



The Paika Revolt was an armed revolt of the traditional Paika militia in the state of Khurda in Odisha in the year 1817. It began in the month of March and sporadically and intermittently continued for nearly a year. The revolt had been led by Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mahapatra, who was traditionally a Buxi, military commander, under the king of Khurda. It had nearly swept away the British in Khurda, Pipili, Banapur and Puri for months before being crushed by the forces of East India Company. It was not a purely military revolt of disgruntled or demobilized soldiers but had a component that gave it a character of a civil uprising in which the Khurda

1857 and set a strong tradition of defiance to the alien Company's rule in the eastern state of Odisha. It has always been a great source of inspiration to the nationalists' struggle for independence in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Khurda as an Autonomous Kingdom:

Khurda was a principality under the Gajapati king of Puri during the 15th and 16th centuries. Taking advantage of the defeat of the Gajapati king Mukunda Deva at the hands of the Afghan rulers of Bengal in 1568 and the consequent conflict between the Mughals and the

The Paik Revolt of Khurda, 1817

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Paikas, tribesmen, peasants, the traditional rent collectors and people engaged in native salt manufacturing, an industry tottering due to the monopoly of salt trade by the Company, all had used arms against their adversary. The uprising was against the unjust Company rule. It broke out four decades earlier to the Great Revolt of

Afghans for control over the province, Ramachandra Deva, the young Zamindar of Khurda, declared himself the ruler of Odisha. His station Khurda village at the feet of Barunai Hills gave him and his men the required strategic defence in the event of military conflicts. Very soon he expanded his kingdom and declared himself

1. The modern scholar most credited with beginning the study of social memory is Maurice Halbwachs, whose notion of the 'collective memory' is best seen in his posthumous work *The Collective Memory*. The notion of collective memory was taken up mostly by psychologists concerned with social cognition and the mechanics of memory in the 1950s and 1960s. Jacques LeGoff picked up where the psychological literature left off and brought together psychological and historical perspectives of memory in a series of works published between 1977 and 1981, translated and reprinted in English in 1992 as *History and Memory*. See Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, translation of 1950 ed. (New York : Harper & Row, 1980); Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* , 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).



as the Gajapati, Chief King of the province. As the original Gajapati kings of Puri had become very weak, the Afghans and Mughals dealt with him on the matters related to Odisha. The local princes and the priestly class, especially the class in charge of Puri Jagannath temple, also sought his mediation for the solution of provincial level disputes. Finally after the Mughal occupation of Odisha in 1593, he was recognized as the Gajapati king under the Mughals. This formally elevated his position among the princes of Odisha. Since the close of the 16th century the prince or king of Khurda became the custodian of Puri and the Jagannath temple which bestowed him with legitimacy and bolstered his image further.

Puri under the Marathas

In 1751 the Marathas took over Odisha from the Mughals. However, it did not change the political situation much in Khurda until 1760, when the Khemidis of Ganjam claiming themselves to be the real Gajapati king, invaded Puri to establish control over the Jagannath temple. The Khurda prince Birakesari Deva (1739-1781) sought the help of the Marathas and promised to pay one lakh rupees to them in lieu of their military help. The Marathas intervened and the Khemidis were repelled from Puri. However, Birakesari Deva's failure to compensate the Marathas as per the agreement compelled Khurda to surrender four *mahals*, estates, to them. The *mahals* were Jagannath Chhattar (Kshetra) and Serai, Rahang, Lembai and Chabiskud. All these were highly fertile and yielded good revenue. Among this territorial loss, the loss of Puri was crucial as it involved grave loss of both material as well as spiritual legitimacy to the ruler who was unable to safeguard the abode of Lord. It was the dwelling place of

Jagannath, the 'supreme deity' of the province and fetched a good amount of money to the state treasury in the form of pilgrim tax. The prince could not reconcile to this loss and went crazy and killed four of his sons for their 'failure' to re-capture the *mahals*. The Marathas deposed him and made his grandson the king of Khurda. In 1795, Mukunda Deva II became the king and lived till 1817. It was during his life time that the Marathas were overthrown from Odisha; the East India Company took over Khurda and the rest of Odisha in 1803; the king of Khurda allowed safe passage to the Company troops through his kingdom with the hope of Puri being restored to his control after the removal of the Marathas. Now Odisha came under the British occupation; Khurda was made a *khasmahal* (brought under the Company's direct administration) in 1806 leading to regular revenue settlements and exorbitant hike in rent; the prince of Khurda was reduced to a pensioner and was confined to Puri by the British; and the Paika revolt broke out in 1817.

