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The Chuar Rebellion of the Jungle Mahal: A Historical Study

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Abstract :

First anti-colonial movement was started by the so called marginal and backward community like Chuar, Paik, Nayek, Majhi, Bhumij of Jungle Mahal against Company rule. They organised a series of uprising from the beginning of company rule. They wanted to throw out the yoke of colonial bondage by sacrificing their lives. British historian and their followers described these uprising as activities of dacoits. They overlooked the real causes behind the revolts. The main cause of uprising was colonial oppression. Before the rule of East India Company, inhabitant of the Jungle Mahal did not meet such oppression. It was a part of British colonization. Economic social and cultural life was ruined through colonization process. As a result people of the land were revolted. Chuar uprising was a such revolt. The essay highlights the causes and nature of Chuar rebellion.

Key- words: *Jungle Mahal, Colonial rule, Chuar Rebellion, Historical significance of rebellion.*

Socio-Economic background of Chuar Rebellion: Chuar rebellion was the earliest revolt against British dominancy in Bengal. Feature of the dominance was not only political but also economical. The main aim of British East India Company was to capture of wealth of this country. The company realized that wealth of this country could be use to purchase different types of goods like cotton and silk, textile, maintain defence expenditure of new occupied area. New land settlement were introduced for this purpose. Since grant of Diwani for Bengal, Bihar, And Orissa in 1765 A D, the major concern of the East India Company's administration in India was to collect as much revenue as possible.¹ As a result socio-economic condition of the people of Jungle Mahal was changed. They followed the way of life of the tribal and also peasant. This way of life was disrupted during the reign of The British East India Company. According to Dr. Binod Sankar Das "The colonial system ended the relative isolation of the tribal society, brought it into the main stream of the new administration set up and put an end to the political dominance of the tribes in this forest track".² Land lord of the area lost their position. People who depend on Zamindars' also get in trouble. In this way the anger of all classes created the background for the revolt. This revolt was known as Chuar rebellion but originally it was a revolt of mass. Chuar

rebellion was named by British officers and historian . main sources of the Chuar rebellion are collected from the writing of British writer who were anti rebel. so the history of the rebellion need to be discussed very carefully . Chuar rebellion occurred during 1769 AD to 1799AD in different phase. However, the rebellion was not ended that year . Rebels activity continued for several more years. Main centre of the revolt was in some district's of South West Bengal like Midnapore, Bankura , Birbhum etc . some parts of Jharkhand were under rebels control. There were traditional and geographical connection between the people of the area . Moreover they lived in a similar economic structure. So there anti British reaction was similar.

Chuar community lived here from earliest time . There is no definite definition of Chuar . Chuar was not special sub caste according to Narendranath sen 'Bagdi' , 'Kurmi', 'kora', 'letho' etc were called chuar. J.C.Jha stated that chuar the Bhumij tribal belonging originally to the Mundari main stock . After moving away from the Chota Nagpur plateau ,they settled in large number in Midnapur Bankura and Purulia .³ Chuar served as a paik under the local zamindar . They used to enjoy 'paikan' or tax free land in exchange for salary . In Bengali chuar means 'uncivilized' 'barbaric' and 'wicked'. The so called upper castes gave the name of chuar to the lower castes .According to Suprakas Roy " perhaps furious at the exploitation they became ghostly in appearance merciless to their exploiters , which led them zamindars and their obedient historian of Bankura and Medinipur to give these people this derogatory appellation".⁴

The chuar were son of the soil . They are early inhabitants of this land since pre historic time. Chuars served as a Paik under the local zamindar . They used to enjoy 'Paikan' or tax free land in exchange for salary . Agriculture and jungle products were others sources of livelihood .They kept law and order in border area . They also enjoyed tax free land . There were good relationship between the chuar and local zamindars . Condition changed with the spread of English domination. British East India Company introduced different revenue system. As a result Agrarian relation changed . So new land revenue systems need to be discussed . The main defect of the new system was maximisation of revenue . It affected landed aristocrats and also the tillers . It reached the point of climax in the chuar revolt of 1798-1799 AD when the company resumed non revenue paying lands but could not re-established the age old law and order system .⁵

The year 1760 was a important of changing of agrarian relation. Company gained the zamindari rights of Midnapur and the adjacent parganas in this year . In the year 1765 AD they also got the Diwani Sanad from Shah Alam second .The company faced a new challenge .A commercial company get duty of collecting land revenue .They had no experience in this case. There were many problem by difference in local tradition , standards of measures , weight and currency . Infrastructure of revenue collection of the Mughal periods was weakened . It was not clear to the company who was the owner of the land . The company had no idea about the real revenue. So in the early stage of British East Indian Company rule , multiple experiment were conducted . After grant of Diwani in 1765 AD company became the legal authority . Diarchy rule begun in Bengal from this year . MD

