis were the sub-ordinate employees of British Govt. in Orissa. The Englishmen were running their administration depending on them. Taking the advantage and opportunity of their Govt. Post the Bengalis were oppressing the common people of Orissa in the name of tax collection.

Before the British rule the land revenue were collected from the people of Orissa in the form of cowry currency. But during the English rule the land revenue was collected in the form of rupee instead of cowry. The exchange value of 5120 cowry was fixed as one rupee. But in fact the village money lenders were receiving 7680 Cowries in exchange of one rupee. Besides this the Sarbarakars and revenue collectors were also demanding bribes from the ryots. Due to the new law of revenue taxation of British Government the

economic condition of ryots and Paiks became miserable. Many ryots lost their lands due to their inability of paying higher rate of tax. Though the then Governor General Lord Wellesly had proclaimed for permanent land settlement in Orissa division like Bengal, contrary to his declaration the land settlements were made frequently in Orissa increasing the tax in each settlement. Further Major Fletcher cancelled all the Paik Jagirs and imposed tax on rentfree service lands without proper study of the past tradition. During the rule of the Raja the common people were getting justice against the oppression of Amalas. But during the British rule the non-Oriya Amalas paid a deaf ear to the complaints and problems of Oriya ryots.

Further in Khurda, the extensive sale of Oriya zamindaries to outsiders brought about the ruin of the ryots. These outsiders were Bengalis of Calcutta and the native officials of British administration. The Estates below the Jumma of Rs.5,000/- were to be sold at Cuttack Collectorate and of higher amount in Calcutta at the office of the Secretary to the Board of revenue. This provision was introduced to fetch money for the British Government. The Oriya zamindars had no agents at Calcutta and therefore the Bengali got the scope and opportunity of purchasing the defaulting estates of Orissa at Bengal and the British officials were purchasing the same sold at Cuttack Collector's office. Thus overnight the Bengalis and British Officials became zamindars of Khurda area and the Oriya landed aristocracy was eliminated and ruined.

Further the Oriya Amalas were excluded from the Courts, police and salt departments in Khurda and in their place mostly the Bengalis and Muslims were recruited who resorted to large scale corruption. Regarding the corrupt practice of Amalas William Ewer has stated in his report that "Almost all Amalas thrived on the business of loot, plunder and speculation."

Salt Monopoly of British Government

After occupying Orissa the British Government introduced the law of salt monopoly by which the common subjects were debarred to procure salt from sea as well as Chilika lake. The common mass were compelled to purchase the salt imported from England against their own will which created discontent against the British rule.

Wrongs done to Buxi Jagabandhu

Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra Bhramarbar Ray was the owner of prosperous Rodunga killa and was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Raja of Khurda. He was considered next to the Raja of Khurda in rank, honour and position.

The Bengali employee Krushna Chandra Singh of Cuttack Collector Charles Grome was residing at Cuttack purchasing the estate of Pragana Rahanga with a calculated move he desired to be the owner of Rodung Killa of Buxi Jagabandhu. His brother Gourhari Singh and relative Chandra Prasad Singh assisted him in the conspiracy. Buxi Jagabandhu used to deposit the revenue of Rodunga killa at the treasury of Cuttack Collector. But Krushna Chandra Singh persuaded him to pay the taxes at Puri instead of Cuttack which was nearer in distance and convenient for Buxi Jagabandhu. The revenue of Rodung Killa was received in Government Collection register as the revenue of "Rahanga ogher" showing thereby "Rodunga" as a part of "Rahanga". Buxi unknowingly fell into the trap set up by Krushna Chandra Singh. In 1809 A.D. British Government advertised for the sale of pragana "Rahanga ogher". Purchasing the estate on lease basis Krushna Chandra Singh sent his men for possession of Rodung killa by using force. But due to the strong resistance of Buxi Jagabandhu, Krushna Chandra Singh failed in his mission of possessing the estate. In 1813 A.D. Krushna Chandra Singh again took lease of Rodunga killa. Buxi submitted a petition before

the Settlement Commissioner Mr. Richardson stating therein his ancestral claim over the "Rodunga Killa" for which he had made payment of revenue in the past. But all the claim of Buxi became futile and he was denied justice by the British authority.

Being deprived of his estate Buxi Jagabandhu became a pauper and managed for two long years with the voluntary contributions by the people of Khurda. He then prepared a plan for rebellion to take revenge against the injustice of British Govt. He was aware of the discontent of Paiks of Khurda for the injustice done to them. So when he gave a clarion call for rebellion, the Paiks, Daleis, Dulbeheras and Paik Sardars; they all responded to the call of rebellion under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu.