Who were The Paikas?

The Paika is a colloquial form of the word *padatika* or foot soldiers. Even after the inclusion of horses and elephants in the army, all the army personnel continued to be known as Paikas in the province. Besides the combatant soldiers, all other non-combatant persons involved in various battles related activities, like the drummers, suppliers of provision, grass cutters for the horses and other helpers were also called Paikas. The Paikas became a synonym of the traditional militias. However, their main concentration was in Khurda and the adjoining areas as of these enjoyed a strategic location in the province from military and political view points. The Paikas also performed



police duties and acted as protectors of the state properties. They supported the local princes and Zamindars as armed militia. As observed by the contemporary Company officials (A. Sterling and G. Toynbee), the Paikas had been divided into three ranks, distinguished by names taken from their works or the weapons they used. They were: the *praharis*, who carried the *khandas* (swords) and were stationed as guards; the *banuas* (derived from the term *bana* means crackers), who used the matchlock and were sent for distant expeditions; and the *dhenkias*, who were armed with bows and arrows and a sword and performed all sorts of duties.

The Paikas were granted land for their services and had been exempted from payment of any rent. Thus, they engaged in cultivation as peasants and formed the militia at the time of battle. Through the Paika system, forest dwellers were settled as peasants and were expected to act as the mercenaries of the state. They were known for their great devotion and loyalty to the will of their lords. Besides the *chasa* or the cultivating community, occasionally individuals of the 'lowest' caste such as *kandaras* (derived from *kanda* or stem), *panas* (from the word *parna* or leaf) and *bauri* (from *bana* or forest) (This suggests that they these people had been earlier forest dwellers before taking to settled life.) also formed the class of Paika engaged in cultivation as well as in state services. The process of formation of state, a process that had been delayed in Orissa, was now bringing these forest dwellers into sedentary life style and imposing the social hierarchy of caste on them too. Physical exercise and military drill was a requirement for the Paikas to remain fit for battle time and other internal security duties. This they regularly did in the village *akhada* (gym) under the care of the Paika veterans. They

rehearsed for noise less cat walk or sly guerrilla movement, called 'Pa' movement, which grew as a form of entertainment and became the main base of many dance forms including the 'Chhau' in Odisha. They propitiated '*mantras*,' magical spells, to 'immunize' themselves against the enemy's weapons. As stated earlier, many of the forest dwellers in search of secured sources of food came to the village settlements and were settled by the village community under the auspices of the Zamindars and the village headmen on the outskirts of the village. Many of them were given land grants for cultivation in lieu of their mercenary military and police services to the emerging regional state structure. The system of Paika sustained them in the village community and helped in the expansion of agriculture and in the process of formation of state. They always felt that their fate was tied to the prince, which made them highly loyal to the traditional chiefs. With the coming of the Company's rule, the local princes were deposed, their *jagirs* were abolished and the Paikas lost the right of rent free land that they had enjoyed under these chiefs. Consequently, the popular resentment leading to civil revolts against the Company rule was an obvious outcome. The sturdy Paikas emerged its vanguard for they held the traditional arms and had the required physical fitness for that. However, others also did not lag behind in their overt and covert support to the revolt, because due to the decline in local salt industry, replacement of cowry cells by rupee currency for transactions and denial of traditional forest rights to the tribes' men, their sufferings were no less. Thus, though the agrarian community without any modern education in the early decades of the 19th Century did not understand much about the complexities of the British rule, it led the revolt at a time, when the



Company's rule had not yet fully consolidated its position in Odisha and in elsewhere in the country.

