

## The Adivasi Resistance in the Jungle Mahals 1760-1832 : The Role of the Jungle Zamindars

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### *Abstract*

*Methodology and sources:* In this article, the author has empirically sifted through a plethora of archival materials, government sources, in addition to books and articles.

*Major Findings-* The author has attempted to trace the history of Bhumij rebels who were also known as the Chuars in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal. The author has put emphasis on the role played by Rani Shiromoni, Durjan Singh, Jaganath Dhal, Gobardhan Dikpati, Anchal Singh, Ganga Narain and other rebellious zamindars in leading the movement. The Chuar rebellion as it was called in the early days, commenced when the Company-State (English East India Company) started to impose taxes on autonomous zamindars of the Jungle Mahals. In response they initially refused to pay the additional revenue and then this covert resistance erupted into a more open rebellion. Their employees also joined the rebellion of their own accord. During this phase, Jaganath Dhal and Durjan Singh played a huge role in resisting the Company – State. Started in 1760s, it continued till the 1780s when presumably Jaganath Dhal died. The next phase started in 1790s when the administration attempted to impose the terms of permanent settlement on the jungle zamindars, dismantle the thanadari that had existed in the villages, and attempted to resume the paikan lands which the paiks enjoyed in lieu of salaries for the services as village police. Rani Shiromoni and Gobardhan Dikpati played important roles. When the promises of the administration were not fulfilled, the sardars or head of the Chuars rose up again under Anchal Singh. The revolt though crushed, did not end there. The Bhumij rose up again under Ganga Narain in 1829 against the administration's forceful hinduisation, indifference and imposition of English system of inheritance. The Company – State had to create a separate Santhal Pargana for them.

*Conclusion:* Thus the zamindars played a huge role in leading the movement albeit the ordinary rebels did not need any prompting from them.

*Keywords:* Anchal Singh, Bhumij, Chuars, Durjan Singh, Gobardhan Dikpati, Rani Shiromoni.

### **Introduction**

The adivasis and the zamindars of the Jungle Mahals had grievances against the administration. According to McAlpin,

In the eighteenth century, a considerable portion of the area under enquiry appears to have formed part of an indefinite administrative unit called the Jungle-Mahals lying between the Chota Nagpur and plains of Bengal. This was subsequently defined as being composed of certain parganas in Birbhum, Bankura and Midnapore; but on account of the disturbances of the *bhumijes*, it was split amongst the neighbouring districts in 1833. But the name of the Jungle Mahals however still survives in a portion of Moureswar thana, in Birbhum and the whole of the Western area of Midnapore. The fact that there was once an administrative unit, roughly corresponding to this area, and the fact that this area contains the largest population of Sonthals outside the Sonthal Parganas and outside Chota Nagpur are not accidents (McAlpin, 1981, 4).

Their grievances found expression in the form of 4 phases of rebellions. Each one had charismatic leaders. Though there was an alliance between the ordinary *Chuars* and their *zamindars*, the former did not require any prompting from the *zamindars*.

### ***Existing historiography on Chuar rebellion***

It is important to commence the discussion with the work of the revenue settlement officer J.C. Price. It is considered as a primary source though it is a much later account. His piece on the *Chuar* rebellion of 1799 gives us valuable insight into the period and the incidents that triggered the uprising (Price, 1953, Appendix IV). Narendranath Das produced one of the major works on the subject. He wrote the history of Midnapur. He had used most of the available archival sources. The work is empirically rich but needed more analysis (Das, 1956). J.C. Jha concentrated on the Bhumij revolt, the final phase of the outrages, in the Jungle Mahals. He emphasised the indifference of the Company state towards the predominantly tribal people and cited this as the principal cause of discontent. He called it a popular revolt (Jha, 1967). Nirmal Sengupta, in his article (Sengupta, 1980, 664-667) had observed there was one factor that glued the well-known as well as the lesser-known tribal movements such as our *Chuar* rebellion and the rebellion of Ganga Narain together. All of them directed their antagonism towards one common enemy - the outsider. Gouripada Chatterjee viewed the struggles in the Jungle Mahals, from the time of the East India Company's assumption of power to the great rebellion of 1857, primarily as an anti-colonial freedom struggle (Chatterjee, 1986). Subas Sinchan Roy called it a popular movement. For him, it was a clash of two extreme forms of violence, where the Company state proved to be mightier (Roy, 2008). Manis Kumar Raha and Iar Ali Khan opined that the gradual extension of the Company state's authority in Central India generated new types of policies in tribal areas. They were unable to bear the Company state's oppression. As a result, they resorted to armed resistance. The new system had displaced the *zamindars*. Even their lands were sold off if they failed to pay rent. The disgruntled *zamindars* combined with the rebels and created disturbances. According to them, the *Chuar* only sought restoration of their lands, not political independence (Raha, 1993). Ananda Bhattacharyya viewed this rebellion primarily an 'Adivasi movement' (Bhattacharyya, 2012). In his article and book (Bhattacharyya, 2012; Bhattacharyya, 2017). Ananda Bhattacharyya identifies it as a popular movement. He stated that "the plundering of the revenue, the attack upon the *zamindars* who were very much loyal to the British and attack upon the Magistrates' offices and the distribution of the plundering spoils among the starving peasants and *Adivasis* were no doubt basic features of the popular movement of the *Chuar* rebellion of 1799". He later called it an "adivasi led peasant insurgency" (Bhattacharyya, 2012). Aparajita Bhattacharya has viewed the *Chuar* rebellion from an environmental standpoint. For her, it was a clash of two civilisations (Bhattacharya, 2007).

