



## **EXTREME AND CHRONIC POVERTY IN ORISSA: HOW DID IT MATTER TO POLICY MAKERS DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD?**

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### **Abstract:**

*Since time immemorial Orissa has been a land of extreme and chronic poverty, although it had its glorious past for having good trade and commerce and prosperity. The economic exploitation of the British knew no bound which led to extreme and chronic poverty in Orissa. The wrong economic and other policies of the British Government and policy makers since its occupation of Orissa in 1803 A.D. made the life of the people of Orissa more miserable. The constant plunder of the resources and people of Orissa by the British led the Oriyas to raise voice against the British Government several times. The voice of the people of Orissa had found expressions in various rebellions. The rebellion against the British started with the Rebellion of 1804 and in due course of time the British Government witnessed in the form of many resistance movements in Orissa. Thus, the wrong economic and other policies of the British policy makers forced the people of Orissa to live a life of extreme and chronic poverty. The policy makers were not farsighted for which there occurred many resistance movements in different parts of Orissa.*

### **KEY WORDS:**

Extreme, Chronic, British, Revenue, Malangis, Jayi Rajguru, Ghumsur, Surendra Sai, Policy,

### **INTRODUCTION-**

Since time immemorial Orissa has been a land of extreme and chronic poverty, although it had its glorious past for having good trade and commerce and prosperity. Generally the concept of poverty relates to socially perceived deprivation of financial well-being with respect to basic minimum needs of human beings. In the Orissan context, poverty is measured in terms of a specified normative poverty line reflecting the minimum living standard of the people. The economic prosperity of Orissa in ancient period began to deteriorate during the medieval period. However, the economic exploitation of the British knew no bound which led to extreme and chronic poverty in Orissa. The wrong economic and other policies of the British Government and policy makers since its occupation of Orissa in 1803 A.D. made the life of the people of Orissa more miserable. The constant plunder of the resources and people of Orissa by the British led the Oriyas to raise voice against the British Government several times. The voice of the people of Orissa had found expressions in various rebellions. The rebellion against the British started with the Rebellion of 1804 and in due course of time the British Government witnessed in the form of many resistance movements in British Orissa.

In this paper focus has been given on the causes of extreme poverty and chronic poverty in Orissa during the British period and different resistance movements in British Orissa occurred out of it.

### **Causes of Chronic Poverty in Orissa during British Period:**

#### **Revenue Policy:**

##### **Permanent Settlement and Short Term Settlements:**

After the occupation of Orissa in 1803 A.D., the British introduced Permanent Settlement in some parts of Orissa which they had experimented in Bengal. However, it proved ruinous to the people of Orissa. After that Under the Regulation XII of 1805, short term settlements were introduced for eleven years in the following order - one year settlement of 1804-5, three years' settlement from 1805-6 to 1807- 8, four years' settlement from 1808-9 to 1811-12 and three years' settlement from 1812-13 to 1814-15.<sup>1</sup> The above settlements broken the back bone of the peasants of Orissa.

##### **Harsh Land Revenue Policy:**

The unkind land revenue policy had forced the people of Orissa to live a miserable life. The British permitted no reduction or remission of revenue, in the event of the peasant's inability to pay. Since 1804, there were frequent floods and droughts, causing famine or scarcity of food, but collection of revenue went on as per the Bengal Regulations. The early land revenue policy of the British was considered more exploitive than that of the Marathas, because the latter allowed remission or reduction of revenue, when there was loss of crops caused by the natural calamities. Because of heavy assessment and failure of crops, the landlords could not pay revenue to the Government for their estates.<sup>2</sup> The Bengali zamindars who purchased estates stayed away from the estates and appointed amlas to collect revenue. Those amlas took advantage of the peasants' ignorance of Regulations and collected more than the legal rent.<sup>3</sup> In this way, both the peasants and the local land lords suffered a lot due to harsh land revenue policy introduced by the British Government. This resulted in the development of chronic poverty among the people of Orissa.

##### **Exclusion of Oriyas from Services:**

A regrettable feature of the early British administration in Orissa was the exclusion of Oriyas from the Government services. The unsympathetic and indifferent attitude of the general Oriya public towards the new British rulers was of course partly responsible for such exclusion.<sup>4</sup> The oriya could not get job for which they had to suffer from extreme poverty.