Jayee Rajguru and the Revolt in 1804: A Precursor of Revolt of 1817

Nearly 13 years before Buxi Jagabandhu it was Jayee Rajguru, who had raised the banner of revolt in Khurda in 1804. Jayee was the royal preceptor, Rajguru, and the Dewan of the kingdom of Khurda at the time of British occupation of Odisha in October 1803. The British had sought permission of the Khurda prince for the movement of their troops through the state. In their fight against the Marathas in Odisha, the British had also asked for Paika help. In lieu they had promised to pay one lakh rupees to the prince. The prince Mukunda Deva II agreed to the proposal with the hope that the control of Puri and the other four *mahals* could be re-gained after the Marathas had been overthrown by the British. However, Jayee, an astute Brahmin and a shrewd Rajguru had advised the prince against it. Finally, the British occupation of Maratha territories did take place with the support of Khurda, but the promises made by the British were not fully kept by them. Only a part of payment promised was made to Khurda. The frustrated Rajguru made elaborate plans to conquer the pilgrim city and the other *mahals* from the Company. In March 1804 the negotiations between Khurda and the British failed and the first Paika revolt under the leadership of Jayee Rajguru broke out, barely five months after the British occupation of Odisha. The Paika militia attacked the Company's men in Pipli and wounded many British troops on 22 November

1804. The Company's retaliation was swift and ruthless. The British troops stormed the fort of Khurda; Mukunda Deva II and the Rajguru were arrested from the Barunai Hills on 3 January 1805. After their trial the pliable prince was released and was confined to Puri on an annual pension. All his royal power or privileges were withdrawn. The recalcitrant and obstinate Rajguru was executed in the Medinipur fort on 6 December 1806. With this the Paikas lost their leader and waited till 1817 to revolt against the British for the second time, for their plight and predicament had been worsening with each passing year of the Company's rule in Khurda and elsewhere in the province.

Emergence of Buxi Jagabandhu As the Leader of the Revolt of 1817

Colonialism created a social structure leading to the growth and flowering of the parasitic classes in the economy. This provided an instrumentality for the external exploitation by imperialism. The advent of the colonial rule disrupted the indigenous economy and substituted it for new social structure, characterized by de-industrialization, de-urbanization, collapse of traditional mercantile capital and pauperization of vast section of rural and urban classes in which, recurrent and intense famines became inevitable.² Tax from the land remained a primary source of revenue for the kings and emperors since time immemorial. Nevertheless, the ownership pattern of land had witnessed changes over centuries. In the pre-capitalist stage of Indian economy, the idea of absolute ownership did not exist. All classes connected with land possessed certain

2. Irfan Habib, "Colonialization of Indian Economy, 1757-1900", and "Studying a Colonial Economy Without Perceiving Colonialism", in *Essay in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 296-366.



rights. Unlike, the ancient and medieval period, the British imperial rule unleashed far reaching changes in Indian agrarian structure. New land tenures, new land ownership concepts, tenancy changes and heavier demand for land revenue brought havoc changes, both in rural economy and social web. Adam Smith had said that a trader was a bad sovereign or ruler and vice versa. His opinion was coloured by his view of the British East India Company. However, the traders of the British East India Company took the business of government so seriously that they succeeded in building up a vast bureaucracy with its span of control ranging from the official on the spot through a long chain of intermediaries. They also change the relative rights, interests and privileges of various classes in the agricultural community, owning, occupying, managing or cultivating the lands and sharing in its produce.