### ***Who were the Chuars?***

It is evident from the earliest Company records that as early as 1771, a group of people, known as the *Chuars* to the officials, made inroads in the district. These men had carried off cattle, grain etc. The government felt that this act of 'banditry' needed strong government action. However, they did not have sufficient force to oppose these 'marauders'. Capt. Carter, the officer in charge had to apply to the superintendent of Birbhum to provide him with more force (Extract of a letter from the supervisor of Birbhum, February 1771, Controlling Council of Revenue Vol.11, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata, West Bengal). Who were these supposed 'marauders' in reality? The definition of *Chuar* was highly flexible. According to the noted historian J.C. Jha, the *Chuars* were the Bhumij tribals belonging originally to the *Mundari* main stock. After moving away from the Chotanagpur plateau, they settled in large numbers in Midnapur, Bankura and Purulia districts of Bengal (Jha, 1967, 1-25). However, the earliest explanation can be found in Grant's *Analysis of Finances of Bengal*, 1767. It had described the inhabitants of Bishnupur as robbers, who lived in a state of "pristine innocence". He described them as a tribe of robbers, aborigines of the country, who were still in the habit of

offering human sacrifices to goddess Bhavani and Kali (O'Malley, 1908, 37). According to the official records, the Jungle Mahals were inhabited by *paiks* and *Chuars*, who were supposed to be 'careless cultivators but an expert in pillage' (O'Malley, 1911, 47-48). However, the most 'persistent disturbers of peace' for the administration were the *Chuars*. This term signifies in Bengali 'an outlandish fellow' and was applied in Midnapur to the 'wild tribes' who inhabited the Jungle Mahals (Ibid). Mr Short, the resident of Midnapur, applied the term only to the rebel *naiks*; Strachey, Magistrate of Midnapur, preferred to call all the turbulent *paiks* of the Jungle Mahals by that common name. Later even the dissatisfied ryots were called *Chuars* by the Company officials. It became a term to denote lawless conduct in the extensive forest tracts of Midnapur, Burdwan, Birbhum, and Bankura (Roy, 2008, 494-495). Even the Company officials like Howell and Abbe Reynal deemed them as simple people. Shri Chaitanya described the *Chuars* (in 1509) as "pirates gathered on the river and robbers on the land" (Bhattacharyya, 2012, 69-79). We find the mention of these original inhabitants in indigenous sources like Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakraborty's work *Kalketu Upakhyan*. However, he too had called them 'choors'. Jagdish Chandra Basu in his *Mednipurer Itihas* identified them as an outlandish fellow (Basu, 1939, 70-77). They eventually came to be identified as such in the Bengali lexicon.

### ***The Economic Backdrop and the Causes of the First Chuar Rebellion***

The Bhumijes were ruled by semi-autonomous *zamindars*, who according to the Company officials styled themselves as 'native' rajas. Since the time of the Mughal rule, they had been accustomed to their independence and only paid a nominal tribute to the Mughal emperor. These jungle *zamindars* used to hire *paiks* (village police) from the *Chuar* community to serve as village police. The head *paiks* were known as the *sardars*. Instead of salary, *zamindars* allotted rent free *chakran* lands to these *paiks*. The *paiks* considered this ownership to be their 'ancient right'. Instead of cultivating the lands, they mostly hired landless *Chuars* to cultivate their lands. They, therefore, acquired the status of *paiks*' tenants. These tenants were different from non-tribal peasants who lived in nearby villages. There was no solidarity between them. This economic base came under serious threat under the East India Company's rule (Bhattacharyya, 2017, 75).

The Marathas had not bothered the southern provinces for a long time. The administrators of the English East India Company considered the time to be ripe for bringing the woodlands of southern Bengal under their sway. They suddenly enhanced the revenues of the Jungle *zamindars*. The Jungle *zamindars* were autonomous and had not paid revenue since the times of the Mughal rule. They only paid a tribute. The administration's sudden enhancement of the revenue prompted them to rebel. Their *paiks* joined the rebellion. Thus started the first phase of the *Chuar* rebellion (Sengupta, 2021, 122-173).

### ***The Organisation of the Rebel Chuars and the Rebel Zamindars***

According to Ananda Bhattacharyya, *Kurmi, Santhals, Bhumij, Bauri, Kora, Mahli, Goala, Sadgope* of South West Bengal and *Munda and Manki* of Chotanagpur and *sardar ghatwals* organised themselves and rebelled against the Company government. They were given the generic term *Chuars* (Bhattacharyya, 2017, xvii). So when the disturbances commenced in the Jungle Mahals, they all allied with each other to rebel. There were a number of 'refractory' *zamindars* who resisted the intrusion of the Company state. Jagannath Dhal, Jadu Singh, Ghatsila *zamindar*, Mayurbhanj raja rebelled against the Company state. The jungle *zamindars* remained extremely active during the 1770s and 1780s. By the end of the 1780s, some of them had been subjugated, or died, or had voluntarily surrendered to the Company state. However, when the *paiks* rose up in 1799, some of them saw that event as an opportunity to regain their lands and power. They allied with the *paiks* and *Chuars* and rebelled. The *zamindars* remained active during 1767-1782.