##### **Maltreatment by Bengali Amalas:**

The Bengali Amlas utilised their positions and exploited the people's ignorance of regulations to their advantage. Consequently many Oriya zamindars lost their estates which were purchased by the Bengali speculators. The ruin of indigenous aristocracy and exclusion of the Oriyas who had served in various capacities, civil as well as military under the native rulers from services under the British Government accelerated the demoralization of the Oriya people.<sup>5</sup> This also resulted in extreme and chronic poverty of the people of Orissa who lost their land and jobs.

##### **Justice and Police:**

The British Government adopted the Cornwallis system for the administration of justice and police in Orissa. The zamindars were ordered by the Government to extend help in the police administration within their jurisdictions. In this context, the zamindars exploited the Oriya people in judicial matter and police case. This was happening because the Oriya people are neither aware of the Bengali language nor the Parsi language.<sup>6</sup> The police to a greater extent was most oppressive in nature towards the people of Orissa. Due to the ignorance and illiteracy, the people of Orissa had to suffer economic losses in the courts and police cases.

##### **Salt Policy:**

The British policy of salt monopoly proved disastrous to the economic life of the people. It is the miserable story of the systematic destruction of an indigenous industry. During the Maratha period a large quantity of salt was manufactured in the sea coast of Orissa. Salt manufacture was a private concern of the

malangis (salt manufacturers). The merchants purchased salt from the malangis and exported the same to the neighbouring states. The Maratha Government did not interfere with the manufacture of salt but collected duties from the salt merchants. The East India Company had established its monopoly over salt trade in Bengal as early as 1765 which proved ruinous to the people of Orissa.<sup>7</sup>

### **Chronic Poverty and Economic Exploitation of Malangis:**

Although the East India Company made huge profit out of monopoly in manufacture and sale of salt, the malangis and the common consumers suffered a lot.<sup>8</sup> The malangis who were employed by the British Government were paid low wages, and yet they were required by the zamindars in whose land salt was manufactured to pay the latter's due as was the case before the establishment of the British monopoly. In 1808, the salt agent James proposed that the salt lands within the zamindar's jurisdiction should be transferred to that of the salt department. The proposal was worked out, subject to the payment of 1, 1/2 annas per maund of the manufactured salt and certain amount of salt as Khorakee (dietary allowance) to the zamindars in whose estates salt was manufactured. The general public had to purchase salt at a much higher rate under the British monopoly than during the Maratha period because of the higher taxes imposed on salt. The price of salt, manufactured under the monopoly system, was deliberately raised to help the sale of imported salt, and ultimate replacement of indigenous salt by the imported salt.<sup>9</sup>

The salt industry could not be revived any more, because indigenous salt could not compete with the imported salt of superior quality. The indigenous salt industry virtually ended with the abolition of the British salt monopoly and discontinuance of Government manufacture of salt resulted in depriving twenty six thousands of malangis of the means of their livelihood.<sup>10</sup>

### **Currency Policy:**

One of the worst effects of British economic policy was the change of Kauri currency in Orissa. So, British currency policy had also adversely affected the financial condition of the people of Orissa and increased chronic poverty among the people of Orissa. In Orissa Kauri currency was prevalent during the Maratha period. But the British Government wanted the payment of revenue in sicca rupee, the standard silver coin, and then prevalent in Bengal.<sup>11</sup> The British allowed payment in Kauri currency till the end of 1807-08. After that they depreciated Kauri to a considerable extent in relation to Sicca rupee. As a result the price of commodities rose very high in terms of Kauris, causing much economic distress to the people. Ultimately, it led to the chronic poverty of the people of Orissa.

### **British Policy towards the Feudatory States:**

Under the Maratha rule, there were thirty princely states, called Garjats whose rulers-paid tributes to the Bhonsla Raja of Nagpur but enjoyed freedom in their internal administration. Out of these thirty Garjats, by the British with the Moghulbandi (the territory which was directly ruled by the British) after the rebellion of its chief in 1804.<sup>12</sup> But thirteen of the princely states were made subject to the British regulations, while sixteen others were exempted from them and allowed to enjoy freedom in internal administration. Those sixteen states which were called Tributary Mahals.<sup>13</sup> The people had to give more and more taxes to the tributary kings. However, the economic condition of the people of Orissa was so much deplorable that they had to remain under abject poverty.

