

Kandha Rebellion of Ghumsur under Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi against the British Rule

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***Abstract-** The 19th century witnessed a number of tribal rebellions against the British rule in India as well as Odisha. All those rebellions occurred due to strong dislike for the new rule, the oppressive revenue system, high rent, threat to traditional privileges of the tribal people, etc. The Ghumsur rebellion under the leadership of Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi, Keonjhar rebellion under the leadership of Ratna Nayak and Dharanidhar Nayak and the Munda uprising under the leadership of Birsa Munda are some of the important tribal uprisings of Odisha against the British authority. The Kandha tribe rose in rebellion under the leadership of Kamal Lochan Dora Bisoi. In order to suppress the rebellion of Dora Bisoi, the British authorities took several measures. When the rebellion of Dora Bisoi became intolerable, the British authority under the Madras Presidency sent George Edward Russel to suppress the rebellion under Dora. At the instruction of Henry Ricketts, the Commissioner of Odisha, Raja Somnath Singh of Angul had played a very important role in surrendering Dora Bisoi. Lastly, Raja Somanath Singh of Angul handed over Dora Bisoi to the British forces in 1837. The Kandha rebellion did not stop after Dora's imprisonment and death. His nephew, Chakra Bisoi, took Dora's place and resolved to take revenge for his uncle's imprisonment and death. He posed a great threat to the British authority. Thus, the Kandha rebellion under Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi is significant in the history of Odisha in particular and India in general.*

Introduction

The 19th century witnessed a number of tribal rebellions against the British rule in India as well as Odisha. All those rebellions occurred due to strong dislike for the new rule, the oppressive revenue system, high rent, threat to traditional privileges of the tribal people, etc. ¹ Besides that the British policy of intervention in their religion, social reforms further aggravated the situation. The missionary activities carried on massively in different tribal area and steps taken against their ruler largely contributed to the tribal uprising.² The Ghumsur rebellion under the leadership of Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi, Keonjhar rebellion under the leadership of Ratna Nayak and Dharanidhar Nayak and the Munda uprising under the leadership of Birsa Munda are some of the important tribal uprisings of Odisha against the British authority.³

Kandha rebellion under Dora Bisoi

The growing discontent among the tribals of Ghumsur from the beginning of British rule under the Madras authority. The British did not pay proper attention for the administration of Ghumsur. In due course of time, the tribals of Ghumsur led by Dora Bisoi started rebellion against the British authority.⁴

Factors responsible for the discontent of Dora Bisoi

There were many factors which led Dora to revolt against the British. First, the suppression of *Meriah* in the Kandha dominated area of Ghumsur was a direct attack of British on the traditional religious faith of the Kandhas. Along with that the activities of the Christian missionaries, infuriated the Kandhas and made them rebellious. Secondly, the land revenue up to 50% was collected from the people through forceful method which wounded the sentiment of the tribals. So, the tribal people became irritated and wanted to take revenge against the British. Thirdly, the Bhanja rulers of Ghumsur had no friendly relation with the British. Being apprehensive to be captured by the British authority, Dhananjay Bhanja the ruler of Ghumsur fled to the jungle and sought the assistance of the Kandhas. The Kandhas wanted to help him as he was their ruler. Lastly, the dissolution of the Bhanja ruling family after the death of Dhananjay Bhanja in 1835 became the immediate cause of the rebellion. After his death, Brundaban Bhanja and Jagannath Bhanja, two members of the royal family became rebellious and got the supported by Dora Bisoi, the tribal chief of the Kandhas of Ghumsur.⁵

Revolt of Dora Bisoi

The Kandha tribe rose in rebellion under the leadership of Kamal Lochan Dora Bisoi. He was Benuiah Kandha born in the village Binjigiri, located near Kullada of the lower Ghumsur area. He was a 'Maliah Bisoi' or 'Head Agent' of the Kandhas of Ghumsur area of Odisha. He was a good sword-fighter and a wrestler of high quality.⁶ Therefore, he became the leader of the Kandhas and 'Agent of Kandha affairs' to the king of Ghumsur. He was appointed as the Commander-in-chief of the Ghumsur army. He had managed the military affairs of Ghumsur in a good manner. While fighting with the British army, he had given a top fight to the British authority at Ghumsur.