**The *zamindar* of Ghatsila:** Damodar Singh, the *zamindar* of Ghatsila, which was the headquarters

of Dhalbhum, opposed the Company state. He evaded paying the enhanced revenues for two months and fell into arrears. It appears he wanted to declare independence. That was problematic for the government as they were apprehensive that others might follow his example, and they might lose a great part of the jungles during the rainy season (Bhattacharyya, 2017, 114). In order to remedy the situation, Vansittart deployed Lieut. Rooke with 2 companies of sepoy against him to remove the Raja's principal adviser. He was not eager to remove the Raja if he voluntarily submitted to the Company's regulations (Firminger, 1915, 70). The Ghatsila *zamindari* ended up with an arrear, though the Company state believed it was recoverable (Ibid, 116-117).

**Raipur Raja:** Similarly, Raipur Raja also resisted the Company state. He was rather an interesting character. A supposedly 'ill-tempered man', he claimed some villages in Bengal as his own, even before the East India Company state had found a grip in Bengal (30<sup>th</sup> May 1782, Committee of Revenue, Vol.14., WBSA). However, even after the emergence of the East India Company state and after they had firmly established their rule in Bengal, he continued to claim these villages (1<sup>st</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> February 1782, Committee of Revenue, Vol.11, Part.2, WBSA). The Company officials found the claims to be groundless. As a consequence, the Raja took hold of Beleachora, plundered and pillaged various villages. The villages of Juanpore and Nyabassan became particularly vulnerable to his 'raids', and it became clear to the Company state that the Raipur Raja intended to control the revenues of Nyabassan. So, it became imperative for them to protect the villages (Letter from the Collector of Midnapore 6<sup>th</sup> June 1781, 1<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> June 1781, Committee of Revenue, Vol.4, WBSA.). It appears that Jagannath Dhal and Raipur Raja allied themselves against the Company government. Jagannath Dhal at one point took refuge in Bumunghati, a *zamindari* under the aegis of Mayurbhanj Raja. The Company officials had to resort to threats to flush him out (Bhattacharyya, 2017, 131). So even in the earliest stages of the Company's administration, they had to tackle those who questioned their authority firmly.

**Jagannath Dhal:** The government was unable to subjugate all of the 'refractory' *zamindars* at once. It appears from Jacob Camac's letter that in the first few years of 1770s, Jagannath Dhal refused to pay revenue to the government at an enhanced rate. He was the *zamindar* of Karackpur. His refractory behaviour had already garnered great disfavour from the government. It eventually induced the Company state to attack him from the southern frontier to force him into paying his dues (Letter to Jacob Camac, 4<sup>th</sup> January-28<sup>th</sup> April 1773, Controlling Council of Revenue at Patna, Vol.7, Part 1, p.156, WBSA). Jagannath Dhal was one of the *zamindars* of Jungle Terai country. The Jungle Terai country included Bhagalpur (Boglepore), Monghyr, and Birbhum. Some portions were situated within the 'ghats' (unspecified). According to the Company's official records, the people of this area were 'refractory in general' and often prevented the Company's men from accessing it through the roads and jungles (Letter to Thomas Lane & Brooke, Chief Council of Patna, dated 13<sup>th</sup> November 1773, 6<sup>th</sup> October-23<sup>rd</sup> December 1773, Controlling Council of Revenue at Patna, Vol.9, WBSA.). It stands to reason that he was not the sole rebellious *zamindar* who refused to pay the revenue to the Company state. There were others who also fell into arrears and had been involved in 'disturbances' in the neighbourhood, wreaking havoc there (3<sup>rd</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> August 1771, Controlling Council of Revenue at Patna, Vol. 2, WBSA). This made their goal of bringing the entire woodland Bengal under their control difficult.

**Jadu Singh:** The decade ended with Jadu Singh's rebellion. It is evident from the existing sources that Jadu Singh of Bagri was reluctant to submit to the demands of the Company state (14<sup>th</sup> December 1778), of 5<sup>th</sup> January 1779-20<sup>th</sup> February 1781, Revenue Department Vol.8, WBSA). According to the official records, he created 'disturbances', and plundered the 'peaceful' people. He allegedly prevented their lands from being cleared and cultivated. He prevented the lands from being 'productive and valuable'