The agrarian crises due to the Company's policies produced a leader of the people, Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mahapatra. Popularly known as Buxi Jagabandhu, he had been the traditional Buxi, military commander, of Khurda. His position was second only to the king in rank. For generations his family held the valuable estate of Rodanga Garh in Khurda. After the conversion of Khurda into a *khasmahal* under direct administration of the Company, like the other land holders, Jagabandhu lost not only his official Buxi position, but also the right of rent free land. Now he had to pay the rent in the court. Unaware of the bureaucratic complexities he made the payment through a middle man, who for sometime worked in the court at Cuttack. This man had plans to usurp the land in his name. He appropriated the paid rent himself and got the estate belonging to the Buxi auctioned in his own name. Even the Buxi's appeal in higher court did

not yield any result. This infuriated the Buxi to raise the banner of revolt, for which the Paikas and other peasants suffering similar fate were ready. The Khond tribes of adjoining Ghumsar also joined the revolt instantly, because their plight due to the loss of their traditional rights over the forest land under the new Company regime was also impinging on their sustenance. Further, the local prince of Ghumsar gave tacit support to it. Confluence of all these factors made the ensuing rebellion very intense and ferocious.

The Narrative of Revolt of 1817

The Khurda revolt began in March 1817, when the Khonds from Ghumsar and the Paikas of Khurda jointly raided Banapur and attacked everything that symbolized the new Company's establishment there. Even the *mahajans* and *sahukars* advancing loan to the peasants with the sole motive of appropriating their land and other valuable materials were not spared. The *sarvarakars*, the traditional rent collectors, the *dalabeheras*, *bisbhoyis* and *zamindars* joined the revolt. All these were middle level officials with a relatively bigger land holding and land rights combined with some local administrative duties. They now assumed the role of the local leaders and political mobilizers. Like the ordinary peasants and tenants, their plight too suffered under the new dispensation because of the denial of remission of rent they had enjoyed earlier and the rigidity in its collection under the new rule even at the time of exigencies like drought and other natural calamities.

In March 1817, a 400 strong contingent of Khond tribesmen from Ghumsar crossed into Khurda; the Dalabeheras and Paikas joined them. The rebels attacked the Police station and other Government buildings at Banapur, took away



about Rs. 15,000 Government money and killed over 100 men. The Salt Agent of the southern division, Mr. Becher, narrowly escaped from this popular fury. However, his boat on the Chilka Lake was captured and plundered. The rebels then marched on Khurda. More crowds joined them on the way, because of their success at Banapur. The officials stationed at dared not offer any resistance and fled away for safety. All the government buildings were burnt to the ground and the treasury was sacked. A part of rebel contingent moved to Lembai, where it killed a *sarvarkar* (rent collector), Charan Patnaik, for he was suspected to be a Company loyalist. The magistrate of Cuttack moved to Khurda to control the rebellion. By the beginning of April 1817, the number of rebels had swelled to about 3000. They constantly attacked the government forces thereby forcing the Magistrate to retreat to Cuttack on 4 April 1817. However, in the ensuing encounter, Lt. Faris, who accompanied the Magistrate, was killed.

The rebels under the leadership of the Buxi also reached Puri and requested Mukunda Deva II, the former king of Khurda and a pensioner confined to Puri, to join them and to lead the revolt. The pensioner king did not join, but had his sympathy for the revolt. Taking advantage of the crises, he gathered courage to come out of the confinement and made elaborate preparations for leaving Puri. The pilgrim city, Puri came under the control of the rebels. The covert support of the prince in Puri gave strength and popular legitimacy to them. The Magistrate of Cuttack recommended that once the Company re-gained control over this most important pilgrim city, the prince should be removed to Cuttack, the Company's headquarter in Odisha. A reward of Rs. 5000 was also announced on the head of

the rebel *sirdars* on 12 April 1817 and martial law was imposed in the entire Khurda territory.

On 12 April 1817 the rebels burnt the government catchery and several other public buildings in Puri. The private houses of the Europeans were also not spared. In the resultant clash 15 rebels were killed and many more were wounded. But, very soon more people joined the rebels. The priests of the temple openly proclaimed the fall of British rule and the restoration of the king's rule in Odisha. This created a mass upsurge forcing the European officials stationed in Puri to leave for Cuttack, where they safely reached on 18 April 1817. By the second half of April, 1817 martial law had been proclaimed in Puri, Pipli, Lembai, Kotdesh, Khurda and Banapur. All communications between Cuttack and southern part of the province were completely cut off. By the end of April 1817, the British swung into action and repressive mode. An armed British contingent returned to Puri and took the prince to Cuttack as their captive. There were attempts to rescue the prince on the way. Some 2500 rebels encountered the British forces escorting the prince. But, their attempts proved futile, because the British used modern arms and scared the mass of crowd. The rebels consisting of the Paikas and the ordinary village people had only traditional arms, which were no match to the British arms. On 11 May 1817 the prince reached Cuttack as a Company prisoner and was placed in close confinement in the Barabati fort till his death on 30 November 1817. By the end of May 1817 the revolt had been effectively suppressed, although the tensions continued to prevail and repressive measures under martial law unremittingly continued till April 1818. Many rebels were arrested; summary trials were conducted and harsh punishments were given to them.



