



# Anti-Colonial Resistance in Odisha: 1767-1857

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## Introduction

The anti-colonial movement in India could be divided into two broad phases. The first phase began soon after the British conquest of Bengal after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and continued till the Revolt of 1857, while the second phase began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued till the achievement of independence in 1947. Here our focus is on the first phase. The first phase with the sole objective of overthrowing the colonial rule was marked by a series of civil rebellions, both major and minor, wherever the British reached for consolidating their rule. These rebellions were led by the rajas, zamindars, and the ex-retainers and the officials of the conquered Indian states. The main participants included the rack-rented peasants, ruined artisans, demobilized soldiers and the tribals, who had been the victims of the drastic colonial changes both in the socio-economic and political spheres. The changes brought by the British had disrupted the agrarian society and had caused prolonged and widespread suffering among the people. The traditional ruling class comprising the rajas and zamindars, etc., had been displaced and the peasants, artisans and tribals had been enraged by the intensifying colonial demands. The traditional intelligentsia and priestly class had been

upset by the foreign character of the British and incited the people against the British. They feared that their religions and their customs and traditions were in danger, because of the British. The leadership of these resistance movements remained in the hands of the traditional feudal class, which presided over the polity then. These rebellions were massive in their totality, but were wholly local in their spread and isolated from one another. They were due to the local causes and grievances, and were localized in their effects. They represented common conditions though separated in time and space. They suffered suppression in the hands of the colonial power, which had the backing of most modern arms and most sophisticated technology of the time. It was an asymmetrical battle between the traditional arms and modern arms. The suppression of the civilian rebellions was a foregone conclusion. However, these resistance struggles set a strong tradition of defiance, which thwarted overt racialism in India in the days to come. Secondly, though the traditional arms had conceded defeat, the British realized that modern arms alone would not sustain their rule in a colony. This led them to evolve the colonial ideology, which supplemented their arms for perpetuating the colonial rule. Since then the colonial ideology and the arms together



were used to create the myth of invincibility of the colonial rule. The rebels, despite being ruthlessly suppressed, inspired their countrymen to fight the injustice unleashed by the colonial rule. They made the supreme sacrifice of their life and property to live up to their belief. It is true that these rebellions did not bear a national ethos and lacked a broad all India vision. The rebels fought for un-setting the colonial rule super-imposed on their land and tried for replicating the pre-British feudal frame in its place. However, they had helped in the evolution of a nationalist struggle in the subsequent period. If the early phase of resistance was not truly nationalist in nature, it was also not averse to nationalism, which was yet to set in India. Since it facilitated nationalism to evolve, it could be explained in terms of proto-nationalism. In other words, these anti-colonial resistance movements could be seen as the forerunners of the second phase of the anti-colonial movement, which evolved from an embryonic form into a concrete shape over a period of time. The great Revolt of 1857, popularly called the Sepoy Mutiny, though it was much more than that, symbolized the climax of the early phase by its spread as well as by its massiveness. There were hundreds of such revolts, though their spread and volume was limited to their respective localities.

### **The Scene in Odisha**

Our focus here is on the anti-colonial resistance in Odisha during this early phase of 1757 and 1857. The resistance is to be examined in the background of the tradition discussed above. Secondly, it had its own uniqueness highlighting which would familiarize us with the specific setting of the development during the period under study. For example, there was no

‘Odisha’ then; what was meant by it was a broad tract inhabited by Odia (Oriya) speaking people. This was known as Odisha state in popular parlance. So, mentioning it as a state is only notional and only for convenience; Odisha became a separate linguistic state in April 1936. Before that, it had been divided into three main parts: the western part comprising Sambalpur and the adjoining areas formed a part of Central Provinces; the southern part, known as the Ganjam Agency, was with the Madras Presidency; and the Odisha Division comprising Cuttack, Puri and Balasore and the adjoining areas had been attached to the Bengal Presidency. Further, the three parts together did not form a single kingdom then and the British East India Company conquered them not in one go, but in a piecemeal manner in three different points of time. They took possession of south Odisha in 1765; conquered Cuttack, Puri and Balasore and their adjoining areas from the Marathas in 1803; and western Odisha with its main centre at Sambalpur in 1817. The south Odisha, which formed the Ganjam Agency after British consolidation, belonged to the Nizam state of Hyderabad; the western Odisha with Sambalpur as its main centre and the coastal Odisha with its main centre at Cuttack had been under the possession of the Bhonsles of the Maratha confederation before coming under the Company rule. The three parts, even after the British consolidation, were not amalgamated, because of which the nationalist movement in Odisha began as a movement for amalgamation of all Odia speaking tracts under one political administration. It was followed by a movement for an Odia linguistic state in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its outcome was the coming up of Odisha as a separate state in April 1936. However, that is not our focus here.



