CHAPTER-VIII

Conclusion
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Though the British connection in India began in 1600 A.D, with the establishment of the East India Company, it was not until the second half of the 18th century that the Company began to develop as a territorial and political entity in India. In the hundred years after 1750 the British became the real rulers of India. By 1858 the Company was the master of the whole of what was known as British India and had established paramountcy over the then existing Indian States. This necessitated the evolution of an efficient administration to reconcile with the changed situations. They tried to avoid any violent break with the past and on the basis of the old system gradually built up a new one through trial and error. The new system was, however, permeated with English ideas and experiences sometimes helping them in consolidation and stability and at times creating confusion prompting resistance and rebellion. The main characteristics of a modern bureaucracy as noted by Max Weber are, hierarchy of functions, jurisdiction fixed by law, operation by way of written orders, professional class of full-time workers, and operation according to certain legal principles or precedents to do away with arbitrary authority or unpredictable decisions. All these came to be developed in India under the British. However, the defects of this system and its incongruity with the indigenous institutions and facts of life were later on noted by the administrators and with difficulties necessary changes were introduced. Particularly in the field of Land Revenue they were forced to adopt Roytwari system under which a direct relation between each landholder and the Government was established and the revenue settlement was revised every thirty years. Of course, by doing so, they took away an

1 From the Regulating Act of 1773 the charter of the Company was renewed every twenty years by Parliament and at every renewal it progressively reduced the commercial character of the Company.
important task from the village community resulting in the loss of an important function of the village self-rule.

The British administrative system pressed heavily on the Indian people by its sheer weight and exactions; and they progressively lost their initiative and self-reliance. The village Panchayats suffered an eclipse because all decision-making powers remained concentrated in the hands of the all-powerful bureaucracy. Self-rule in the villages progressively ceased. It became a cog in the administrative wheel. This necessarily does not mean that the British rule was harmful in every sphere. They have amply helped India in urbanisation, education, trade and communication, etc. What purpose did the British Raj serve in India? Writing on "The Future Results of British Rule in India" in the New York Daily Times on the 28th of August 1853, Karl Marx wrote: “England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive and the other regenerative – the annihilation of old Asiatic Society and the laying of material foundation of western society in Asia”. The Britishers carried out both these missions only to the extent to which these were consistent with their interests. In this connection we may dwell upon the interesting query: What would have been the situation in India, had she been a colony of any of the other imperialistic powers such as France, Portugal, Holland etc.? Indians who reflected on this had no two opinions on this matter. B.G. Tilak, the Father of the Indian Unrest, “who can not be suspected of the slightest partiality for the British, wrote as early as 1892 that the benefits that India had derived under the British” could not have been secured under any other power.¹

The above observation on the British rule in India is generally felt and realised in Sambalpur as well. But there are certain

¹ B.G. Tilak, Benefits to India from British Rule (in Marathi) (Kesari, Poona), 9th August 1892.
distinguishing features special for the Sambalpur region which merit singular attention and interpretations. Even though after the step by step occupation of States in Orissa with their overwhelming military strength, it was a question of time and convenience for them to occupy Sambalpur. But the process they evolved and the methods they employed to occupy Sambalpur appeared to be not only different but also strategic. They appeared as a mighty power against the Marathas, but did not follow the same process to acquire Sambalpur. They allowed the native rule to continue even after the death of Maharaja Sai not through a strong and popular ruler but with a widow who was devoid of knowledge in statecraft and the intricacies of administration. More the while, her installation on the Gaddi was against tradition and popular opinion. This diplomatic selection of ruler not only allowed them to keep the ruler subservient to them but also gave them opportunities to locate opponents and to understand every bit of the relation of the royal house with the people in all matters: civil, political, administrative, personal etc. This was, in fact, one of the most intelligent ways to step into one’s shoe without being caught in their intentions.

Having gauged the popular reaction and developing situation, the Britishers, not-withstanding the legal claims of succession, installed an imbecile, impotent and a “yes man” Narayan Singh, an old man, devoid of the slightest knowledge of statecraft, on the Gaddi. The intention was double-fold. They wanted to accelerate the growing unpopularity of the native rule by weakening the grip of the royal house-hold upon the people on one hand and on the other created a situation in which the native ruler was completely dependent on the British authorities, even for mere existence. This situation virtually made them the deciding factor in every activity of the Raj and allowed them to utilise their tactics, force and diplomacy at free hand to deal with the subsequent happenings like the resistance and rebellion. They were
about to walk on to the Gaddi without even a show of force, but were saved from ignominy due to the promulgation of the Doctrine of Lapse. Then the story of direct British rule in Sambalpur began as an episode of excessive exactions to churn out the milching cow and of consequent protests and rebellion jeopardising the interests of all.