All the above causes along with some other causes of the concerned rebellions led to resistance movements in Orissa.

### **Resistance Movements in British Orissa:**

There were a number of uprisings of common people, landholders, zamindars, tribal leaders and feudatory chiefs in the 19th century.<sup>14</sup> Out of these, four were very severe and posed great threat to the British rule in Orissa. All those rebellions occurred due to a strong dislike for the new rule, the oppressive revenue system and high rent, threat to traditional privileges of vested landed-interests etc. and the above cause's alike.<sup>15</sup>

### **Khurda Uprising under Jayi Rajguru:**

Among the resistance movement, the Khurda uprising is one of the prominent movement of

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Orissa. Mukundadeva-II, the Raja of Khurdha (1795-1817A.D.) welcomed the British after their conquest of Orissa in 1803.<sup>16</sup> He hoped that the four Pargans (Rahang, Serain, Chaubiskud and Lembai) lost to the Marathas would be restored to him by the British. Since he was minor, his regent Jayakrisna Rajguru or Jayi Rajguru went to Cuttack to present his case for the restoration of the Parganas and a reduction of annual Peshkash. They refused both the demands. Instead, they pressurized the king to execute an agreement on lines dictated by them. They wanted the king to dismiss Rajguru. Jayi Rajguru understood the evil designs of the British. He made an alliance among the Chiefs of Khurdha, Kujanaga and Kanika estates.<sup>17</sup> The king of Khurdha made all preparations for confrontation with the British. The British were afraid of the defiant attitude lest chiefs of other states might follow suit. They acted promptly and captured the fort of Khurdha in December 1804. The fugitive kings arrested by the treachery of one Fateh Muhammad in January 1805. The Raja of Kanika, Balabhadra Bhanja was made a prisoner. The Raja of Kujang was replaced by his elder brother. Jayi Rajguru was hanged. Khurdha was confiscated and brought under the direct (khas) management of the British.<sup>18</sup>

### **Khurda Uprising under Buxi Jagabandhu:**

The discontentment of the people was growing since the eviction of the king and taking over of the administration of the state by the British. It took the form of an uprising in 1817.<sup>19</sup> The most important cause was the rural economic problems

- ▲ The increase of land revenue through arbitrary settlements made during 1804 to 1817 broke the backbone of the rural masses. It brought untold hardship to the people and deterioration to agriculture. Some of the Bengali estate holders like Shyamananda Rai became so harsh and extorting in revenue collection in Khurdha that Government cancelled his lease and put him in jail for fear of popular reaction. W. Trower has observed that about 14,000 people had left Khurdha in a year and a large number were put in jails as they could not pay land-rent during the period of 1805-17.
- ▲ The British Government cancelled all rent-free jagir lands of the Paiks, the local militia class, and imposed tax on such land. Those lands were enjoyed on a hereditary basis.
- ▲ Their economic as well as social privileges were affected very much by the government action. That class took very active role in the uprising, which was also called Paik Rebellion.
- ▲ The condition of middle class was worst affected. They were removed from offices of administration and lost their bread. People were suffering a lot from the rampant corruption, abuse of power by police daroghas and the complex and cumbersome processes of the judiciary.
- ▲ Salt monopoly by the Government was another big grievance of the common people against the British. Manufacture of salt was a private enterprise.
- ▲ The new currency system which came in place of cowrie shells caused a lot of hardship to people when the value of cowrie went down, prices of essential goods increased. They failed to pay rents in metallic money.
- ▲ The expulsion of the king of Khurdha, the symbol of honour of the Oriya people, from his state.