for the Company state (Letter from Ducarel, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1783, 1<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27, WBSA.). He wounded some *sezawals* (*sazawals*) and committed 'violence' on the *amla* (*amlah*). Then he absconded with the *talukdars* of Simlapal, Shyamsundarpur, carrying of *zamindari* papers and *amlas*. Mr Ducarel, an officer in charge, 'fruitlessly' urged him to return (Ibid). However, it appears that at least temporarily, their efforts were thwarted. They were unable to squeeze Jungle Mahals. By the end of 1783, the arrears of revenue turned out to be Rs.2130 (appx). It appears that Jadu Singh used to collect a lions' share of the revenue of the area. He continued to exert influence despite the Company state's efforts to thwart it (Ibid). The *pargana* could yield revenue. The government felt the inhabitants were prevented from paying to the government. Eventually, Mr Thomas Short was appointed as the resident of Bagri, Burdwan, to settle the disturbances there (28<sup>th</sup> October 1783, General Letters to the Court of Directors, Revenue Department, 1771-1816, WBSA). According to the official records, Mr Short had indeed tried to induce Jadu Singh to come in and state his grievances, if any, and which might be the cause of his defiant behaviour. He had been subsisting on 'pillage' and been 'disturbing the peace' of Bagri. Jadu Singh attended Mr Short. He brought the *talukdars* of Simlapal, Fulkusma, Shyamsundarpur, Bilshedy with him. Upon arrival, he complained that the *sezawal* had collected more money from the *pargana* than he had given credit to them or accounted for at Burdwan. Mr Short agreed to examine it. However, while he was employed to do so, Jadu Singh allegedly entered into intrigues with one Balaram Haldar. Mr Short felt deceived. Jadu Singh even stationed guards without consulting anyone, stopped all communication between the *sezawal* and Mr Short. Then he fled into the jungles with the *talukdars*. The jungles proved to be a safe abode for the rebels; they knew it would be difficult for the troops to pursue them there. The Company state admitted it had prevented Mr Short from ascertaining through them the real amount of the *moffusil* collections made from the ryots (Enclosures, commissioners of Burdwan, 1<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27, WBSA). .Eventually, Jadu Singh was neutralised, and his son Chatra Singh was put in his place. Since his dismissal, some of his lands were resumed (Letter from Mr Short to Committee of Revenue, dated 24<sup>th</sup> July 1783, Calcutta). However, Chatra Singh was eventually detained by the government as they received information from Burdwan that there was a conspiracy to get Jadu Singh released (Letter from Thomas Short to Committee of Revenue, dated 27<sup>th</sup> June, 21<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> July 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.30.WBSA). The government's apprehension proved to be valid. People's loyalty toward Jadu Singh had not waned. In fact, the ryots and his *zamindari* still appeared to be under Jadu Singh's influence (1<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27). The government feared that if Jadu Singh continued to exert his influence in the area, the countryside would remain a wasteland (Letter from Ducarel, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1783, , 1<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27, WBSA. ). The government proposed the following (Oct. 13<sup>th</sup> 1779) of 5<sup>th</sup> January 1779-20<sup>th</sup> February 1781, Revenue Department, Vol.8, WBSA ):

1. The officials in the Company's service should be stationed at Bagri under the immediate control and authority of the Committee.
2. The rents of the district should be paid at *khalsa kachari*.
3. In order to destroy Jadu Singh, he must be detached from the *Chuars*.
4. Jungles should be cleared so that lands could be used.
5. These incursions had blocked a considerable branch of trade of silk and cotton of Radhanagar. Necessary steps should be taken to protect the roads for the merchants and travellers.
6. They would induce the ryots and *Chuars* to cultivate the lands. Mr Short was to be authorised to give grants of wastelands at a small annual *jama* or rent-free for the first year. It was not to extend beyond 5 years. The lands were to be resumed if the conditions were not met. By this time, the Company government was forced to acknowledge that Chatra Singh was the nominal *zamindar* of Bagri and was incapable of improving the country, from the want of ability, activity and

influence (1<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> May 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.27). The Company state had no real faith in the 'native' rajas and considered them to be incapable of managing their estates. However, they still managed to exert influence over the inhabitants of their respective *zamindaries*, which was crucial for controlling them.

Eventually the government had to replace Jadu Singh. The government chose his son Chatra Singh as the substitute.<sup>1</sup>

**Mayurbhanj Raja:** The 1780s remained turbulent. The Mayurbhanj Raja began to question the authority of the Company state. As a gesture of defiance, he claimed Beleachora on the west of Subarnarekha as his own. He claimed to have inherited these 'ancient rights' from the Marathas. The government was unwilling to acknowledge his claims, and they eventually dispossessed him. However, he was unwilling to give up his claims to the territory. For this purpose, he decided to use armed forces. He even sought assistance from the Marathas. As a result of the clashes, revenues suffered, and the terrorised ryots abandoned their habitations and fertile lands (1<sup>st</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1785, Committee of Revenue, Vol.59). The table will demonstrate the extent of the government's loss due to his activities.

**Table No - 1: Loss of revenue in 1783 due to Mayurbhanj Raja's rebellion**

Name of the districts	Approximate balances (in rupees)
Balrampur	4718
Casijura 2 Anna	376
Casijura 4 Anna	5299
Maynachura	14830
Midnapur	5221
Narjole	347

**Source:** WBSA, 3<sup>rd</sup> November-8<sup>th</sup> December 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol. 34.

He also held the district of Amerda and Kanpur as a tributary of the Marathas (17<sup>th</sup> August 1781, Committee of Revenue.). He also appeared near Contai. The government claimed his activities had prevented the *zamindars* and ryots from settling their revenue with the government. They had even refused to return unless a strong platoon of sepoy was posted there (Letter from Pearce, the Collector of Midnapore, dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1781, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1781, Committee of Revenue, WBSA.). The administration had to deploy numerous platoons of troops to subdue these rebellious *zamindars*. Eventually this phase of the rebellion came to an end. However the most formidable phase of the rebellion commenced very soon. By the end of the century, it had erupted in the Jungle districts once again.