British measures to stop the rebellion

In order to suppress the rebellion of Dora Bisoi, the British authorities took several measures. When the rebellion of Dora Bisoi became intolerable, the British authority under the Madras Presidency sent George Edward Russel to suppress the rebellion under Dora. During this time, Dhananjay Bhanja who had left Ghumsur had taken shelter under the Kandhas of Ghumsur. However, it is supposed that instead of paying revenue to the British Government, he had taken much amount of money with him to continue and support the rebellion in association with the Kandhas of Ghumsur. In the mean while Russel reached Ghumsur on 11 January 1836 to suppress the rebellion. He had a grand army with him to fight with the Kandhas. In spite of that the British Government of India had ordered the superintendents of the Tributary Mahals to render habitual help to Russel to suppress the rebellion.⁷

Preparation of Dora Bisoi for the rebellion

During this critical time Raja Dhananjay Bhanja died on 31 December, 1835 leaving his family to the care of the Kandhas of Ghumsur. At this critical hour, persons like Brundaban Bhanja, Jagannath Bhanja, Madhu Bhanja, Baliar Singh, Sundaray Bisoi, Sangram Singh, Nanda Bisoi and many others came forward to strengthen the hands of Dora in the rebellion against the British authority. As these tribal leaders were residing in the forest, they were quite acquainted with the jungle area. They took the benefit of it and resorted to Guerrilla warfare in this rebellion. Now Dora as the leader of the rebellion planned to fight against the British by concealing themselves in the jungles and ghats and to make sudden attacks on the British army.⁸

The British operation

In order to capture the family members of Dhananjay Bhanja, Captain Butler on 14th February, 1836, led the British troop to the Ghats He had two point responsibilities to perform (1) to capture the royal members and (2) to rescue to treasury which had been taken by Dhananjay Bhanja. Dora had instigated the Kandhas to resort to aggression against the British troop. When the British troop reached the Ghats to make a head way to Udaygiri, they faced resistance from the Kandhas. When the British troops forcibly took away the fowls of the Kandha villages, they invited the hostility with the Kandhas of Ghumsur.⁹

Resistance by the Kandhas

In the mean time, the rebellious Kandhas attacked a British detachment between Udaygiri and Durga Prasad. In that encounter, thirteen soldiers (sepoys) and two European officers named Lieutenant Bromly and Ensign Gibbon were killed. Prior to that the British forces had captured some Kandhas and took others as prisoners after this incident. On the other hand, the Kandhas under Dora Bisoi gave a tough resistance to the British forces. By this, the British also became cruel to suppress the rebellious Kandhas of Ghumsur.¹⁰

Special operation of British forces to arrest Dora Bisoi

In order to arrest Dora, the British entered into Ambhajhara and Jiripada but they could not get success. Till that time Dora was playing as the key leader of the movement. The British searched in many places to arrest him. He moved from place to place and at last sought refuge at Angul. Being failure to capture Dora Bisoi, the British, declared a prize of 5,000 rupees who would capture him. In this connection, the Tributary Chief of Angul betrayed him. At the instruction of Henry Ricketts, the Commissioner of Odisha, Raja Somnath Singh of Angul had played a very important role in surrendering Dora Bisoi. Lastly, Raja Somanath Singh of Angul handed over Dora Bisoi to the British forces in 1837.¹¹

Results

After the capture of their leader Dora Bisoi, other rebellious leaders were captured later. They were tried and awarded severe punishment. As a result of which Dora received life

imprisonment and died inside the Ooty prison in 1846. 40 rebellious persons were awarded death sentences, 29 received confinement for life and 2 others received the same sentence for 8 years. Similarly, others got imprisonment who were involved in the rebellion of Ghumsur.

After the arrest of Dora Bisoi and other rebellious leaders, the British Government made new agreement with the Kandhas. The British appointed Sam Bisoi as the Chief of the Kandhas who had played a great role to capture of Kamal Lochan Dora. After this, the rebellion organized Dora Bisoi ended.¹²

Kandha rebellion under Chakra Bisoi

The Kandha rebellion did not stop after Dora's imprisonment and death. His nephew, Chakra Bisoi, took Dora's place and resolved to take revenge for his uncle's imprisonment and death. He posed a great threat to the British authority.

Factors responsible for the rebellion under Chakra

The Kandhas under Chakra Bisoi were instigated to make rebellion against the British Raj. The following factors were responsible for this rebellion. (1) the death of Dora Bisoi, had left a scar in the mind of Chakra. He wanted to take revenge of the death of his uncle Dora Bisoi. (2) the actions of S.C. Macpherson, the Meriah Agent disturbed the Kandhas a lot as he had interfered in the religion of the Kandhas. He rescued *Meriahs* and threatened the Kandhas of dire consequences who violated the law regarding Meriah. Further, he punished the Kandhas mercilessly. (3) on the other hand, Captain Macpherson was humiliated in his camp at Bisipara in 1846. He was forced by the Kandha revolutionaries to surrender the Meriahs whom he had rescued from the Kandha area. Otherwise the Kandhas would have killed him. This achievement of the Kandhas under the leadership of Chakra made them courageous. Finally, the Kandhas installed Pitambar, the minor son of Dhananjay Bhanja as the king of Ghumsur. This emboldened them and being surcharged with enthusiasm, they looted the British camp. The above factors forced the British Government to plan to suppress the rebellion of the Kandhas under Chakra Bisoi.¹³