Reza Khan appointed amils. They agreed to pay highest amount of revenue to company. Other hand the amils use to choose their agents who agreed to pay highest amount. This system was known as Amildari system. The Choudhary disappeared from land revenue system. Strong oppression come down in the life of farmers due to pressure of land revenue. Governor Verelest knew plight of the peasant. So he removed Amildari system and appointed supervisor of revenue in 1769 AD to some major district. But condition of the Rayats was not changed because supervisor had not interest to them. They were busy in private trade. so oppression to the Rayat was continued. The following data would illustrate the increase in the amount of the revenue payable to the Raja of Bishnupur. ⁶ 1586 year - 107000(The Ain-I-Akbari), in 1715 year 129803(Jamma Kameil Tummari), 1769-250,501(Fergusson), 1770-280,501, 1771-479,66-15-16, 1776-522,817-3-0. Officers of the company could not understand that the revenue settlement in the Jungle Mahal and Bishnupur had been over assessed. Even the East India Company did not realised that Zamindar could challenge them. But it was reported that Jungle Zamindar had secret understanding to challenge company. The Zamindar of Chatna and Barabhum refused to pay tax. Raja of Dhalbhum took anti English stand. There were many reasons for the dissatisfaction of the Zamindar. The political and economic compulsions by the company government like restriction on export of salt and on police duties, resumption none revenue paying lands and waste lands and rigorous enforcement of long -neglected Mughal rule of making Zamindars responsible for robberies committed by his men prompted this jungle Zamindar against the British rule. ⁷ In 1769 coalition of Zamindar and Paik threatened company government. Paiks were known as chuar in Jungle Mahal. Not only Zamindars and Paiks but peasant were also dissatisfied.

In 1772 committee of circuit decided to introduced five year farming system. All the stake holder were dissatisfied. There was no attention to save hereditary rights of the Zamindars. Revenue rate was very high. The age old arrangement of maintaining law and order by the local Zamindars ended with the confiscation of 'Nankar' lands. ⁸ Many Zamindar and Paik were dispossessed from there estate. The economic condition of primary producer was very worse. So there was existed a environment of unrest and anarchy. Annual settlement was made with Zamindars from 1777-1789. But over assessment was unchanged.

In 1793 permanent settlement was introduced. Zamindars were recognised as the owner of the land. They were given hereditary right of succession of the lands. The amount to be paid by the land lord were fixed. It was agreed that this would not increase in future. The fixed amount was 10/11 th portion of the revenue for the government and 1/10 th was for the Zamindar. Finally the farmer also in lieu of the patta were certain holding. There was no direct contact of government to the primary producers. The Zamindar was not entitled to any remission on the plea of loss by any natural calamity. In case of default of payment his land would be sold in liquidation. There were also three important guiding factors for recognizing the permanent settlement in Bengal such as the British official realized that they were foreigners in India, their rule would be unstable unless they acquired local supporters who would act as a buffer between them and the people of India. Secondly

perhaps the predominant motive was that of financial security and thirdly, the permanent settlement was expected to increase agricultural production .⁹ However , the farmers grief did not end there . They were made rented farmer. Exploitation of Zamindari Amla was seen. Pattani tenure increased. As a result heavy pressure was felt over the Rayats . Zamindars were not in favourable condition due to over assessment of rent .Some Jungle Zamindar lost their estate. The another policy of government was to abolish none revenue paying land that was very harmful to Zamindar and also their armed retainer . Resumption of non revenue paying land which touched the position of the general agriculture community was the main sources of social discontent of the period.¹⁰ These were the important background of Chuar rebellion .Peasant Zamindar Paik everyone had a goal that was threw away the company rule.

Mobility and Historical significances of Chuar Rebellion: After 1765 the Jungle Mahal were exposed to the company exploitation at that time the Zamindar of this area led a revolt against the company government. The Mughal state did not interfere too much with the Zamindar in their region .There were three big Zamindar they were the Zamindar of Bishnupur ,Karnagarh and Dhalbhum . Other small Zamindar were Raipur, Shyamsundarpur ,Fulkusma ,Dhalbhum , Samntabhum , Simlapal and Bhalaidiha .Many of them could not bear the burden of huge revenue . The company adopted a policy of sending troops against Zamindar unable to pay revenue. Lieutenant Fergusson set out with armed forces to adjust revenue with Zamindars on the order of then resident of Midnapur, Mr. Graham. After a fierce battle the Zamindar of Lalgah ,Ramgarh, Salda , Manbhum accepted his submissions. He settled with them but unrest was not ended. “By 1769 British position in Jungle Mahal Threatened by the peasant militia of the Zamindar who were called Chauars or the Bhumij people inhabiting the hill between Ghatsila and Bharabhum”.¹¹ Zamindar of Ghatsila Jagannath Dhal was the leader of this revolt . He fortified his state. He and his Chuars companion showed heroism. He was defeated the battle . Peace was restored here. The fire of rebellion could not be suppressed for long time . The causes of the Anger of the Zamindar and peasant were not gone away .Expression of anger was chuar uprising of 1798-1799 AD.

