

A STUDY ON THE STRATEGY OF ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM IN MANBHUM TERRITORY. (1765-1858)

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Abstract:

The English East India Company aimed to maximize their commercial purpose against their rivals and acquired control of India's governmental structure, achieving their goal by creating administration in various facets. The administrative system in its numerous components took a new turn with new features and qualities, while establishing their authority in various sections of India. After receiving Diwani (right to collect revenue) of Bengal province from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam –II in 1765, the Company embarked on a voyage to establish and consolidate its dominion over the area, including the Manbhumi region. The new kind of administrative imposition instituted by the Company was not met with a warm welcome. Rather, it had to contend with the old-age traditional and primitive ethno-cultural residents of the Jungle Mahal region. The inhabitants of this region reacted adversely to the foreign rule's violent acquisition and unprecedented dominance. The tenants, together with the zaminders of the area, protested the annexation and erupted in a violent riot. It happened in stages while the Company's administrative structure was being implemented over this region. It is critical to realise that during the early period, it was the Jungle Mahal that refused to integrate with the East India Company's norms about revenue collection and other types of systemization. This article attempts to ascertain the nature of the Company's initiative for the application of the laws and regulations in this region, which were regarded as an imposition by the primitive indigenous. It will expose certain features of the traditional lifestyles and cultures of the different ethnic communities that dared to challenge such 'illegal' involvement by unknown strangers. This research investigates its influence on the Manbhumi territory as well as colonial administrative policies.

Keywords: Manbhumi, British, Company, rule, administration, landlords, inhabitants.

Objectives of the Study:

Rewriting regional history has been popular in recent years. It is important to understand the territory of Jungle Mahal, including Manbhum, its geopolitical setup, indigenous lifestyle, and the 'rude and ungovernable' attitude, as the territory witnessed the initial administrative features of the British East India Company, who wanted to bring this area under their custody. It is also critical to understand the nature of the opposition to the company's repressive policy, exploitation, and coercive involvement, as well as the eventual installation of new laws and regulations.

Methodology:

Primary sources have been utilized like reports, letters to prepare the paper along with the secondary sources to have a clear idea on this study.

Introduction:

The Jungle mahal comprised of a greater part of Chutianagpur, Medinipur, Bankura, Manbhum, Bardhaman and singbhum. Before its formation, in 1765, Mughal Emperor Shah-Alam II awarded the rights of Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to East India Company Governor Robert Clive, having granted the right to collect the revenue from those regions, the Company exercised the rights and began to influence over the landlords of those areas. The local landlords and the people did not capitulate before them by surrendering their independence. As the system of collecting revenue by the company was unlike their traditional system, the region arose with an agitation. The landlords who were considered to be the kings had the strength enough to go against the British. The common inhabitants were not ready to pay the revenue to the company. The Adivasi-Bhumij leaders residing in this forest-oriented barren land accompanied with professionals worriers came in the front. So with the introduction of revenue system and imposition of various administrative rules made the whole situation disorder. The suppressive measures were taken up by the company military to keep the area under control. Loot, exploitation, oppression, firing by the armed forces worsened the situation. The whole area of Junglemahal including Manbhum became restless and many revolts against the company rule were taken place in different phases in different forms.

Geo-political background of Jungle Mahal and Manbhum:

Since long past, the area which was considered to be Junglemahal was the territory of the plateau to the south-western part of Bengal surrounded by forest and hills. As per the report sent by the then collector Y. Burges of Medinipur to the Board of Revenue in 24th September, 1799, the Jungle Mahal area was 'In 1781 some of the Zaminders of the Jungle Mahals while giving description of their country wrote- It is Junglemahal that their rent are of a kind of quit rent collected from their Paiks and Mandals. They are surrounded likewise by Jungle Zaminders- on the east by Bagri and Bishnupur, on the north by Panchet (Panchkot) on the west by Singbhum and on the south by Mayurbhanj.'ⁱThe Jungle Mahal comprised of a greater part of Chutianagpur, Medinipur, Bankura, Manbhum, Bardhaman and Singbhum. Manbhum district 'takes its name from one of its most easterly parganas, at the chief place in which, Manbazar or Manbhum Khas, was the head quarters of the Jungle Mahals district from 1833 to 1838, in the earlier of which years the Manbhum District was constituted.'ⁱⁱUntil the middle of eighteenth century, the Manbhum region, then under Junglemahal, was ruled by the major princes of Panchakot, Patkum, Barabhum Pargana, Manbhum Jhalda, Jharia, and other natives states.

