Ghumsar Resistance Against British Imperialism

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Ghumsar was one of the oldest Zamindaries of Southern India. It is believed that the Sailodvavas ruled over this region. Afterwards, the Bhanja dynasty established themselves with full glory. The estate of Ghumsar spreading over 1350 square miles was covered with dense forests and mountains. Of the total area, 500 square miles were hilly tracts and the rest plain land.

Ghumsar witnessed continuous rebellions and uprisings against foreign rule covering over 113 years from 1753 till 1866. It is oldest among the Zamindaries of Ganjam. Presently it is identified with the whole of North-Western part of the Bhanjanagar revenue Sub-Division. The inhabitants of these tracts were the aboriginal Kondhs. The non-aboriginals mainly Odias who lived in the plains constituted 1/3rd of the population of the estate. The Kondhs regarded the Bhanja Rajas of Ghumsar as their protectors, who used to decide their tribal disputes. The person who maintained liaison between the Kondhs and the Rajas was an officer designated as Dora Bissoi. The Rajas appointed him as his deputy in the Kondh tracts to look after the affairs there.

RESISTANCE OF THE RAJAS TO THE BRITISH RULE:

After concluding an agreement of peace with Krushna Bhanja, the Raja of Ghumsar, General Bussy left Ghumsar for Ganjam and then for Madras. Subsequently, Ganjam passed into the hands of the British. The Company Officials frequently interfered with the affairs of succession in the Zamindari. So the Rajas of Ghumsar rose in rebellion against the Company authority in defence of their hereditary rights, status and power. The rebellious conduct of the Rajas and non-payment of necessary tribute by them led the British to take over the Ghumsar estate in 1836.

GROWTH OF DISCONTENT AGAINST THE BRITISH AUTHORITY:

The growing dissatisfaction among the people of Ghumsar against the British rule manifested itself in the outbreak of popular movement which continued till 1866. Kamal Lochan Dora Bissoi, provided leadership to it from 1835 to 1837 and then Chakra Bissoi from 1846 to 1856. In 1866 it was finally pacified.

The British annexation and administration of Ghumsar created confusion in all rungs of the social hierarchy of the estate. The local feudal
aristocracy was deprived of power and position for which they felt humiliated. With the establishment of the British administration, the people of the estate began to fear that the English wanted to convert them to Christianity and they felt that there was impending danger to their religion.

The introduction of the British land revenue administration, instead of providing any immediate relief to the peasants and labourers, added to their misery and hardship. They were required to pay 50% of their produce as rent to the British Government. This caused enormous hardship to the peasants. Further, they were exploited by the government officials. So they developed strong dislike towards the British rule.

The immediate cause of rebellion in Ghumsar was the common dissatisfaction at the arbitrary dissolution of the age-old institution of Rajaship in the estate. They earnestly desired the restoration of the Bhanja family to power.

RESISTANCE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF KAMALA LOCHAN DORA BISSOI:

The leader of the rebellion in Ghumsar after the British annexation in 1836, was famous Kamala Lochana Dora Bissoi. He belonged to the hereditary feudal patriarchate family of Dora Bissoi of the Kondh tribe of Ghumsar. In addition to his being Dora Bissoi, Kamala Lochan received the title of “Birahara Patro” from the Raja Dhananjaya Bhanja. He had also the distinction of being the “Abhaya” (The defender) of the Jakro tribe of Kondhs.

The Kondhs found a leader in the person of Kamala Lochan Dora Bissoi, who made it a mass movement. Several contingents of troops were posted at several strategic points like Kondhs. Nuagam, Bellaguntha, Nimapadara, Chamunda, Buguda, Vishnuchakra, Pailipada, Badaborosing, Aska and Sorada to suppress the rebellion led by Dora Bissoi.

When George Edward Russel came to Ghumsar as its special commissioner in 1836, reward of rupees five thousand was declared for the apprehension of Dora Bissoi. But the Kondhs extended no assistance to the government for the capture of their leader. The Dora and his followers attacked a British detachment of 35 men in the Kurlmingia mountain. They created fear among the British soldiers and officers by their daring acts. Russel made a determined bid to move proved to be of no avail. The Dora then took resort to trickery to incite the Kondhs against the Government. He spread a rumour that the Government would impose several taxes on the Kondhs. This rumour worked well. The Kondh rebellions sparked off at different parts of the Kondh high lands. The Government issued a proclamation and urged the Kondhs to assist the Government for apprehension of the Dora and his men. The proclamation left no impact on the Kondhs, who continued to resist the British authority under their charismatic leader Dora Bissoi. The Government ultimately succeeded in capturing almost all the followers of Dora Bissoi except their leader. All the relations of Dora Bissoi, his Sardars, Naiks, and Paiks were either killed or captured. Dora Bissoi became a wandering fugitive. He moved to the Angul estate. The Angul Raja Somanath Singh arrested Dora Bissoi and handed over him to the Government for which he received the stipulated reward of Rupees five thousand. Dora Bissoi was captured in 1837 and thereafter he was sent to Ooty near Madras, where he died as a state prisoner in 1846.
RESISTANCE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF CHAKARA BISSOI:

The capture and imprisonment of Dora Bissoi did not end the struggle of the Kondhs against the British Government. The place of Dora Bissoi was taken over by his nephew Chakra Bissoi. Ram Singh Buxshee, father of Chakra Bissoi was killed by British troops in 1837 and this incident left a bitter scar on the mind of his son. He received inspiration and military training from his uncle during the days of haunt and wander in the jungles as fugitive.