A chronological sequence of the different anti-colonial struggles in Odisha needs a mention here.

### 1. Resistance in Parlakhemundi: 1767-68

The Northern Circar comprising Ganjam, Parlakhemundi and the adjoining areas of Odisha was under the occupation of the Nizam of Hyderabad in the 1760's. The Nizam handed over it to the East India Company, for the latter had helped him against the French. However, the prince of Parlakhemundi Raja Jagannath Narayan Dev, who was the most important zamindar there, objected to it. He revolted against the British with the help of neighbouring princes of Vijayanagram and Badkhemundi. He obstructed Mr Scotford, who was coming to take possession of Ganjam in 1767. Col. Pitch defeated him at Jelmur in May 1768. Jagannath Narayan's son Gajapati Dev continued the fight after his father's death in 1770. What made this dynastic struggle to a tribal and civilian rebellion was the intense involvement of the tribals as the ally of the prince. The Doras and Bisoyis (tribal sardars) backed him fully. In 1799 the prince Gajapati Dev and his son were arrested and sent to Masulipattam jail. The revolt suppressed for the time being erupted once again in 1830. G. Edward Russell was sent in 1836 to suppress the revolt: a number of Bisoyi *sardars* were caught and executed. However, after a few years the revolt erupted once again in 1856-1857 under the active support of the *sabaras*, a local tribe. It was led by Radhakrishna Dandsena. Captain Wilson was sent to control the situation. Wilson set fire on many *sabara* villages and destroyed their crop. Finally Radhakrishna Dandasena and some of his rebel friends were arrested and executed in 1857.

### 2. Khurda Resistance : 1804

Nearly 40 years after the occupation of the Northern Circar, which later on formed the

Ganjam Agency of the Madras Presidency, the Company eyed on central and coastal Odisha in 1803. This brought Khurda under the British control. Jayi Rajguru, the Dewan of Khurda close to the pilgrim town of Puri, with the active support of the displaced Paika soldiers (peasant militia) of the kingdom revolted in March 1804, barely six months after the British occupation of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore in September – October 1803.

Jayi was the Dewan and the Rajguru (chief advisor) of Khurda ruled by Mukund Dev II, who was a minor then. The issue in Khurda was: who would have control over Puri and the Jagannath temple there. The Marathas controlled it and Khurda contested the Maratha claim. Khurda agreed to support the British, when they invaded the Maratha Odisha with the hope of retrieving the pilgrim city and a few parganas (revenue villages) attached to the temple. The non-Hindu Company Government would not have any interest in a temple, which was known for image worship, the Khurda prince and the dewan calculated. However, very soon their hopes were belied; the British had no intention of leaving the control of any conquered territory to the Indian princes. Moreover, the temple was a major source of revenue for them. Jayi mobilized the traditional Paika soldiers to recover Puri and the adjacent areas. In this revolt the dewan could get the support of the local princes of Kujang, Kanika, Marichpur and Kishanpur. He had tried to contact the Maratha Bhonsles for help. On 22 November 1804, there was a skirmish between the paik soldiers of Jayi and the British armed contingent led by Captain Hickland. On 5 December 1804 Col. George Harcourt, who headed the Company administration of Odisha since its occupation in 1803, sent a bigger contingent to Khurda and occupied it. Jayi and the Prince Mukund Dev-II escaped to Barunei hills, from where they were



caught on 3 January 1805. They were arrested and sent to Medinipur jail. In 1807 the prince was released and was compelled to live as a pensioner in Puri, away from his capital town Khurda; Jayi Rajguru, the stubborn dewan, was executed on 6 December 1806. After the fall of Khurda, The prince of Kujanga, Chandra Dhwaja Sendha was arrested in May 1805. Around the same time the Prince of Kanika was also arrested. Soon after that Khurda, Kujanga and Kanika were brought under the direct administration of the British.