The flare-up of popular sympathies outside Khurda

It is true that most of the events related to the revolt took place in the Khurda region. It was most formidable there. The Paikas of Khurda were most active under their leader Jagabandhu Bidyadhar. The Khonds from Ghumsar had rushed to Khurda to join the revolt there. However, the Paikas all over the southern and eastern parts of the province were not reluctant in their support to Khurda. They burnt the police stations of Asareswar, Tiran, Hariharpur, Gop and committed many violent activities there. The prince of Kujang and Kanika also secretly helped the rebels. The princes of Ghumsar, Nayagarh and Ranapur were often warned for protecting the absconding rebels of Khurda. When the British troops reached Kujang to take control of the situation in September 1817, the Paikas attacked their boats in Paradip. On 19 September 1817 in a similar event some 2000 Paikas and the local people of Kujang encountered the British troops, but were over powered and routed completely. Besides the local prince of Kujang, the other prominent rebel leaders there were Narayan Paramguru and Bamdev Patjoshi.

The Paikas of Gop adjoining Khurda under their leader Karunakar Sirdar [Sardar] raised the banner of revolt in June 1817. The police station was burnt. The rebels deserted the village fearing British retaliation. It was a common practice for the British troops to burn the rebel villages to scare the rebels.

The Aftermath of Revolt

The 1817 was a major revolt in Odisha. It broke out in Khurda and extended more or less to the greater part of the province. As G.

Toynbee, who worked as Revenue Superintendent of Cuttack later, accepted in his writing, *A Sketch of the History of Orissa: From 1803-1828*, (1873), when he said, "... it doubtless appeared to many of the proprietors that our reign was at an end, and that we were about to be driven out of the country". It was an unequal battle in which the British were clearly at the upper end, but the rebels gave a tough fight, because of their determination to fight.

Even after the suppression of the revolt, the Buxi and some of his close associates like Krushna Chandra Bhramorbar Ray, Gopal Chhotrai and Pindaki Bahubalendra absconded and remained at large for a long time, despite the government efforts to nab them dead or alive.

The Government's failure was largely due to the popular support the rebels enjoyed throughout. Even the princes of Nayagarh and Ranapur were 'suspected' to have helped the rebels in their absconding. In December 1817, the rebels even regrouped themselves under the leadership of Gopal Chhotrai and took another political trajectory in the form of robbing and looting of the houses of the supporters of the Government. They dissuaded the peasants from paying revenue to the Government. In a conciliatory move, in order to pacify the situation, the Company Government offered general amnesty to all the rebels except their main leaders. It was also notified in 1818 that the balances of previous years and the interest on all revenue arrears would be remitted to those peasants, who would pay up in full for year 1817-18. This was a big concession to assuage the feelings of peasants. The Buxi was finally convinced to surrender in 1825. He was given a monthly pension of Rs. 150 and was confined to Cuttack,



where he died in 1829. His trusted Dewan, Krushna Chandra Bhramarbar Rai, also surrendered and was confined to Cuttack.

In the meanwhile, preparations were made for the conviction of the 'grave offenders' or the more active rebels. A Military Commission was set up in May 1817 and General Sir Gabriel Martindell was deputed to act as its Commissioner to oversee the trial. He reported against 268 persons and awarded punishment to them. Gopal Chhotrai and four of his associates Vishnu Paikari, Ram Singh, Nar Singh and Nath Pradhan were sentenced to death for treason. Parasuram Patnik and Sachidanand Patnik were also given death sentences for the offences of murder. Another group of prominent 103 rebels were deported for life and 55 others were given varied terms of rigorous imprisonment.