In the phase of 1798-1799 AD Raipur of Bankura district was main centre of Chuar uprising. OS Malley wrote “In the last two years of the 18 century South West of district ,which is now comprised in the Raipur thana, was in very disturbed state in consequence of what is known as the Chuar rebellion. In May 1798 it was found necessary to send a party of sepoys to keep the peace in this trac . Next month a body of 1500 Chuar made their appearance at Raipur, set fire to the bazar and kachari and overran the place”.¹² Durjan Singh was the main leader of the revolt. He was Zamindar of Raipur . In 1791 he failed to clear his dues amounting to RS 3145.7 as 18 gondas and imprisoned. His estate was put up to sell but against the Government notification. He appealed to the Diwani Adalat and eventually failed to clear hi dues. But he took his own course. It is known from letter of Charls Stuart (Letter no -63BDR MID Vol -iii) that he formed a coalition with neighbour Zamindar . Mohan Das Singha Chowdhury of Bhalaidiha , Sundar Narayan Deo of Bagri

were the members of this coalition . The Zamindar had already been snatched from the hand of Durjan Singh . So he declared war against company government. Under his leadership 1500 chuars rebel placed their dominance over more then thirty village of Raipur . The employees of the new Zamindar flew away . Rebels had an idea about the power of the company . So they were engaged in a Skirmish. At last rebels were defeated . But for long time there was no peace in this area . Agriculture was stopped in the whole area the government was helpless and settled the Zamindari with the son of Durjan Singh.

Activity of chuar spread in different parts of districts of Midnapore. Rebels took serious turn at Bahadurpur ,Salboni and Karnagarh . The local officer could not control the rebels work. In 1798 July four hundred Chuar assembled under the leadership of Gobardhan Dikpati and he stopped collecting revenue at Chandrakona .Then the revolt spread at Basdevpur, Tamluk , Turkachar , Balarampur , Ramgarh etc. Salbani was strong centre of rebels . As a result of plundering and killing of government employee Salbani became an uninhabited crematorium. The tenants took shelter in the Anandpur village. Anandpur was a trading centre where prosperous Merchants lived. Dividends of monopoly salt trading were distributed among these merchants. Foreign traders used to buy Taluk in the name of native Merchant. These taluks were of the jungle chiefs. So the Anandpur was plundered by the rebels . Company official continued to blame each other for the rebellion .Several high ranking officer were transferred. The daroga of silda, Satpathi were dismissed. The whole year of 1799 saw the cessation of revenue collection. Disappointed collector told the council that if the Chuar were not suppressed, there would be no cultivation. The power of the rebels increased a lot when contact was established with the Paiks of Orissa . Karnagar was a main centre of Chuar rebellion. It was five miles North East of medapur . Rani Sheromoni was the Zamindar of the state. She was born in a so called lower family. So he had sincerity with the chuar rebels . At the early stage she had no direct relation with them. But in the end she took leadership in rebellion .Rani was kept under house arrest. Government occupied her two forts Abasgarh and Kannagarh . According to J C Price possession was not continued more days. One region after another fell into the hands of rebels.

At last course of government was changed . Board of revenue could understand that Paikan land policy was wrong. Remission in revenue was granted . The government recognised the right of the proprietors over the soil . Some benefits were given to Chuar leaders . Arrangements were made for them to donate tax free land . Sale laws were not enforced .Some administrative measure was taken . The government formed jungle Mahal district in 1805 according to regulation xviii. ¹³ A general amnesty was declared. The revolt continued to stagnate. But the Chuars rebels were not completely crushed .In 1806 the Chuar took violent method. In 1809 body of the five hundred Chuar assembled in the jungle estate of Raipur . But they were suppressed. O.S.S Malley wrote in his book ‘History of Bengal, Bihar and ,orissa, under British rule’ that it took many years for peace to be established. He reported of revolt up to 1816. Some benefits were given to isolated the Paikes . Arrangements were made for them to donate tax free land. Special benefits were given to Chuar leader. The revolt continued to stagnate.

Conclusion: The political significance of the Chuar rebellion is undeniable. The rebels had much limitation. Their vision was confined to regional boundaries. Many leaders of the Chuar rebellion did not join spontaneously. Rani shiromoni took the leadership under pressure of the rebels . All this is historically true. But they were aware of their condition. So they revolted to overthrow the company .They sacrifice their life to free their from foreign rule. They set an example of anti British struggle. The next generation was inspired by this tradition. The rebels movement did not failed. The government recognised the rights of the proprietors over the soil. Paikan land and Devottor land system was also recognised .Board of revenue directed to reduce the rate of revenue. A decision was taken that Zamindari won't be confiscate due to non – payment of revenue. It was seen that Zamindars of Bhalaidiha, Simlapal ,Shyamsundarpur existed but many Zamindar lost their estate due to pressure of high rated land revenue to other parts of Bengal.

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