All the above causes were operating and popular discontent was growing. Just at that time, Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar a dispossessed landholder came on the scene and provided leadership to the people for a vigorous revolt. The title of Buxi was given to the military commander of the king of Khurdha. He was evicted of an estate called Rodang which his forefathers had been enjoying on hereditary basis by paying a nominal rent for their military service. In rank and authority, he was next to the Raja. He was dispossessed from his estate through a conspiracy of some officials of Puri and Cuttack. He became almost a beggar and lived on the voluntary contributions made by people. He petitioned to Commissioner of Cuttack for restoration of his estate but he was asked to establish it through the court of law. He became depressed.<sup>20</sup>

Jagabandhu realised the popular resentment and came out to provide leadership to the movement of 1817. Under his leadership, insurgents attacked offices, police stations, burnt or looted treasuries and killed or injured officials. Gradually it spread to Lembai, Pipili, Nimapara, Gop, Pattamundai, Kujang, Chandbali etc. The zamindars and the people did not pay revenue. The situation became very serious after the rebels captured Puri in April 1817 and declared Mukundadeva-II as the Rajah. The British Govt. acted promptly. It sent troops to suppress the risings of different places. The Raja of Kujang surrendered. The two rebel leaders Narayan Paramguru and Ramdev Patjoshi were arrested. The situation was brought under control by Maj. Gen. Martindall the Military Commissioner of Cuttack by end of 1817. However, Buxi Jagabandhu, Madhu Mangaraja and Krisna Chandra Bhramaravara continued their rebellious activities. The Raja of Nayagarh supported the rebels. Ranapur, Nayagarh Daspalla, Boudh, Athmallik witnessed disturbances and nonpayment of revenue at many places. By 1818, rising in Banapur, Tangi, Khallikote,

Pipili, Gop and Bolgarh etc. were suppressed. But Jagabandhu could not be captured. However, he had to surrender in 1825. He was kept at Cuttack with a monthly pension of Rs. 150.<sup>21</sup> Thus, ended one of the great uprisings in Orissa.

### **Ghumsur Movement:**

The growing dissatisfaction among the people against British rule continued almost since its beginning. Kamal Lachan Dora Bisoi provided leadership from 1836 to 1847 and Chakra Bisoi from 1847 to 1866.<sup>22</sup>

#### **The significant causes were:**

- ✦ The British land revenue system which demanded fifty percent of produce as revenue and, exploitation and extortion of rent-collectors and officials which caused much hardship to people.
- ✦ The local landed aristocracy was deprived of power and position.
- ✦ The activities of Christian missionaries posed threat to the religion.
- ✦ The suppression of Meriah (human sacrifice) and introduction of modern education caused much resentment.
- ✦ Finally, the dissolution of Bhanja ruling family came as the immediate cause.

The Khond tribe rose in revolt under Kamal Lochan Dora Bisoi. He belonged to hereditary feudal Dora Bisoi family of the tribe. He was a 'Maliah Bisoi' (Head Agent) of all Khond areas of Ghumsar who came forward to provide leadership. The Khonds attacked the British army in several places and killed many people of the British army. The British authorities tried all means to capture the Bisoi for a long time but failed. They captured his men and relatives. The Bisoi moved from place to place to secure support to his cause. Finally, he was arrested by Raja Somanath Singh of Angul and handed over to the British in 1837 and he died in Ooty prison in 1846.<sup>23</sup>

After that the leadership was taken by Chakra Bisoi who resolved to take revenge for his uncle's imprisonment and death. A massive revolt took place in 1846 to restore the Meriah, the Bhanja family and the power and privileges of the Dora Bisoi family. The Khonds gathered at the Agent's office at Phulbani and secured the release of their Meriah victims. They installed a minor son of Dhananjaya Bhanja, Pitambar, as the Raja of Ghumsar. Those successes made them encouraged to loot and damage British camps. However, the British tried all means to capture Chakra Bisoi, but got failed. He died in 1856.<sup>24</sup>