Introduction of money-economy and rigid enforcement of revenue rules spelt disastrous, precipitating great crisis. Among the tribals, social insecurity loomed large on account of growing indebtedness. The British Government felt that more effective control over the internal administration would ease the tension. But the standard of rebellion unfurled by Govinda Sing of Jharsuguda was carried on by Balbhadra Sai and Surendra Sai with the active support of all. Since then till 1864 Surendra Sai did not look back in spite of heart-breaking bereavement of family members and friends and continued his relentless fight against the British authority spreading the network of guerilla fighting at strategic points. He not only symbolised the popular resistance against the British rule, but also personified the vigorous protest against injustice and highly exploitative policy of taxation implemented by the Colonial Government.

In fact, the nineteenth century was a period of great political unrest in Orissa as is evident from the series of disturbances. The century witnessed the Paik rebellion of Khurda (1819-24), Kondh uprising in Ghumsur, Baud and Angul (1836-56), Kolh rebellion in Mayurbhanj (1830-66), the resistance movement of the Gonds and Binjhals in Sambalpur (1827-64), the unrest among the Bhuyans of Keonjhar (1867-93), the uprising in Nayagarh (1849-54 and 1893-94), and desperate struggle of the Kondhs in Kalahandi (1882-84). All this was an indication of the tribal peasant’s violent reaction against the imposition of a new socio-economic and political order. Due to lack of
education, proper leadership and close liaison among the insurgents though the aforesaid uprisings could not be successfully piloted to the goals, the lesson was not forgotten. Its immediate impact was a reorientation of the government's attitude and introduction of welfare measures.

But the smouldering fire of political unrest in Sambalpur was far from being extinguished. The surging unrest found new outlets in subsequent period. In spite of a row of hangings, order could not be established at Sambalpur. Terror and tyranny could not cow down the spirit of protest, instead it forced the authority to calm down for which Major Impey was sent to conciliate and negotiate terms with the rebels. "The Sambalpur district was perhaps the very last district in India", wrote the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, "in which the embers of the disturbances of 1857 were finally stamped out in 1864".

The continuous resistance of the natives of Sambalpur unnerved the British authority to such an extent that there was immediate necessity of political reorganisation of the territory. Soon after the Kolh rebellions of 1831-32, Sambalpur had been added to the Chhota Nagpur Division by the Regulation XIII of 1833. Later on in 1849, after annexation of Sambalpur with the British Raj, it was directly administered by an Officer styled as Principal Assistant of the Agent for the South-West Frontier. This arrangement continued till 1860, with a change in the titles of Officers. In 1860 Sambalpur was transferred to the Orissa Division of Bengal and by the notification of 30th of April 1862, it was made over to the newly constituted Central Provinces.

The 19th century was a century of struggle, experiments and observations for the British. The policy of land revenue administration under the British had a deep impact on the society. The people had
adjusted themselves to a social system whose very foundation was now questioned by the British rule. Land was not merely a source of income, it was the very source of existence for the people. This was not fully understood or appreciated by the British Officers and their agents coming from Bengal. Within a short period the social structure was shattered into pieces. As new laws were introduced in the land revenue, the social problems came to the surface. The relationship between the cultivator and the landlord on one side and the Government on the other, became a vital social problem. There was no trace of social sympathy for the cultivator. This was the worst part of social impact arising from the land revenue policy of the British. The conditions were such that there was little scope for any growth of trade and industries. The policy adopted by the British crippled the life of trade and commerce.