#### ***The Second Phase of the Chuar Rebellion: Paikan Rebellion of 1799.***

Two events took place simultaneously. The company state had been experimenting with different land revenue settlements for decades. In 1793, they finalised the permanent settlement. By virtue of its sunset laws, the *zamindars* became susceptible. They could be stripped off their *zamindaries* if they failed to pay the revenue by the end of the fixed day. This rule was imposed on the jungle zamindars as well. In addition they were demilitarised. The age old village *thanadari* system was dismantled. The paiks were dispossessed of their *chakran* lands which they enjoyed in lieu of a salary. They became unemployed. The sale of the Panchet *zamindari* was the final straw. In response these events, both the zamindars and *paiks* rebelled. Thus the *paikan* rebellion of 1799 started (Sengupta, 2021, 122-243). During this phase, Rani Shiromoni of Midnapur, Durjan Singh and Gobardhan Dikpati led the movement though the *paiks* hardly needed any prompting from them.

**Rani Shiromoni**

Rani Shiromoni's role in the disturbances can be studied from three vantage points: her relationship with the Company state, her association with the other jungle *zamindars* and her relationship with the ordinary ryots. It is essential to examine how they all played out during the *Chuar* disturbances.

**Rani Shiromoni's relationship with the Company state:** Rani Shiromoni, was the *zamindar* of Karnagarh in Midnapur. She was one of the Jungle *zamindars* who fought furiously against the Company state during the second *Chuar* disturbances, alongside the *paiks* and the *Chuar* rebels. She and the Company state had an uneasy relationship. In 1780, the Company government had settled her land at Rs.111797, which seemed excessive to her (Das, 1984, 13-40; Panda, 1996, 13-40). When the Company state introduced the Decennial System, she expressed her reluctance to abide by its terms. She refused to pay revenue according to the Decennial System. Her estate was eventually held under *khas* from 1787-1800 (Chatterjee, 1986, 118-119). During, the first phase of *Chuar* disturbances, various pockets of Jungle Mahals had become turbulent. The government warned Rani Shiromoni during the Balrampore and Karnagarh disturbances of 1780 (Das, 1984, 81-82). They must have suspected her involvement in the disturbances even at that time.

**Rani Shiromoni and the "confederacy" of zamindars:** Eventually when the Permanent Settlement was put in place, her *zamindari* was affected. Her dissatisfaction with the government's decision to divest her must have prompted her to ally with other dispossessed jungle *zamindars*. It appears from the government records, 3 years before the actual *paikan* rebellion of 1799, she had allied herself with other jungle *zamindars* and had formed a 'confederacy' (Letter to Col. Scott, from Sam Watson, dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1799, Midnapore, 5<sup>th</sup> May–24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA). For instance, she allied with Durjan Singh of Raipur, one of the rebellious jungle *zamindar* (Letter to G.H. Barlow from Imhoff, dated 26<sup>th</sup> June 1799, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Midnapore, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51). The Company state had not been able to subdue Durjan Singh.

The testimony of Aumud Puna *daroga* of Satpati implied that the Rani had connections with other jungle *zamindars* as well (Petition of Aumund Puna, *Daroga* of Thana Satipati, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA.). For instance, Sarupnarayan of Shyamsundarpur had also allied himself with Rani Shiromoni (Deposition of Alu Md, Sherishtadar, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March 1799, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March 1799, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA) in addition to Chunnilal Khan, a relation of Narjole *zamindar* (Chatterjee, 1986, 31) as well as Durup Narayan of Fulkusma, Narjole *zamindar*; and *zamindar* of Ramgarh (Deposition of Madhu Singh, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51). The alliance was made in their self-interest. According to the testimony, she wanted her *zamindari* to be put in her management once again and wanted the *paikan* lands to be restored (Deposition of Amlee Atmaram Nandi, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA). She was believed to be the original 'instigator' of the *paikan* movement.

**Rani Shiromoni's relationship with the peasants and the ordinary Chuars:** During the years following the Permanent Settlement, and the subsequent sale of the Panchet *zamindari*, the jungle *zamindars* still exerted sufficient influence over their *paiks* and the landless *adivasi Chuars*. There were instances when they deployed the *paiks* to cause depredations on each other's territories (Ibid). The relationship between the ordinary *Chuars/paiks* and the inhabitants was not amicable. Rani Shiromoni's relationship with the ordinary inhabitants of the adjoining areas was not of trust either. It appears that the inhabitants of Medbazur, Midnapur had gone to Rani Shiromoni to complain about the *Chuars'* depredations in consequence of the *Chuar* disturbances. They intended to take their cattle<sup>2</sup> to Narjole. She had assured them that if they kept their cattle at her house, they would not be plundered. They kept guard for 20 days. However, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day, 200 armed *Chuars* carried off the cattle. Rani Shiromoni claimed that she was unable to prevent the robbery. However, the inhabitants and petitioners later witnessed the Rani conversing with the same *Chuars*. The *Chuars* wanted to

plunder and kill those men from Midnapur. They eventually let them go after accepting a ransom of Rs 10. A local inhabitant named Saraup Bushno remained security for the payment (Testimony of Chaitan Giri, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA.). This would indicate that there was an alliance between the Rani and the ordinary *Chuars*.