### 3. The Paik Revolt in Khurda: 1817

Barely after a decade of Khurda's annexation, Buxi Jagabandhu Vidyadhar Mahapatra led a major revolt there against the British. This is called the Paik Revolt, because the Paiks (derived from *Padatik* or foot soldiers), who had been deprived of their military positions and of their hereditary free holding rights over land, were the main stay of it. The Paiks were peasant militia, who looked after the defence and security and got free land from the state in lieu. The Company administration withdrew the Paiks' rights over land. This enraged them. The tribal Khonds discontented with the stern changes brought by the British in different spheres were also the principal participants in the revolt. Jagabandhu Vidyadhar had lost his position of Buxi (army general) after the annexation of Khurda. He was also evicted from his zamindari for non-payment of revenue. In fact, he had been a victim of the complex land revenue system. He took the lead in the revolt. The revolt began, when nearly 400 Khonds from Ghumusar reached Khurda and attacked the British officials in end of March 1817. The Paik joined them soon. The revolt spread to Banapur, Pipili, Lembai, Kothdesh and Puri. The British officials were attacked, treasury looted and government

buildings set on fire. For nearly two months, the revolt remained beyond control. Finally by May 1817 the British could suppress it. However, Buxi Jagabandhu could not be traced and arrested till 1825, which shows the wide sympathy and support he had from the local people. The British suspected the complicity of the princes of Ghumusar, Ranapur and Nayagarh with the Buxi. The Buxi's main associates included Krushna Chandra Bhramarbar Ray, Gopal Chhotray, Padmanav Chhotray, Pinaki Bahubalendra, Bishnu Paikray, Ram Singh Nath Pradhan, Parashuram Patnaik and Sachidananda Patnaik.

The Khurda Paik revolt was a major revolt in Odisha, which is claimed to be the 'First War of Independence', because it occurred four decades earlier than the Revolt of 1857. Before the revolt of Khurda many minor and major civil rebellions had been witnessed in and out of Odisha. Any discussion on the anti-colonial resistance ought to be in the broader context of India without losing the sight of contemporary developments. The fact is that the region that was conquered earlier than others was also quick to resist the conquest. This was the general nature of the resistance movement all over the country.

In 1827, the ryots (peasants) of Tapang Garh in the vicinity of Khurda had withdrawn payment of rent in protest against the undue revenue demands. Samant Madhab Chandra Samantaray had been their leader. The Khonds and Paiks had renewed their fight in 1836 in Banapur. Following the suppression of the revolt, Saran Singh and Krutibas Patsani had been arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

### 4. The Khonds and the Ghumsar Uprising: 1834-36

The zamindar, locally called raja (prince) of Ghumusar Dhananjay Bhanja was arrested for



non-payment of revenue and disobedience to the Company government. He was kept in Ganjam Fort jail in 1818. His father Srikar Bhanja, who had handed over the estate to his son and had gone on pilgrimage, protested it. He was also put in jail. Srikar Bhanja escaped from Berhampur jail with the help of others and mobilized people to fight the British. The Khond tribals supported the prince, because they hoped only the prince could halt the rapid changes brought by the British. This forced the British to reach an agreement with Srikar, who was re-instated in May 1819. In the year 1832 Srikar wished to retire from this position and handed over the zamindari to Dhananjay, who defaulted the payment of revenue and prohibited the company officials from Ghumusar. The Khonds continued their support to him. What had enraged the Khonds against the British the most was the ban on their age old custom of *meriah* or human sacrifice. Whereas the British considered the practice of *meriah* out and out inhuman and non-negotiable, the Khonds took it to be an undue infringement on their age old social system. The over-zealous British officials banned it on gunpoint before convincing the tribals about its in-humanness. The basic difference between the traditional prince rule and the British rule was that whereas the former believed in minimum state interference in the tribal land, the later chased for over-administration with the twin objectives of maximizing their revenue demand and carrying their reformatory mission. This had brought the tribals, including the Khonds and *sabaras*, to the prince side. They hoped to un-set the new colonial policies with the help of the displaced rajas and zamindars, who tolerated the tribal social practices and often cajoled their subjects for payment of state dues. This, however, does not mean that the pre-British prince rule was un-exploitative and

un-repressive in nature. Unlike in the pre-colonial time, now the colonial demand for appropriating the resources had been unending. This necessitated over-administration in the hitherto inaccessible tribal tracts, which resulted in incessant tribal (and civilian) uprisings during the period.