### **Paralakhemundi Movement:**

Another important movement was the Paralakhemundi movement. In 1803, Paralakhemundi became a permanently settled estate. Purusottama Narayan Deo was confirmed as Raja of the estate. Durga Raz continued as the estate-manager during his time and after his death, when his son Narayan was a minor, till 1813. When Durga Raz's son Padmanabha Deo became unpopular as the manager among the Bissoyis (Chiefs of hill tribes) Doratnams (village Chiefs) and Paiks (soldiers) for his harsh behavior. Pattamahadevi, the wife of Gaura Chandra Gajapati, the Raja, during 1770-80 organised the discontented Chiefs to remove him. The situation became serious. He was removed by the British Govt. and Narasimha Rao was appointed. His failure to maintain peace in the estate and complicity with Patamahadevi led to his removal and appointment of Suba Rao Mudali. He too failed to maintain peace and was suspected of supporting the group of Suagimahadevi. He was also removed. Narasimha Rao was reappointed. Fighting continued between the two factions. Disorder and instability came to prevail during 1822-32.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Paiks remained uncontrollable. They destroyed some 43 villages in the neighbouring estate of Karakvalasa.<sup>26</sup> They instigated the people of Paralakhimundi not to pay land revenue. The British Govt. learnt that Gopinath Pattanaik and Rakana Chandradoo were the brain behind those disorders. The zamindar failed to control the situation. The Government attached the estate for arrears of revenue and placed it under Court of Wards in 1830. Padmanabha was reappointed manager; the zamindar went away to Palasa. The manager proved hostile to some Bissoyis. He removed them and appointed men of his own. The zamindar's wife made a plan and won over Rakana and others. Gopinath Pattanaik incited Paiks against the British. The zamindar's wife died in 1831, but her followers kept on their plundering activities. Insurgents under Godiapadhi Krisnama Dora attacked and looted the British troops and the neighbouring estate of Karakavalsa. They obstructed passage to Chicacole. Major Baxter was killed by the insurgents. The confusion was worse confounded. However, Edward Russel, the Special Commissioner,

took drastic steps in 1833. Many insurgents were captured. All possible was done to weaken the Bissoyis and the Paiks. The estate was put under the direct control of the collector. Intermittent disturbances, however, continued. When the Savaras rose in rebellion in 1856-57 Radhakrisna Dandasana, their leader and many others were captured and executed.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Paralakhemundi uprising came to an end.

### **Sambalpur Movement:**

The Sambalpur movement under Surendra Sai was another landmark in the history of the resistance movements in Orissa. Surendra Sai raised a standard of revolt when his claim to the throne was rejected by the British and the Rani Mohan Kumari, wife of Maharaja Sai was placed on the throne in 1828. Surendra Sai his brother Udanta and Govind Singh of Jharsuguda revolted against the Rani as well as the British. The British troops controlled the situation.<sup>28</sup> They realised the popular resentment against the Rani and replaced her by Narayan Singh, a member of the royal family in suppression of Surendra's claims. The new Raja was 'equally inefficient. In 1837, the Gond zamindars of Sambalpur rose in rebellion under Surendra Sai. They fought a pitched battle against the British at Debrigarh hill, in which the zamindar of Lakhanpur, Balabhadra Singh was killed. In 1839, Surendra attacked the zamindars who were against him.<sup>29</sup> He killed Duriar Singh, zamindar of Rampur. He was sent to Hazaribagh jail in 1840 along with Udant and uncle Balaram. He remained in jail till 1857 when the mutineers broke open the jail.<sup>30</sup>

The annexation of Sambalpur to British empire in 1849, by the application of 'Doctrine of Lapse' after death of Narayan Singh worsened the situation.<sup>31</sup> Land revenue was increased and rent-free land was assessed for tax. The common people were hard-hit. Thus the 'discontentment of all classes of people-zamindars, ryots, common masses led to a break-out in a massive scale under Surendra Sai in 1857.<sup>31</sup> Although, he had fought bravely with his fellow men for some period, but it could not last long. Finally, he surrendered and he was given Rs.1200 per annum. At last, he died in the Asirgarh jail on 28th February 1884.<sup>32</sup> With this ended the Sambalpur uprising in British Orissa.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Thus, the wrong economic and other policies of the British policy makers forced the people of Orissa to live a life of extreme and chronic poverty. The policy makers were not farsighted for which there occurred many resistance movements in different parts of Orissa. Although, the British Government became successful in suppressing those revolts, but it forced the people of Orissa to live in abject poverty during the British period.

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