Outbreak of Paik Rebellion

In the last week of March 1817 A.D. a body of 400 Kandhas being armed with deadly weapons marched from Ghumsur to Banapur area. They were loyal to Raja Srikar Bhanja, the king of Ghumsur who had been illegally imprisoned by the British Government. Judging it as the golden opportunity for rebellion Buxi Jagabandhu proceeded towards Banapur with his Paik troops. The Paiks, Paik Sardars, Daleis and Dulbeheras from all parts of Khurda joined the rebellion. The rebels attacked the Government buildings and police stations. They killed the British officials and looted the British properties and Government treasury. Betcher, the salt agent of the southern division narrowly escaped from the hands of the rebels. His boat on Chilika lake was captured and plundered. From Banapur the rebels marched to Khurda. At Khurda they burnt down the Government buildings and looted the Government treasury. they British government officials of Khurda fled for life in Panic. The rebels killed traitor Charan Pattanaik at his village Rathipur.

From Khurda this rebellion spread to Panchagada and Bolagada. Jagabandhu

attempted to excite disturbances in Princely states but the rulers of Gadjat did not respond to the rebels.

On receipt of intelligence report regarding the rebellion, E. Impey the Magistrate at Cuttack in order to quell the rebellion sent one detachment under Lieutenant Prideaure to Khurda and another under Lieutenant Faris to Pipli to protect the Pragana Limbai. Thereafter he himself and Lieutenant Travis left for Khurda on 1st April 1817 and reached at Gangapada, the next day. He was panic-stricken to see the situation growing dangerous.

Impey was advised by Lieutenant Travis to retreat. Impey returned to Cuttack and reported the situation to the Government as follows. "This instant I returned after a most fatiguing march of a day and night from Khurda. I can only write for the information of His Lordship in council that my retreat was forced and that the whole of the Khurda territory is in a complete state of insurrection."

Meanwhile Lieutenant Faris at Gangapada was shot dead by the rebel Paiks. Lieutenant Prideaure by that time had reached Khurda. But seeing the Paiks numbering 5,000 under the command of Jagabandhu were advancing to charge him he managed to retreat to Cuttack enroute Pipli.

On 7th April 1817 the rebels occupied Pipli, Raja Balabhadra Chhotray of Gadapadmapur joined the rebels with 300 Paiks. They committed various acts of arson and looting in that area : Meanwhile Captain Wellington was sent to Puri to protect the town and to watch the movement of Raja Mukunda Dev-II Captain Le Fevere left for Khurda on 9th April 1817 and it was occupied without any resistance. It was on the same day the Paiks numbering between five to ten thousand including the Kandhas of Ghumsur area entered Puri under the leadership of Buxi

Jagabandhu through Loknath Ghat. The rebels and some of the local inhabitants burnt the Government and Private buildings. The British officials stationed at Puri fled to Cuttack in fear. The Sevayats of Lord Jagannath temple openly proclaimed the fall of British rule in Orissa.

Buxi Jagabandhu approached Raja Mukunda Dev-II for installing him on the throne of Khurda and to take the leadership of the rebellion. But the Raja did not agree. Rather he sent his messenger Purushottam Behari to the British authority with a secret letter asking for military aid.

Meanwhile the British authorities took measures to control the rebellion. Martial law was proclaimed at Khurda, Pipili, Limbai, Puri and Kothadesh. Major General Gabriel Martindell was appointed as the military commissioner and as the commander of British force in Cuttack.

Captain Le Fevere proceeded to Puri on 16th April 1817. By the time he reached at Puri Buxi Jagabandhu fled to Banapur with his followers. Arriving at Puri Captain Le Fevere arrested Raja Mukunda Dev-II. Puri was reoccupied.

On 28th April 1817 Major Hamilton sent the Raja and his son to Cuttack. They were imprisoned in the fort of Barabati. In spite of these efforts by the British authorities the rebellion spread to Gop, Tiran, Kujanga, Pattamundai and Asureswar. The rebel Paiks looted and plundered the properties of British supporter zamindars and Amalas under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu. Under the leadership of Karunakar Sardar the Paiks attacked the police station in Gop and had driven the police out of it. Captain Faithful succeeded in suppressing the rebels. Madhusudan Sendha, the Raja of Kujanga was helping the Paiks secretly. Madhusudan Mangaraj, Bamadev Pattajoshi, Narayan Paramguru were the rebel leaders at Kujanga on 13th September 1817,

Captain Kennet proceeded to Kujanga with British troops numbering 2,000 and with the assistance of Balukeswar Das and Krupasindhu Chhamu Karan, Captain Kennet could be able to suppress the rebellion.