5. In November 1835 Col Hudson occupied Ghumusar. After this the Khonds revolted intensely in Ghumusar, which continued for many years. Dora Bisoi (Bisoi was a leadership position among the Khonds) led it. His main associates were Buxi Ranasingh, Sankha Bisoi, Nanda Bisoi, Indrajit, Nathguru, Bana Patra, Bikram Sundara, Bhadendar, Madhu Behera, Bangar Behera, Jadu Behera, Bhunkar Bania, Sardar Godidas Naik, Abhay Baliar Singh, Sunia Singh, Punia Naik, Brundaban Bhanja, Madhu Bhanja and Hari Bhanja. In 1836 G.E. Russell was sent to suppress the revolt, which was becoming uncontrollable. Finally in 1837 Dora Bisoi was arrested and sent to jail, where he died in 1846. However, the Khonds could not be silenced. After Dora Bisoi, his nephew Chakra Bisoi led them. The British Agent S.C. Mcpherson and successor Jon Campbell finally suppressed the Khonds ruthlessly, though Chakra Bisoi could not be arrested despite all efforts. This also shows the large scale tribal support the rebel leader had and the hostility the British faced in the tribal Khond territory. Both the tribals and the non-tribals had joined hands against the British.

#### **Surendra Sai and the Revolt in Sambalpur : 1827-64**

Sambalpur witnessed a major anti-colonial resistance under the leadership of Surendra Sai between 1827 and 1864. Before elaborating it, we need to discuss about the British





occupation of the western Odisha in 1817. After the occupation of Bengal in the east in 1757 and the Nizam's territory in the south subsequently, the Company considered it imperative to conquer the territory lying in between the two parts. Thus, there began the second phase of Odisha occupation in 1803. The Bhonsles of the Marathas with their H/Q at Nagpur ruled over the coastal and western Odisha then. In the later part of 1803 the British defeated the Marathas and conquered Cuttack, Puri and Balasore. The Bhonsles signed the Deogaon Treaty with the Company in December 1803 and conceded their defeat. In the third phase, Sambalpur and the adjoining areas, known as western Odisha, was brought under the Company rule between 1804 and 1817. The third phase of occupation unusually took long 13 years (1804-1817) to complete. However, its reason need not be traced to any local resistance or any stiff Maratha opposition. The Marathas were too weak to check the British. Even in 1803 instead of resisting the Company forces they had fled away. The princes of Sambalpur, Sonapur and Baud in Western Odisha had been in the Maratha custody for defaulting the annual revenue payment and their queens readily agreed to accept the Company rule, for they had been assured by Col George Harcourt, the general of the Company's troops occupying Odisha, that they would be exempted from any payment to the Marathas, except a token *peshkus* of five gold coins to the Company. Soon after, the princes of Raigarh, Sarangarh, Reirakhhol, Gangpur, Bamanda, Bonai, Bargarh and Shakti agreed to sign treaties with Major Brouton, who headed the Company forces at Sambalpur. They all were eager to take the Company's help to be free from the Maratha control. Still, the occupation of Western Odisha was halted half way till 1817. The Company had incurred heavy loan for

pursuing its expansionist policy in India in the preceding years. This was severely criticized in England and in 1805; Governor General Lord Wellesley was withdrawn from India. By then the Company's total loan amount had crossed over 31 million pounds from only 17 million pounds in 1799. The Napoleonic War in Europe threatening the independence of England had been a bigger worry for Britain. All this had forced England to temporarily suspend the policy of colonial expansion in India. Its immediate beneficiaries were the Bhonsles, who got back Sambalpur, etc. However, by 1817, after the defeat of Napoleon, the expansionist policy was once again revived and Sambalpur meaning the whole of western Odisha was conquered following the Third Anglo-Maratha battle of 1817. With this the occupation of Odisha was complete.

