



Paika Vidroha of 1817 - The First War of Indian Independence

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Since time immemorial, Odisha has witnessed its people's courageous stand and skillful warfare against the enemy. Be it their victory or defeat, the people of Odisha have always exhibited their strength in the bivouac of life. However, the powerful Kalinga Empire lost its sovereignty and independence in 1568. In different times the 'Afghans', the 'Mughals' and the 'Marhattas' have attacked Odisha. But the occupation of Odisha by East India Company in 1803 AD was eventful. In three phases Odisha came under British hegemony which took about 50 years of time. That shows how difficult it was for the East India Company to occupy Odisha.

With the establishment of Bhoi dynasty in Khurda by Ram Chandra Dev-I, a fort was constructed at the foothill of Barunei. Earlier Jayee Rajguru, the chief priest and the Regent of minor king Mukunda Dev II was promised of one lakh rupees and restoration of four 'praganas' by the British to remain neutral to the conquest of Odisha from the marhattas. However, the British declined to honour the promise after the conquest of the Marhattas. Such a betrayal made Jayee Rajguru shocked and insulted and he decided to drive out the British at the cost of life. Accordingly, he reorganized the paikas, made strategy and declared war against the British in 1804. Defending the fort for twenty one days, he got defeated at last. Both the king Mukunda Deva II and Jayee Rajguru were arrested. Jayee Rajguru

took all responsibility onto himself for which the king Mukunda Dev II was proved innocent and Rajguru was executed in a brutal manner. The armed resistance in 1804 is looked upon as the precursor to the great revolt of 1817.

After the death of Jayee Rajguru, Khurda came under the East India Company as the last independent fort of the country. The common people enjoying rent free land were asked to pay tax to the Govt. New revenue settlements were made which affected the people. Various impositions made their lives miserable. Thus, there was discontentment against the oppressive rule of the British. The Zamidars (Land lords) were also affected and the estates of some zamidars were auctioned for non-payment of taxes. Again Cowrie (shell) was the medium of exchange since ancient times. But the British demonetized Cowrie and introduced silver coins. This led to the sufferings of the people. Further, a defective Salt Policy was introduced which affected the rights of the salt producers in the coastal areas. The common people could not accept hike in salt price. That ignited the people at large to free themselves from the colonial rule.

Meanwhile, Buxi Jagabandhu, the commander in chief (General) of the king of Khordha who was a victim of British colonial rule came forward to give leadership to the common people in protecting their rights. As a visionary and strategist, he decided to take people



of all categories to his confidence irrespective of caste, creed and social status. The tribal 'Kandhas' and 'panas', the 'Dalais', 'Dalabeheras' 'Khandayats' and even the 'Brahmins' reposed faith in Buxi to have a successful protest. Thus, the revolt against the British was organized under the banner of Gajapati, the former Raja of Khurda to muster support from all walks of life. Buxi sent letters on palm leaf to the Rajas of 'Ghumusar', 'Keonjhar' 'Mayurbhanj' and other 'Gadayatas' to support the revolt. Thus, in the last week of March 1817, hundreds of 'Kandha' rebels with arms assembled at Khurda. They joined with the forces of Buxi and an organized armed revolt against the British started in the first week of April, 1817.

The police station of Banpur was burnt, government quarters were ransacked and hundreds of British officials and their supporters were killed. The government treasury was looted. The rebels were joined by hundreds of people on their march to Khurda. The Tehesildar's office and the Govt. Treasury in Khurda were attacked. The insurgents also moved to different 'praganas' and caused devastation. The collector of Cuttack rushed to Khurda with some sepoy. But on their way at Gangapada, the Paika rebels intercepted them with grenade attack. The collector had to flee to save his life.

The main contingent of rebels marched towards Pipili and looted the Police Station. Under the Stewardship of Buxi, the Paikas entered Puri through Lokanath Ghat and were engaged in retaliating against the British officials. The Paikas instigated the people to avenge and the revolt spread into Gop, Kujanga, Kanika, Asureswar, Pattamundai and to other far off places. It also spread to Baripada and Balasore. Many parts of Western Odisha also joined the movement and the British army became more revengeful to crush it boldly using Machine Guns and Gun Powder. By April 1818, the British could take the situation under control. However Buxi

with his aides moved to forest to start Guerrilla warfare. He moved from jungle to jungle and fought from the jungle. But the British announced rewards, arrested Buxi's family members to pressurize him to surrender. However, Buxi was lured by the cunning British to surrender in the larger interest of the people of Odisha which would facilitate amendment in law with ensuring beneficiary measures. Thus, Buxi Jagabandhu gave in and was exempted from all punishment. Buxi surrendered in the larger interest of his people and his defeat was as dignified as the victory. The British Govt. accepted most of the demands of the Paika leader, Buxi. Buxi's leadership gave Paika Vidroha a new momentum for a period of eight years. Jayee Rajguru, Buxi, Pindiki Bahubalendra, Krutibasa Pattasani and Madhab Chandra Rautaray, the five valiant Paika leaders along with their trusted soldiers shall shine in the saga of Odisha's freedom movement for their invaluable contribution.

Paika Vidroha of 1817 was the first great political upheaval in India. The revolt with its objective to oust the alien rule and the involvement of the mass from all sections of life, deserves to be termed as the first war of India's independence.

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