In fact, the *Chuars* were mobilised by the Rani to commit various acts of 'banditry' on the local inhabitants, who supposedly resided in the Company's territories. They specifically targeted cattle and utensils. Secondly, their loot, plunder and arson, had led to peasant desertions. Clearly Rani had brought in the *Chuars* to desolate the countryside (Deposition of Sheikh Md. Punah, dated 1799 (Pous), 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA). In addition to deploying these 'robbers' against the inhabitants of the villages, Rani Shiromoni also attempted to cut off the Company troops' provisions. She received co-operation in this regard from other jungle *zamindars* as well (Deposition of AluMd, Sherishtadar, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1799, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA).

**The movement of the rebels under Rani Shiromoni:** The rebels too depended on her and her guidance. They would all gather at Bahadurpur, Salbani, Karnagarh and commence their journey from there (Letter to H. Tucker from Robert Gregory dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1799, 5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA). They also built forts. These forts served two purposes. First of all, they provided refuge to the rebels. They had become extremely violent. They plundered the villages and towns and set them ablaze. They required a safe place of abode. These provided them with sanctuary. Secondly, these forts hoarded the "spoils of their excursions". The Company officials became aware that these places were symbols of strength and security for these rebels and as long as they were permitted to hold forts, the Company would be unable to restore tranquillity in the area (Letter to Col. Scott, from Sam Watson, Midnapore dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1799, 5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA). When the Company state deployed the troops in the area against the rebels, they always targeted these forts. Eventually the forts of Karnagarh and Narjole fell to the company's troops and Rani was arrested.

Her capture had far-reaching consequences. There were about 300 alleged 'robbers' who had taken refuge in an area about a ½ mile from her estate. They all dispersed once they heard their Rani had been apprehended. It is noteworthy they were not 'robbers' at all but *Chuar* people who committed acts of violence and banditry during the rebellion, but they were neither professional robbers nor were they a 'criminal tribe'. The troops of the Company state was able to recover a large number of arms and ammunition, including 27 matchlocks, 4 muskets (all loaded with hammered iron balls), 25 *talwars*, 4 battle axes, 3 spears, 10 'tangents', 5 bamboo bows, 14 pouches, 9 daggers, 4 powder arms, and one silver mounted small sword. As a consequence of these events, the Company government put the Rani and her followers on trials. Ultimately the Rani of Shiromoni, Chunnilal Khan, Naranarayan Bakshi were sent to Calcutta (Chatterjee, 1986, 33-34). The Rani's arrest was successful in temporarily suppressing the 'violence' of the *Chuars*. Eventually, the forts which had harboured the 'banditti' and the *Chuars* were soon demolished by the Company state (Letter to the Magistrate of Midnapore from Robert Gregory, dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1799, Midnapore). The sequence of the events would demonstrate that the leadership of the Rani was only one aspect of the disturbances. The ordinary *Chuars* did not require prompting from the *zamindars* to rebel and cause depredations in the Company's territories. The *zamindars* of the Jungle Mahal were influential enough to mobilise the *paiks* and *Chuars*. However, the latter was resourceful enough to make 'raids' on their own.

**Durjan Singh:** He was the former *zamindar* of Raipur. Durjan Singh was a near relation of Madhu Babu, the head of a considerable number of *Chuars* (Letter to L. Col. Scott from Sam Watson dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1799, Midnapore, 5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA). Durjan Singh's *zamindari* was sold in the year 1796 despite his appeals to the *Diwani Adalat*. It provided him



with a legitimate reason to hold a grudge against the Company state. Since the sale, he wreaked havoc in the countryside with the aid of several *Chuars* and *paiks*. In the year 1798, he slaughtered a *naib*. Some of the *zamindars* like Fulkusma *zamindar*, for example, were one of his allies (letter to Tucker, Judicial and Revenue Department Fort William, 1<sup>st</sup> May-29<sup>th</sup> May 1800, Judicial Criminal, WBSA). During this period, forts became the safe abode of the *Chuars* where they remained protected. Gobardhan Dikpati, the guardian to the Raja of Jhargram, also had a fort from where a large body of *Chuars* found sanctuary. However, the Jumdah fort was the most formidable one. It was situated on the river Kosi, five *cosses* from Raipur and surrounded by a close and 'dangerous' jungle. From the fort, the *Chuars* branched out in all directions. They destroyed Balrampur town in April 1799 and other areas of the jungle districts. Sam Watson reckoned if the forts were levelled and posts were established at Raipur and Balrampur, peace and tranquillity could be restored (Letter to L. Col. Scott from Sam Watson, dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1799, Midnapore, 5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA).

It appears from the government records that the ordinary *Chuars* rallied around Durjan Singh. From the deposition of Madhu Singh *barkandaz*, it appears that he was in league with the *Chuars*. They were under his protection and robbed according to his wishes. They even kidnapped people when they thought the Company troops had apprehended Durjan Singh (Deposition of Madhu Singh Barkandaz, 31<sup>st</sup> May-11<sup>th</sup> July 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.51, WBSA). Durjan Singh was eventually apprehended and put on trial. The Company state wanted to make an example out of him to deter others from imitating him and committing similar 'crimes' (Letter to Tucker, Judicial and Revenue Department Fort William, 1<sup>st</sup> May-29<sup>th</sup> May 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol. 50, WBSA). The Court of Circuit sentenced his son Fateh Singh and Bahadur Singh on charges of creating disturbances and committing outrages in the jungles. They were to endure five years of imprisonment. However, it appears from correspondence between Strachey and Tucker, that they were unable to deter Durjan Singh and his son. Even after the end of the term of their imprisonment, they attempted to create turmoil in the area with the assistance of the *Chuars*. The Company officials decided to keep them in confinement until the *Chuars* under Durjan Singh were either apprehended or driven out (Letter to Tucker from Strachey, dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 1800, 3<sup>rd</sup> April-24<sup>th</sup> April 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.58, WBSA).