Further, it needs to be emphasized here that neither the local princes and zamindars of south Odisha in 1765, nor their counterparts in coastal Odisha in 1803, or in western Odisha in 1817 had offered any resistance to the British forces at the time of their occupation. Their resistance began only after they experienced the colonial aggression both in political and social spheres. Initially they had welcomed the Company's rule in place of the Nizam or the Marathas. To them, the British rule was considerably a better alternative to the prevailing native Maratha rule. Even the priests of Puri Jagannath temple had been pursued by the Company officials to appeal to the *Gadajat* princes to welcome the British, for Lord Jagannath was said to be wishing to remain in the Company's care and supervision. The prince of Khurdha, Mukunda Dev II, had signed a pact with the Company to let his traditional *paik* soldiers assist the British army against the Marathas in lieu of a payment of one lakh rupees.



Further, Khurdha also expected to get back its hold over Puri and its Jagannath temple lost to the Marathas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for the British as Christian iconoclasts would not like to deal with the Hindu temple affairs. When this was proved to be a misconception the Khurdha prince on the advice of his Dewan Jayi Rajguru resisted the British in early 1804. The Paiks, who formed the peasant militia, and many other sections of civilian population joined the revolt. This was one of the early signs of resistance in the state. While the pliable prince Mukunda Dev II was given a pension and was rehabilitated in Puri, the astute, stubborn and determined Dewan was hanged by the British in the Medinapur jail in 1806. Though the general mass of people was not involved in politics until then, the *paiks*, who were the traditional peasant militia, took part in this resistance movement, for they had been loyal to their employer prince and had materially suffered due to willful non-compliance of the pact by the British after the Maratha defeat in 1803. If the money had been paid to Khurdha, the *paiks* would have had their share. This exemplified that there was a general absence of nationalistic spirit at the time. The local princes and the nobility considered the native Marathas to be a bigger enemy than the alien British and had offered to assist the later against the former. This was the nature of politics in the state then, as in elsewhere. Resistance to the British in the name of nationalism had not yet been a vogue at this point of time. Their resistance had been largely due to their personal sufferings backed by local pride and local patriotism.

6. Coming to the revolt in Sambalpur, Surendra Sai with the help of local zamindars, tribal people and *Gauntias* (village heads) had led it. The revolt had two main phases, the first phase was from 1827 to 1840, when Surendra

Sai, a claimant to the throne of Sambalpur, targeted the zamindars loyal to the British and was sent to jail for killing a loyal zamindar in 1840. In the second phase, he came out of the Hazaribag in 1857 and revived the struggle till 1864. The revolt spread over many parts of Western Odisha. Surendra Sai was arrested in 1864 and he died in jail in 1884.

7. In 1827 the prince of Sambalpur Maharaja Sai died and the throne was handed over to one Narayan Singh by the British. Narayan Singh was very old and weak enough to withstand the pressure of the Company. The local people saw it as a ploy to annex Sambalpur with the British administration. Until then, though Sambalpur had been under the overall dominance of the Company rule, there prevailed a façade of independence. The people were against the annexation, because it hurt their local pride. Due to British intervention, changes were brought in land revenue settlement. The local landed gentry lost the rent-free land which it enjoyed earlier. The people resented the British move. When Surendra Sai from the zamindar family of Khinda emerged as a claimant to the throne of Sambalpur, support poured in for him. In 1840, Surendra Sai and his six brothers Udant Sai, Dhrub Sai, Ujjwal Sai and Medini Sai and uncle Balaram Sai were accused of killing a zamindar, loyal to Narayan Singh and British. They were sentenced to jail in Hajaribagh jail. With this the resentment in Sambalpur was suppressed for the time being.

## 8. Resistance in Angul : 1848

The prince of Angul, Somanath Singh, had secretly sheltered the tribal leaders, who rebelled against the British. This was his way of defiance to the authoritative colonial regime. While reacting to the British interference in his internal administration, he often punished the 'poor'



natives to ascertain his power and position. He also defied the government order. In 1831, he occupied some villages of Daspalla. In 1846, a village of Hindol was also occupied by him. These were acts to ascertain his independence and to challenge the British. However, he was portrayed in the colonial narrative as an oppressive ruler. On the pretext of mal-administration and excessive oppression the British annexed Angul and deposed Somnath Singh from the throne in 1848. It was a ploy which suited the aggressive annexation policy of the Company. Somnath Singh revolted and was arrested on 1 February 1848. Along with him some other rebels were also sent to jail. On 23 November 1848, 17 of these rebels escaped from the Cuttack jail after attacking the jail staff and looting their arms. In the resultant clash five jail staff and 15 rebels were killed. The Company government suspected Somnath Singh as the man behind this attack. Due to this Somnath Singh remained in jail in Cuttack and then in Hazaribag till his death. Angul had been brought under direct British administration on 16 September 1848.