Ethnic groups and socio-cultural set up of Jungle Mahal, Manbhum:

The inhabitants of this area comprised of different tribes and castes like Bhumij, Munda, Kol, Mal, Bagdi, Bauri, Santals, etc. 'the Bhumij are no doubt the original inhabitants of Dhalbhum, Barabhum, Patkum, Baghmundi, Bhanjabhum, and still they form bulk of the population in the adjoining estates.'ⁱⁱⁱThey are warrior-like persons and the whole places 'was practically in a state of insurrection'. 'The most persistence disturbances of peace however were the Chuars. The term Chuar signifies in Bengali an outclass fellow and applied in Midnapore to the wild tribes who inhabited in the Jungle Mahal and the tracks beyond them'^{iv}

Local administration and lifestyle of Jungle Mahal:

In the latter half of the eighteenth century the Jungle Mahal area were unproductive barrenland surrounded by hilly tracts. The inhabitants were not totally depended on agriculture. 'The Zaminders of the jungles are mere free boaters who plunder their neighbors one another and their servants are bandit who they chiefly employ their outrages. These depredations keep the zaminders and their servants continually in arms, for after the

harvest is gathered there is scarcely one of them who does not call his riots either to defend his own property or to attack his neighbors, the effect of this, I may say, feudal anarchy is that the revenue is very precarious, as the Zaminders are refractory and the inhabitants are rude and ungovernable.^v But in later period to evaluate the inhabitants of jungle mahal is depicted in the William Grants view, 'The people of Bishnupur which appeared to have been known as a part of the jungle mahals were known as the Chuars swarthy black supposed to be the aboriginals of the country but believed to have lived in a state of pristine innocence.'^{vi} There was a local setup between the landlords and the tenants under them. The jungle Zaminders exercises a extensive authority in their own estates and few of the dependants would spare their property even perhaps their lives.^{vii} Thus the Zaminders here established their total domination with an administrative structure of their own. The tenants under them were ready to sacrifice even their life for the Zaminders.

The local tribal people comprised of the Mundaries or the Mundas of Chotonagpur proper, the Bhumij of Manbhum and the Larka Kols or Hos of Singbhum, led their life as own way. In regard to the revenue system, local administration, land property was quite different in then Jungle Mahal area with that of the other parts of Bengal. The system of joint labour, joint property of land, Mandal, Mukhia, Pradhan, Majhi, Ghatwali, prevailed in the societal life since long past. The landlords deployed the local inhabitants as soldiers for self guard, resistance against the attacks, to maintain peace and security and appointed sardar, paiks and other royal servants. All the persons had to pay a very little amount of rent to the landlords and possessed a land property.

Initiation of British authority:

East India Company wanted to establish its authority by keeping the landlords of this land under controlled over the Jungle Mahal area. They made survey and through revenue settlement ensured to collect the revenue from this area. 'On 30th January, 1767, John Graham, the Resident of Midnapore, wrote a letter to Esign Ferguson in which he referred to the powerful and very large tract of country westward of Mindapore. With a view to bring these independent Zaminders to obedience and to reduce them to a proper subjection to the Company's Government on payment of just revenue, John Graham, directed Ferguson to carry arms against them.'^{viii} But the local Zaminders along with their militia resisted against this forceful intervention and had undergone with a severe uprisings. '...the forces which

Lieutenant Ferguson employed in his expedition against the jungle Rajas were supplied from Midnapore estate of Rani Siromoni and these retainers were not paid any sums by way of wages, but they had land assigned to them on which they paid a *peshkosh* or *quit rent*.^{'ix}

Chuar Rebellion:

“The word Chuar means ‘ a thief , dacoit or rebel’. It refers to the Bhumij, Kols or Bandits of Manbhum”^xHowever the Chuars were a class of wild tribe^{'xi}The local tribal specially Bhumija led by their chiefs who enjoyed the traditional rights, privileges and independence felt being violated and resisted against these repressive activities in 1760's, that came to be known as Chuar rebellion. Among them, the chiefs were Sardar Ghatwal Shyam Ganjan of Dhadka, Subla Singh of Kuilapal, and Dubraj of Barabhum. The Company took the suppressive measures against this revolts. Again in 1783, the southern part of Bengal experienced disturbances led by landlord of Kuilapal with Paiks and Chuars. In 1798, there was a fresh outbreak of Chuars in Parganas of Raipur, Ambikanaga, and Supur adjoining Manbhum and Barabhumon the east. Under the leadership of Durjan Singh, Lal Singh, Mohan Singh, The military forces were deployed to suppress it. ‘All the lawless tribes of Jungle Mahal made common cause for the paiks and carried slaughter and flame to the very doors of the Magistrate's cutcherry. The ordinary police and the military stationed at Midnapore were utterly unable to cope with the banditti, as they were called, and a reinforcement of troops had to be dispatched to Midnapore.’^{xii}. The British forces failed to bring the rebels undercontrol ‘as the Chuars lived in remote inaccessible places, they were difficult to get at; they constantly made raids when they were least expected, and troops were sent out against them, disappeared into their fastness, only to reappear and commit fresh depredations as soon as the troops were withdrawn.’^{xiii}Ultimately with the armed forces the Company was able to suppress the insurgency very brutally.

Ganga Narain Hungama (1832-33):

This revolt was a tremendous upsurge in the territory of Manbhum. It was caused due to a family feud relating to the succession and right to possession over the estate of Barabhum Raj. This outbreak was led by Ganga Narayan Singh. Madhav Singh, the Dewan of the estate deprived Ganganarain, his cousin, of his dues in the estate. For this reason, Ganganarain killed Madhav on 2nd April, 1832 and proceeded towards Barabazar to grab all the estate. He attacked the Munsiff's cutcherry and plundered the local market on 1st May.

On the next day, with 3000 Chuars, he attacked the local Police station, 'leaving Barabhum in the undisturbed possession of GangaNarain.' Ultimately it was brutally crushed.

The Sepoy Mutiny (1857-58):

Manbhum witnessed the excitement of the mutiny of 1857. On 5 August, 1857, the sepoy of Ramgarh battalion, stationed at Purulia, the Sadar subdivision of Manbhum revolted, plundered the treasury, released the prisoners and sacked the private houses of the Europeans. 'The mutiny was said to have been led by Nilmani, Singh Deo, the landlord of Panchet. A large number of Chuars also assembled together to plunder the local market at Purulia. The Court was burnt down, the old records were destroyed. The Deputy Commissioner was forced to retreat to Raniganj of Burdwan via Raghunathpur of Purulia. It may be said that, the mutiny of the Ramgarh battalion in Manbhum, 'was a brief but significant episode in 1857, whose repercussions on the administration and life of the people continued to be felt afterwards.'^{xiv},

Administrative Reformation:

After observing the depth of terrible situation of Chuar rebellion in Jungle Mahal, the Board of Directors of the Company's Government decided to set up a separate administrative division comprising of the forestry area of Midnapore, Burdwan and Birbhum. Along with drafting regulation for a separate Jungle Mahal district, they started to deploy the Police Chouki in the important place of Jungle Mahal. Thus the Jungle Mahal district was formed on 13 December 1805 comprising of 13 parganas like, Panchet, Bagmundi, Jhalda, Joupur, Mukundapur, Noyagarh, torang, tung, etc, and Bishnupur, Shenpahari, Shergarh from Burdwan District and Chatna, Barbhum, Manbhum, Supur, /ambikanagar, Shimalapal, and Velaidihi parganas from Midnapore district. Under the Regulation No.2 in 1805, the landlords were given the special rights to execute the activities of Police, to appoint the Paiks and digwars, though they would remain under the control of the Collector, who could punish them for negligence of duties or commit any offensive activities. One landlord could not see the paiks and digwars to the Talukmahal or Parganas occupied by other landlords. Under the act of Permanent settlement, the new Zaminders gave effort to the development of the agricultural land, causing a forcible collection of revenue from the tenants. But, the regulation could not secure the rights of the property.

Conclusion:

According to the study, the nature of administrative changes implemented by the East India Company's Government in the Jungle Mahal area were followed by massive revolts against the policy of colonial land revenue settlements, heavy burden of new taxes, eviction of peasants from their lands, and encroachments on tribal lands. The economy, government, and land taxation system underwent rapid transformation, which favoured the residents and landlords. However, the Company authority violently destroyed all revolts, and the new administrative policy was implemented, destroying the forest-led lifeblood of the traditional complex character of Manbhum's indigenous tribal population. According to the new laws and restrictions imposed by the British government, the old Zamindari system was replaced by a new class of mahajans and land-holders.

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