British plan to capture Chakra Bisoi

Looking into the above factors, Macpherson did not follow the policy of appeasement with the Kandhas. The British Government realized that his presence as a Meriah agent was detrimental to the smooth functioning of British administration at Ghumsur. In order to bring the

situation under control, the Madras Presidency appointed Lt. Col. Campbell as the Meriah Agent who succeeded Macpherson. However, Campbell was a man of different attitude. He followed a convincing policy and tried to win over the Kandhas of Ghumsur. So, the Kandhas promised to abstain from Meriah sacrifice. In this way trial was made to persuade the Kandhas and to make unfriendly with Chakra Bisoi.¹⁴

Role of Somnath Singh in the rebellion

By his strategy Campbell won most of the Kandhas to his side. However, Chakra Bisoi did not come under the influence of the British authority. He organized rebellions of the Kandhas against the British forces. It was alleged that Chakra Bisoi and Nabghan Konhoro were assisted by Somnath Singh, the King of Angul. After this, the British Government followed a new policy towards the rebellion. He pardoned both Chakra and Nabghan in order to suppress the rebellion. The policy bore fruit and Nabghan surrendered. However, Dora did not surrender to the British authority. This made the British authority to become skeptic about Somnath Singh and wanted to take severe actions against Somanath Singh of Angul.¹⁵

As a result of which Somnath picked up his quarrel with the British in 1846. He forcibly took possession of a village of Hindol. For that offence he was fined Rs. 3,000/-. The King tried to protest but he could not get success. On the other hand, Lt. Col. Campbell was authorized to march towards Angul to suppress Somnath Singh. In 1848, Angul was confiscated and Somnath Singh was sent as a prisoner to the Hazaribagh Jail. He had to pay heavy price for supporting Chakra Bisoi in the rebellion against the British authority.¹⁶

British attempt to Capture Chakra

Then the British made many attempts to capture Chakra Bisoi. The capture of Rendo Majhi, the leader of the Borikiya Kandhas of Kalahandi and the successive attack on the camp of A.C. Mac Neill who succeeded Campbell as Meriah Agent led British to conclude that Chakra Bisoi was behind the attack. Meanwhile G.F. Cockburn who succeeded Samuells as the Superintendent of the Tributary Mahals wanted to take steps against Chakra. In the meanwhile, the Zamindar of Madanpur was accused of giving shelter to Chakra. So, he was removed from his zamindary. Although, R.M. Macdonald sent troop to capture Dharam Singh Mandhata of Athagaon who had given shelter to Chakra, was arrested.¹⁷

Chakra's strategy

Looking at the strategy of the British forces, Chakra never stopped in his mission against

the British. He could know that the Savaras of Parlakhemundi were rising against the British under the leadership of Dandasena of Gaiba. Taking this opportunity, Chakra united the Savaras and Kandhas and instigated them to set fire and plunder those villages which did not support Dandasena. Captain Wilson moved to suppress this rebellion and captured Dandasena who was captured and hanged. After that Chakra moved from Parlakhemundi to the area of Tel valley. Looking at the threat of the British authority, the king of Patna could not help Chakra Bisoi. So, in order to save himself, Chakra entered into the forests of Kandhamal.¹⁸ The Govt. of Bengal learnt the connection of Baud and ordered for the annexation of Kandhamal into the British territory in 1855. From that time nothing was known about Chakra Bisoi.¹⁹ He was never captured. He died in 1856. However, in 1857 G.F. Cockburn, the Commissioner of Odisha wrote to the Government regarding Chakra that perhaps he has abandoned this country. For a decade from 1846 to 1856, the activities of Chakra became a severe headache to the British authority.²⁰

Conclusion

Thus, the Kandha rebellion under Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi is significant in the history of Odisha in particular and India in general. The role played by both Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi in this Tribal uprising was commendable. The British failed to capture him even though efforts were made to capture Chakra Bisoi. However, it is beyond doubt that this tribal rebellion under the Kandha leaders like Dora Bisoi and Chakra Bisoi had given a tough challenge to the British authority in the early part of the British administration in Odisha. Although, the rebellion could not bring much result, but it had shaken the British authority in Odisha.

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