### 9. Rendo Majhi : 1855

Rendo Majhi led the Khonds in Madanpur under the princely state of Kalahandi. The British suspected that rebel Chakra Bisoi of Ghumsar fame had been sheltered by the local Khonds. As mentioned earlier, the Khonds had been strongly resenting the ban on the *meriah* (human sacrifices) system. The British in their efforts to abolish it encountered the Khonds of Madanpur. It is true that *meriah* was an inhuman practice, but the Khonds had their own arguments for sustaining the age old traditional practice to legitimize it. The *meriah*, human scapegoat, was bought and well nurtured for a long time before sacrifice, which notionally absolved the tribals of any guilt in practicing the custom. The British did

not make any effort to understand the tribal beliefs. Probably the Company officials were not aware that such a belief ever existed among the Khonds. On their zeal for uprooting the practice, they vilified it as inhuman, which was not so in the tribal belief. If the tribal 'misgiving' had been removed, probably any attempt at abolishing the practice would not have been so bloody. The Khonds reacted by resorting to revolts. Rendo Majhi and his son Palaso Majhi were arrested and sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment. This angered the Khonds who revolted in December 1855. They attacked the British camp at Araladhoni. The *barikiya khonds*, to which Rendo belonged and *kutia khonds* joined hands and attacked the British camp more than once. In 1856, the zamindar of Madanpur was deposed for his failure to control the Khonds and the estate brought under the direct rule of Kalahandi state.

### 10. Odisha in 1857:

The great Revolt of 1857, which began in the army cantonment of Meerut on 10 May 1857, spread all over India on some form or other. Odisha had also been impacted by it. The second phase of Surendra Sai's revolt had been witnessed in Western Odisha during the period. Along with his colleagues (brothers) Surendra Sai was in Hazaribag jail since 1840. In 1849 Sambalpur was brought under direct administration of the British, as per the Doctrine of Lapse, since Narayan Singh died in that year without a natural heir. The direct administration led to unusual hike in land revenue demand. The village headmen, priests and many others were dispossessed of their rights over free land holdings. The resentment became intense and people waited for a leader to lead it. In 1857 the great Revolt of 1857 broke out in Meerut and spread to other parts of the country, especially in northern India. Following this the rebel sepoys broke open the jail of





Hajaribagh. Surendra Sai and his brothers came out of jail and marched towards Sambalpur. In October 1857 Surendra Sai and his brothers reached Sambalpur and led the revolt. Balaram Sai, their uncle and guide had died in jail. The zamindars of Ghens, Kolabira, Pahadsrigida, Machida, Laida, Luisingha, Lakhanpur and Bheden joined the revolt. In the revolt the Ghens zamindar Madho Singh and son Kunjal Singh were arrested and executed in Sambalpur jail. Another son Hate singh (Hathi Singh) was deported to Andaman. On 23 January 1864 Surendra Sai along with his son Mitrabhanu Sai and many other rebels were arrested and sent to the Asirgarh jail in Nagpur. Surendra Sai breathed his last in the jail on 28 February 1884. He was twice in jail, i.e., 1840-1857 and 1864-1884. The total duration of his jail term was over 37 years. People of the region especially the village headmen, local peasants; zamindars and tribals had joined the revolt, because they felt that the colonial demand was unjustifiable and the British rule was oppressive and unbearable. Their local pride had been hurt due to British intervention. They all had fought for local pride at a time when nationalism was yet to take roots and the general mass of people was yet to take possession of politics.

It is true that Surendra Sai and his rebel friends had not been in any direct contact with the main leaders of the revolt. However, they had witnessed the rebel Sepoys breaking upon the jail in Hazaribagh. They had also been convinced that the British rule was not invincible. They had been the direct beneficiaries of the revolt, which had set them free from the jail. Further, Sambalpur had been annexed with the British Empire as per the Doctrine of Lapse in 1849. It was this Doctrine, which had brought Laxmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi and Nana Sahib of Kanpur and many others to the forefront of the revolt. Surprisingly, the revolt in Sambalpur continued

till 1864, though the great revolt had been suppressed within a year, by 1858. In one word, whether it was the Khurda revolt of 1817 or the Sambalpur revolt of 1857, these were the miniatures of the Great Revolt of 1857.