The Ewer Report

Mr. Walter Ewer was an associate of General Gabriel Martindell in the Military Commission in Khurda. Mr. Ewer also conducted a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the causes of the revolt. Its Report which came to be known as the Ewer's Report was submitted in May 1818. The report discussed the causes of the revolt in great details and concluded that the revolt was due to the ruinous effects of maladministration, abuse of power and widespread corruption in the bureaucracy. It also pointed out economic factors like the evils of the new revenue system, the replacement of the cowry cells by rupee currency and the decline of local salt manufacturing and salt trade leaving a large section of the local community jobless. The Report concluded that all these economic changes had pauperized the peasants and forced them to revolt.

Conclusion

A close reading of the Ewer Report suggests that the Paika Revolt of 1817 was essentially a peasant movement. The Paikas played an instrumental role in it, because besides being peasants, they had been the armed militia with traditional arms in their possession. The dispossessed Sirdars, military commanders, Zamindars and rent collectors emerged as the main leaders. However, all the classes had extended their overt and covert support to the rebels. It was, because of such support, the rebel leaders could not be apprehended for quite some time even after the suppression of the revolt. This became feasible because the Company transformed indigenous agrarian social hierarchy and became the major claimant of agrarian social surplus in comparison to all other previous claimants.

The Khurda revolt of 1817 was a remarkable chapter not only in the history of modern Odisha, but also in the history of the anti-colonial struggle in India. It occurred soon after the British occupation of the province in 1803 and set the great tradition of defiance and resistance to the colonial rule in India. If the Great Revolt of 1857 was the culmination of a century long tradition of civil revolts, the Khurda revolt of 1817 was a precursor to that. It could be seen as a minuscule of the Revolt of 1857. Even after its suppression, Khurda rose in revolt in 1827. During the Non-cooperation movement of 1920s, it remained a nationalist stronghold and had prepared for a no-rent campaign in Khurda's Pichukoli village on the pattern of Bardoli campaign, which Gandhi suspended due to the Chauri Chaura incident in February 1922. This suggests that the tradition of defiance to the



colonial rule persisted in Khurda throughout the period.

Whether it was the revolt of Jayee Raj guru (1804) or the revolt of Buxi Jagabandhu (1817), the Paika uprising in Khurda has to be seen in the social setting of the early 19th century. It was one of the numerous civil uprisings against the British in the country. The sudden changes brought by the East India Company in the local economy and polity upset the traditional social fabric. The changes worsened the situation, which resulted in such civil revolts. The people's deep sense of pride and respect for the locality, religion, social customs and traditions played a pivotal role in their coming into the revolts. Because of the pressure, at times some of the rebels even surrendered and accepted to be the pensioners of the Government. However, each one of the cases has to be understood in their specific contexts. We should neither eulogize them as 'nationalists' in a spiritual biography of nation, nor drub them as 'betrayers' in an equally fallacious and a-historical manner. A more nuanced approach would be not to make any gradation or ranking of such revolts in hierarchical 'greater' or 'lesser'. These political episodes of history were largely a product of their times and need to be evaluated for their historical significance in their

interface with the British rule. Locating the Buxi or the Paikas at a higher historical pedestal than the other anti-British rebels would be, probably, an injustice to the great and long tradition of struggle against the alien colonial rule in the country. Their analysis in an objective, rational and scientific basis without any bias and imposition of the present on these early 19th century revolts would only make their study lively and relevant today. The leaders of such revolt were often the superior claimants in agricultural production in the indigenous social hierarchy and they were driven to revolt when alien rule interfered with this social hierarchy and reduced their position while claiming major share of agrarian social surplus for itself. If commemorating the 200th year of the Khurda Revolt in 2017 does not become a window to the new generation to peep into the various facets of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle of the nation, the objective may not be realized.

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