In December 1846, a massive revolt erupted in Ghumsar under the leadership of Chakara Bissoi. He was popularly known as the staunchest “Champion of Meriah” all over the Kondhmals.

They were determined to secure the restoration of the Bhanja family to power and to establish the influence of his own family in Ghumsar, and also among the Kondhs. In course of uprising Chakra Bissoi and his followers made a victorious march into Kullada and enthroned one “Rajapila”, Pitambara Bhanja, a twelve years old illegitimate son of the Late Dhananjaya Bhanja, as the Raja of Ghumsar.

Chakra Bissoi pleaded with Maj. Macpherson and others to refrain from taking measures for suppression of Meriah sacrifice. But his pleading proved of no avail. He convinced the Kondhs that they would incur the anger of the Earth Goddess, Tari Pennu, if they would surrender the victims (Meriahs) to the Government. Soon thereafter a large mob of Kondhs assembled before the Agents camp at Bissipura, six miles south of Phulbani, the former headquarters of the Kondhmals, and demanded the resolution of the Meriah victims, promising that the latter’s lives would be spared.

Kondhs attacked the camp of the Agent, for which Macpherson marched with a large force and burnt some villages of the Kondhs in the Kondhmalas to create Panic among the Kondhs.

The Madras Government felt disturbed at the recurrence of the rebellion in Ghumsar and sent Major General Dyce, Commanding the Madras Army to suppress the rebellion with heavy hands. The authorities believed that the rising was due to combined efforts of the Baud-Kondh leader, Nabaghana Kanhar and Chakra Bissoi and the Raja of Angul secretly helping them. Major General Dyce made certain severe allegations against captain Macpherson and his assistants. He did not use conciliatory measures but used coercive measures like burning, plundering, destruction of grains etc. to suppress the rebels. These revealing remarks of General Dyce shows that the Kondh insurrection of 1846-47 in Ghumsar Maliah was more attributable to the oppression and mal-administration of the Agent and his assistants than to the fomentation and incitement of Chakra Bissoi and Nabaghana Kanhar.

G.H. Bushby, the Secretary to the Government of India, intimated General Dyce that the object of the Supreme Government of India was to persuade the Kondhs “to abandon a savage and inhuman rite gradually by measures of conciliation and persuasion and not by recourses to force and violence.

Accordingly Lieutenant Colonel Campbell was appointed as the Agent in place of Cap. Macpherson for Meriah Agency by the end of April 1847. The tactful policy of persuasion
followed by Lt. Colonel Campbell yielded tremendous result. Within no time he won over most of the Kondh Chiefs, “Who swore to abstain henceforth from offering of human victims.

Not only the Kondhs of Ghumsar but also those of the Kondhmals promptly responded to Chakra Bissoi’s call for rebellion. However Major General Dyce succeeded in quelling this Kondh rising. But Chakra Bissoi escaped.

Captain Dunlop received an information that Chakra Bissoi fled from Ghumsar and entered the Jungles of Angul estate. British Government doubted that Somanath Singh, the Raja of Angul was supporting the rebels in opposition to the British rule. So he was expelled from his estate and Angul was taken over by the Government in 1846.

In 1848 relentless efforts were made to apprehend Chakra Bissoi, who was hiding alternatively in Baud and Sonepur. Chakra Bissoi maintained his sway over the Ghumsar Maliahs although he retired from active confrontation with the Government for four years since 1848.

The Ghumsar rebel chief, Chakra Bissoi was reported to have gone into the Jungles of Paralakhemundi Zamindari and joined hands with Dandasena, the leader of the Paralakhemundi rebels. All attempts to arrest him proved to be futile. The Raja of Madanpur was removed from the management of his estate for providing shelter to Chakra Bissoi. But the Commissioner of Nagpur did not allow the Commissioner of Orissa to interfere with affairs of Madanpur and Kalahandi which remained under his authority.

It is believed that the rebel Chief Chakra Bissoi breathed his last before the outbreak of the Mutiny of 1857. It has been rightly remarked that “Chakra Bissoi, the chief of some insignificant Muthas, had been ignored because of his obscure birth though he deserves to be ranked with Jagabandhu Vidyadhara and Surendra Sai”.

It is further observed that “Chakra Bissoi had no personal motive. He rose for the restoration of the Ghumsar family to fulfill the pledge given by his uncle Dora Bissoi, to the last Raja. He fought for the vindication of the family honour, as the Bissoi family was driven out of the Ghumsar Maliahs and his uncle languished in a prison at a distant place.” For more than ten years he carried on intermittent struggle against the British powers.

Chakara Bissoi led the life of a fugitive haunted from place to place, from Athagada to Paralakhamundi, and from Angul to Ghumsar. Chakra Bissoi was never captured. He remained the most predominant figure in the history of Ghumsar Maliahs from 1846 to 1856. His brave adventures and daring actions, his indomitable courage, uncommon vigour, inordinate zeal and towering personality have added luster and glory to the name of Ghumsar. By 1866, Ghumsar appeared fully subdued and totally reconciled with the all mighty British Raj.

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