#### (a) The Zamindar of Balia

Ramakrishna Samantsinghar, the zamindar of Balia in Jajpur and his two associates Dinabandhu Mahapatra and Upendra Jena were arrested for planning to wage a war against the Company government in August 1857. Ramakrishna was a wreck-rented zamindar, who had been evicted for non-payment of revenue due to the Sunset law. He mobilized the native Khandayats (a specific agricultural community) to fight the British in August 1857. He had also collected some arms for it. The news of the Revolt of 1857 had inspired him to execute the plan. However, their arrest and seizure of arms frustrated the plan, whereas Ramakrushna and Dinabandhu were sentenced to five years of imprisonment. Upendra Jena was acquitted. Ramakrushna's property was seized and auctioned. Besides these, the deposed prince of Kujang was suspected to be mobilizing people and collecting arms for fighting the British. The Government imposed a monetary fine of Rs. 500 on him and averted the attempt.

(b) The story of Chakhi Khuntia, also known as Chandan Hajuri, a Puri *panda* (temple priest) was also suspected to be inciting people to revolt during the period. As a Puri *panda*, Chakhi Khuntia used to visit the military cantonments and facilitate the Hindu Sepoys pilgrimage to the Jagannath temple. He also used to visit the palace of Jhansi. In the process, as stated, he had been instrumental in passing the message of revolt to different people. Since some rebel sepoys had visited Puri, the suspicion was not baseless. In March 1858, the Puri Magistrate seized the Panda's property. Later on he was



arrested in Puri. It was also rumored that he had been executed for his complicity with the rebels. However, after investigation, Chakhi Khuntia was surprisingly declared to be innocent and released from jail, when the British Government declared general amnesty to the suspected rebels. He was released from jail on 15 November 1858; his property was also returned to him.

### (c) Conclusion

To conclude, the anti-colonial resistance in Odisha began with the advent of the British in 1767 and continued incessantly till the departure of the British in the 1947. Its first phase from 1767 to 1857 had witnessed several tribal and civilian rebellions, which were separated by time and space, despite having a common objective, i.e., overthrow of the alien British rule. The tribals and the peasants, especially the peasant militia Paiks formed the mainstay of these rebellions. This was so, because in armed struggle, these people specialized in the use of traditional arms. These were more or less a spontaneous reaction to the rapid changes brought by colonial government. The traditional feudal leaders such as the princes and zamindars led these rebellions. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British persuaded the feudal leadership to join them (the British) with the presumption that the anti-colonial rising would be over after this. They did not address the real issues which had given rise to these rebellions. In fact, the colonial rule could not possibly address them, for that would have nullified the very basis of colonialism which primarily aimed at subjugating the people by political and cultural means and by appropriating the resources of the colony. The British could not give up their policy of over-administration, because that would have grossly constrained their revenue drive. Their zeal for abolishing certain tribal practices, such as the *meriah* system, also could not be wished away, because that would have subjected the colonial

rule to severe criticism at home (Britain) and elsewhere. They hardly cared to convince the people about the evilness of the custom, which had been so dearly nurtured by certain sections. Probably it is the arrogance of arms and the general racial misgiving about the colonial belief that guided the British to ignore the real issues. The tribal and civilian rebellions on a continual basis, despite their ruthless suppression, were a lesson to the Colonial regime not to over-depend on its arms and to look for ideological means for its sustenance in the colony. Further, it is a fact that the resistance movements survived even after the withdrawal of the feudal forces in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally they merged with the nationalist struggle in the 1940's. Why they took so long to integrate with the modern intelligentsia led nationalist struggle, despite being conspicuously anti-colonial and anti-feudal throughout, is a point to ponder over. However, their integration smoothed the merger of the princely states in Odisha and with India after independence, because the peasants and tribals mainly formed the population of the Princely states in Odisha. Here it needs a mention that the modern intelligentsia led nationalist struggle since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century initially veered towards the tribal and civilian uprisings, for the later had been conspicuously anti-feudal, but gradually the two did come together. In other words, the anti-colonial resistance movements of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite being ruthlessly suppressed by the British and deserted by the feudal classes half way since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, ultimately facilitated and advanced the process of an united and integrated India in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

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