**Gobardhan Dikpati:** He was also considered to be the head of the Santhals. He inhabited the *pargana* of Bagri. He had been active in the years 1790-91 and supported himself and his followers with the contributions from some of the wealthier people of Chandrakona (5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA.). However, Gobardhan Dikpati was considered as a 'persistent disturber of peace' for the Company government for years. Like the Rani, he too had a fort at Bagri where the *Chuars* were provided with sanctuary. The parties of "banditti" he dispatched rendered the high road from Burdwan to Chandrakona quite dangerous for quite some time (Letter to Col. Scott, from Sam Watson, dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1799, Midnapore, 5<sup>th</sup> May-24<sup>th</sup> May 1799, Judicial Criminal, Vol.50, WBSA). However, unlike Rani Shiromoni, he was universally hailed as a "robber" and his band of followers as "banditti". Curiously enough there is some evidence to suggest he had close ties with the Company state as well. It appeared the Company government had once pardoned him for some 'infractions'. Since he was pardoned, the conduct of Gobardhan Dikpati, according to some of the officials, was 'innocent' and 'meritorious'. He had appeared to be 'anxious' to be employed by the government. He tried to assist the *zamindar* and extend the cultivation of the country (Letter from Touchet to Strachey, dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 1800, 3<sup>rd</sup> April- 24<sup>th</sup> April 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.58, WBSA.). However, this phase had not lasted for long. Eventually the administration had to neutralise him.

### **Results and Impact of the Second Chuar Rebellion**

The Company government began to seek the causes of the unrest. It became apparent to the government that they would not be able to administer the area without the assistance of the *zamindars*. They were able to resolve their dilemma. This section will demonstrate that all the new regulations were accordingly made.

So as early as February, the Vice President in Council directed the magistrate to restore peace in the province. It was observed that the primary reason for the disturbances in the *parganas* was the resumption of the *paikan* lands. The government soon decided to investigate the matter. They intended to get a detailed account of these lands: annual revenues yielding from it, the nature of land tenure there and an alternative land management system then in operation: the *khas* management (Price, 1953, Appendix IV). They discovered that the lands, which were resumed, had been incorporated with the parent estates. The newly assessed *jamawas* added to the *jama* of the different landholders. According to their opinion, the assessment on the resumed *paikan* lands had been very moderate. The *paikshad* had been left in possession of their lands. It was only their police duties, which were done away with. The *zamindars* had received 10% of the assessment. The Company officials concluded that the revolt might have started with the *paiks* but now hill robbers, who were kept in check by the *paiks* themselves, were seriously involved in committing 'grotesque' crimes. It thus became imperative for them to take some substantial measures to prevent such incidents from happening again in the future. Accordingly, they made changes in the existing *thanadari* system and made settlements with the *zamindars* and *paiks*.

**New regulations for thanas:** One of the glaring failures of the new *thanadari* system was the widespread violence in the countryside. That violence had ended up creating wastelands out of previously cultivable lands. P. Touchet, the commercial resident of Rangpur, confessed on November 14, 1799, that the new *thanadari* system had failed to accomplish its goals. He recommended that the old system is restored, and *darogas* be called off. He also recommended that the jungle *zamindars* be given the responsibility of police duties, and *sardars paiks* be reappointed. Imhoff and Strachey too concurred with this view. A police committee was set up, headed by G.H. Barlow. They recommended that the *daroga* and the *zamindars* should both jointly take responsibility for the country *thanadari* (Roy, 2008, 501-502). Subsequently, on March 6, 1800, the Governor General in Council instructed the Magistrate of Midnapur to invest the *zamindars* of the Jungle Mahals with police duties (Roy, 2008, 502). They stated, "We think that it would be expedient to vest the landholders in concert with the *darogas* under the Regulation 22 of 1793 with the joint charge of the police of their respective estates on engaging to perform the duties required of them" (Letter to R. C. Mornington, from Barlow etc., Calcutta, dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1800, 20<sup>th</sup> February-27<sup>th</sup> March 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.57, WBSA). It was eventually recommended that the *paiks* should be reinstated at the original quit rent paid by them for their lands. The police duties were handed over to the *zamindars* of the Jungle Mahals. They were made responsible for the peace of the country (Price, 1953, Appendix IV; Ghosh, 2007, 19). It is noticeable that the new decision applied only to Midnapur sector of the Jungle Mahal though eventually, it was extended to the entire area, by the regulation 18 of 1805 (Roy, 2008, 502).

**The settlement with the paiks and zamindars:** It appeared to the officials that the *zamindars* were willing to take these responsibilities (7<sup>th</sup> July-18<sup>th</sup> September 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.62.). Additionally, Strachey and the collector asked the *paiks* who had been wandering around and had become *Chuars* for want of any means of subsistence to come to Midnapur by April 20<sup>th</sup> to settle lands on terms they formerly held them. Otherwise, these lands were to be given up on the same condition to other persons and never be restored to them (Letter to the Magistrate Hon'ble Tucker from Strachey, Secretary to the government, Judicial and Revenue Dept, Fort William, dated 9<sup>th</sup> April 1800, 1<sup>st</sup> May-29<sup>th</sup> May 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.59, WBSA). The officials threatened them that

there was no dearth of able and capable men, who were willing to serve as *paiks*. Many of them had previously worked as *paiks* and lost their lands at the time of the Decennial Settlement (Ibid). The general amnesty provided to the *paiks* was therefore conditional.