Viewed from the social and economic consideration, the British interference in the administration of the Feudatory Chiefs was the saddest aspect on the 19th century. It was a situation beyond parallel. It created a condition which could be compared with slavery. The institution of permanent settlement fixed the tribute of the Rulers to the British Government. But the Rulers used to impose new taxes on the people. There was little margin for the cultivators to save as build up capital. They lived in semi-starvation and the question of economic motivation or development of any kind was ruled out. In general, the privileges and comforts enjoyed by the Feudatory Chiefs in these States were much more than those that would have been enjoyed by them under the feudal order of England. With little responsibility they enjoyed so many rights and powers. The condition under temporary settlements was no better. During the early phase of the 19th century there were economy-settlements which were not based on rational or logical considerations. They were left to the individual decision of the
concerned officers. These officers were overburdened with their regular duty and had little time to go into the details of the problem.

The worst socio-economic impact of the short-term settlements was that the landholders were acting as mere middle men without any direct interest in agriculture or in social problem. They were bound with the Government for a stipulated amount for the duration of the settlement. Once they paid the Government dues, there was no further responsibility on them. So much so that most of the landholders did not stay in their areas. They usually remained outside and appointed a few clerks to collect the revenue. These petty clerks used to collect many unreasonable taxes and thereby create an atmosphere of terror. This atmosphere was unfortunate. It retarded social unity and growth.

There were two long-term settlements of thirty years each from 1837 to 1867 and from 1867 to 1897. But the result of the first thirty years' settlement was disastrous. The landholders not knowing what would happen at the end of 1867 collected the maximum possible and tried out all possible resources of survival in the provinces. All available food-stuff was sold out and an outbreak of famine took place. After this experience, there was no other alternative but to extend the 1837 settlement to another thirty years, to end in 1867. Had the 1837 settlement been made a sixty years' settlement from the beginning, then the social and economic condition of the people during this period would have greatly improved. The great famine of 1866-67 could have been avoided. It was lack of foresight on the part of the Government which invited one of the most bitter periods in the history of Orissa. Even such bitterness had not been experienced during the worst periods of the Native, the Mughal or the Maratha rule.

Consequent upon the protracted and severe resistance offered by the tribals to the British authority, the revenue administration of the
Sambalpur region was almost paralysed. The Gauntias and rent-collectors of villages were denied proprietary rights, in spite of the promises made to them. Instead, a new proclamation was issued for a fresh settlement under the seal of the Chief Commissioner Sir Richard Temple in 1863 but because of the unfavourable situation the settlement could not be materialised till 1872. Mr. A.M. Russell concluded the settlement in 1876 raising the annual rent of the Khalsa villages from Rs.87,797 to Rs.1,10,414 and the Takoli payments from the Zamindars were increased from Rs.25,720 to Rs.59,460. These enhancements of revenue and curtailments of rights of the Gauntias and Zamindars drove a number of them to debt and dishonest means which in turn fell upon the common people to bear the grunt. These factors, along with the loss of production due to inadequate rain fall and the confusion created by the Resistance Movement, there was a lot of hardship in the economic life of the people. This phenomenon also induced an imbalance in the social structure for those who lost or had the fear of loosing in case of their involvement against the authority became subservient to the will of the strong forces. They even acknowledged the leadership of the lower strata.

The complication in the economic front due to ineffective revenue administration helped securing the position of the tribals in the society. They were welcomed as champions of liberty and given due recognition for their sacrifices of home and hearth for public cause. The leader of the movement Surendra Sai was hailed as a national leader. Till today, he commands the honour and veneration of the people as a dauntless leader of the humanity. The Hindus accepted and assimilated the culture of the tribals and the tribal deities like Stambeswari, Pataneswari, Samaleswari became the deities of the

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general people of this zone. The tribals also allowed them to jostle with the upper caste Hindu and accepted their rites and rituals. The tribals who were reluctant to send their children to school around 1850 took special interest for the education of their children. This is clear from the statistics for the school-going children below 12 years of the Sambalpur region in 1872. There arose a ‘free for all’ situation in the Sambalpur region at the time when untouchability and detestation of the lower castes was the social custom and it facilitated social and economic upliftment of the lower stratas of the society. Not only that, there was acceptance of tribal leadership in various ventures by the elites. There was also a tremendous influence on the social consciousness of the tribals.

By the resistance movement of the 19th century the concept of nationalism was in a nebulous stage and Sambalpur came to the focus during the nationalist movement of the Gandhian Era after the Language Agitation of 1894. By acts of bravery for and dedication to the cause of the Motherland, the people of Sambalpur have earned laurels and for this the British rule has been responsible in some way, may be positive, may be negative.

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