Trial and Punishment of the Rebels

After the suppression of rebellion the British Government adopted measures for the prevention of any such rebel in future. For the trial of rebels and war prisoners the British authorities appointed a commission with Gabriel Martindel and Walter Ewer as members and they were directed to submit a report regarding the causes of rebellion and to suggest measures for the prevention of any future outbreak of rebellion in Khurda.

Raja Makunda Dev-II died inside prison on 30th November 1817. Raja Madhusudan Sendha of Kujanga was released after his surrender as because he helped the British Government in capturing some of the rebel leaders. Amnesty was proclaimed for all offences of the rebels connected with the rebellion. But Buxi Jagabandhu, Krushna Chandra Bidyadhar, Gopal Chhotray, Pitabas Mangaraj, Padmanabha Chhotray, Pindaki Bahubalendra and some other rebel leaders who were already in prison were not included in the amnesty. In order to capture the above mentioned rebel leaders dead or alive cash reward was proclaimed. One hundred and twenty three rebel Paik leaders were sentenced to transportation for life. Bamadev Pattajoshi and Narayan Paramguru the rebel leaders of Kujanga were sentenced to fourteen years of imprisonment. Parsuram Routray, the killer of traitor Charan Pattanaik was sentenced to death and was executed in April 1818.

Yet Buxi Jagabandhu and his close associates Nityananda Mangaraj, Dasarathi Paikaray, Lokanath Baliarsingh, Upendra Jagadev, Rama Chandra Samantasinghar, Adikanda Bidyadhar, Sambhunath Patsahani,

Dama Subudhi and Mir Hyder Ali remained untraced. In course of time and few rebel leaders surrendered to Commissioner Rebert Ker and some of them were captured. But Buxi Jagabandhu, the chief architect and mastermind of Paik rebellion remained undefacted.

Surrender of Buxi Jagabandhu

Buxi Jagabandhu fled from Khurda and remained concealed in the dense jungle of Ghumsur. From Ghumsur he went to his father-in-laws house, the zamindar of Shergada and remained there for sometime. Then he made his escape to the forest of Boudh and Dasapalla.

In order to arrest Buxi Jagabandhu Major Roughsedge made contact with Chandra Sekhar Dev, the king of Boudh. Being informed regarding the attempt for his capture Buxi left the jungle of Boudha and concealed himself in the dense forest of Ghumsur once again. During this difficult period the people of Khurda were providing money for his subsistence which is the proof of his popularity among the common mass.

Getting the secret news regarding the shelter of Buxi in a Kandha village of Ghumsur Brigadier General Thomas made a surprise attack to nab him. But Buxi managed to escape to Nayagada. Thus all efforts of British Government failed to arrest Buxi Jagabandhu.

A proclamation was issued by British Government that if within a given time Buxi surrenders his life would be spared and he would be given an allowance from the Government. But Buxi did not respond to the British proclamation.

So, the Britishers took an extra-ordinary step to facilitate his surrender. The British Governemnt detained his two wives, natural born son, adopted son, servants and Gumastas of Buxi Jagabandhu in the fort of Barabati on 29th October 1819. But when Buxi did not come out from concealment, the British Government under compulsion of the circumstances released the

family members of Buxi in 1820 A.D. As a last attempt commissioner T. Pakenham issued a strong worded Parwana to the Raja of Nayagada to persuade Buxi Jagabandhu to surrender and to accept the agreement with British Governemnt.

As per the terms of agreement Buxi would not leave Cuttack without the sanction of the British Commissioner and he would be allowed to remain at Cuttack with his family members with a life long pension of Rs. 150/- per month.

When Buxi felt that the terms of agreement with the British would in no way hamper his prestige and dignity he came out of his eight years concealment i.e. from 1817 to 1825 A.D. Buxi surrendered on 25th May 1825 and stayed at Cuttack with his family. He left the mortal world on 24th January 1829 and as per the terms of agreement his pension was stopped from that date.

The rebellion of 1817 in Khurda is called as the Paik rebellion on the ground that the Paiks of Khurda all along took a leading part in the rebellion. But the entire civil population of Khurda had the moral support behind the Paiks. The ultimate aim of the rebellion was to expel the Englishmen from Khurda Kingdom and for restoration of the Gajapati king of Orissa to the throne of Khurda. In the words of William Trower, the then Collector of Cuttack "The rebellion was a crusade, the object of which was to expel the English from all interference with the land of Purushottam Chhuter."

Thus the Paik Rebellion was basically a freedom movement. It is improper on the part of Indian historians not to record this great revolt as the first Independence war of India which commenced in Orissa in 1817 A.D. before the historical sepoy mutiny of 1857.

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