There was a logic behind rehiring the same *paiks* who had wreaked havoc in the countryside. The Company officials acknowledged the *paiks* were undoubtedly the only people who could oppose the *Chuars* of the jungles. They were well acquainted with their mode of attack and plunder. They knew the avenues and passes by which they carried off their booty. The *paiks* could effectively intercept it. Therefore, the government considered this decision to restore the *paikan* lands to the *paiks* to be just and 'political'. It was recommended that resumed lands of the *paiks* in the other *parganas* of the district be restored as well. It was to be done on the same terms. A general indemnity was to be proclaimed to them all (7<sup>th</sup> August -18<sup>th</sup> September 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.62). Campbell suggested that the police duties should only be given to the *zamindars*, but it should not extend more than 3 years at the most. Campbell believed that the *zamindars* would hope that the terms would be eventually extended. It would stimulate them to perform their duty. However, he was sceptical about the "booyers", *ghatwals* and the *digwars*. He did not want to allow them to keep up an armed force. He suggested 5% *malguzari* or Rs. 2700 p/a to be deducted from the *zamindar* of Panchet to enable him to cover the expense of the police. The expense of the police establishment of Raghunathpur and Phatkumamounted to Rs. 346 per month (Letter to Tucker from D. Campbell, dated 31<sup>st</sup> May 1800, Birbhum, 5<sup>th</sup> June-17<sup>th</sup> July 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.60).

It must be mentioned that officials like Keating, Leslie and Seton were sceptical whether the new system could be implemented all over Bengal. They acknowledged that they were little acquainted with the district of Midnapur. They could not be certain that the new police system could be made according to the peculiarities of the district. They were also unsure whether it could restore peace in the area. However, they could not conceive any objection to applying the general principles of the plan at that time. Despite their scepticism, the officials had to acknowledge the intimate knowledge the people possess of the roads and by-paths through the forests and the extensive connections by marriage and language that afforded the *zamindars*, and the *sardars* means of obtaining minute information of everything that happened in their district. They were able to counteract the designs of the armed 'banditti'. This knowledge enabled the Company troops to pursue and attack them when the rebels attacked and committed 'depredations'. That is why the government agreed to employ these people as officers of the police in Ramgarh district as well (Letter to Richard Wellesley from Keating, Leslie, Seton, dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 1800, Patna, 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> July 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.61, WBSA.). In addition to hiring the *sardars* and *paiks*, the Company officials wanted to induce the new purchasers to give up claims to the *zamindaris* and restore them to the old *zamindars*. There was a logic behind that decision. The government acknowledged that these old *zamindars* were ignorant men and were unacquainted with the new regulations, but they served a purpose. The nature of their lands rendered them extremely difficult to access. They were also unhealthy to a degree. The revenue yielded from these lands were inconsiderable. However, Mr Strachey admitted that by being proprietors of these lands for an extended period and by habits of life and other circumstances, they were able to command complete obedience among their immediate dependents. However, in general, they were daring, hardy and active men who were well acquainted with the disposition of their neighbours and the *Chuars*. They were acquainted with the haunts of the *Chuars*. They could assist each other (Letter to Tucker from Brooke, John White, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1800, 5<sup>th</sup> June-17<sup>th</sup> July 1800, Judicial Criminal, Vol.60, WBSA). By these measures, the government also wanted to curtail any further alliance to oppose the government in the future.

### ***The Naik and Bhumij Rebellions***

But these measures too failed to curtail the disturbances in the area. The administration had to face with two more phases of the *adivasi* rebellion. The *naik* rebellion (1806-1817) commenced as a

result of the unfulfilled promises of the administrators. The *Bhumij* rebellion (1828-1829) started in response to the forceful hinduisation and interference in the *adivasi* affairs by the government. The government crushed the *naik* rebellion and hanged the rebels. The government also eliminated leader Anchal Singh. The *Bhumij* rebellion which was spearheaded by Ganga Narain fizzled out after his death. The administrators created a separate Santhal Pargana for the *adivasis* in 1833 as a direct consequence of these events (Sengupta, 2021, 122-243).

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion it may be said that there were four phases of the *adivasi* rebellion in the Jungle Mahals and its surrounding areas. The first two phases are known as *Chuar* and *paikan* rebellion. The last two phases were called *naik* and *Bhumij* rebellion. During the first two phases of the rebellion jungle zamindars such as Jadu Singh, Jaganath Dhal and Rani Shiromoni played an important role. But the ordinary *adivasis* had grievances of their own. That may be the reason behind their spontaneous outburst. The jungle *zamindars* joined the rebellions at a later stage. Nonetheless their charisma and leadership abilities cannot be denied. The *naik* and *Bhumij* rebellion witnessed the leadership provided by Anchal Singh who was later hanged and Ganga Narain whose death signaled the end of the era. The government was able to subdue the rebels. Despite numerous promises by the government, the creation of the separate Santhal Pargana was the rebels' only consolation.

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