

MODERN ODISHA

Anglo-Maratha Conflicts in Odisha

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The decline of Mughal Empire led to the rise of many small powers like the Marathas to declare themselves as independent powers. Some of them also started establishing themselves as important power in the political horizon of India by subduing the some states of India including Odisha either through war or diplomacy. In meanwhile, the Marathas had to struggle with the English. The Anglo-Maratha conflicts constitute an important chapter in the history of Odisha which can be discussed bellow.

Causes of the Anglo-Maratha Conflict in Odisha

The most important reason for the Anglo-Maratha conflict was the strategic location of Odisha. Odisha lay between the already occupied British territories of Bengal and Madras Presidencies. The line of communication ran through Odisha. It is irksome, expensive and sometimes difficult to get a safe passage through Odisha from the Maratha authorities. Secondly, Odisha had been considered as a part of Bengal from the day of Muslim conquest in 1568 A.D. The fertile land was a revenue earning proposition. Thirdly, the right of obtaining revenue collection by the British after the Battle of Buxar made them covetous of establishing political authority. Fourthly, the Matarha incursions into outlying British districts in the Northern as well as the Southern Sarkars of the Mughalbandi region caused harassment. Last but not the least was the British objective of extending their dominion over the whole of India. In addition to those, trade interest particularly that of salt of the two dashed with each other's. So to achieve the manifold interests the British East India Company decided to occupy Odisha. Spadework for the conquest started, properly speaking

since 1633 when they established their first factory at Hariharpur (Jatsinghpur district) and a second at Balasore sometime after.

British diplomacy to occupy Odisha

The Maratha rule was against the British interest. The British tried to persuade the Bengal Nawab to drive the Marathas out of Odisha but failed. After getting Diwani in 1765, Clive wanted the Maratha territories in Odisha through negotiations instead of force. In 1767, he sent Thomas Motte to Nagpur with an offer of money to the Bhonsala but it failed. Warren Hastings had to pay 13 lakhs as well as a loan of 12 lakhs of rupees to the Marathas to secure a passage through Odisha for operations against Hyder Ali of Mysore. Lord Cornwallis's negotiations to get Odisha also failed. Ultimately Lord Wellesley, who had set the goal of extending British dominion as wide as possible in India, succeeded in the attempt. When Bhonsala refused to give away Odisha for a sum of money or accept the subsidiary alliance, preparations were made for the showdown.

1. First of all, the British wanted to win over the Maratha army officials and soldiers.
2. Secondly, they declared that occupation would be followed by conciliation and good administration.
3. Thirdly, they entered into negotiations with native states (Garhjats).

Fourthly, they realised the inability of the Marathas to raise the strength of their small army. Finally, there was the necessity to have Odisha at any cost for maintaining a line of communication between the Presidences of Bengal and Madras. In the mean time, they acquired a thorough knowledge of the topography of Odisha

Anglo-Maratha conflict during the governorship of Rajaram Pandit

The governorship of Rajaram Pandit in Odisha witnessed the Anglo-Maratha conflict during the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings. The Raja of Nagpur had joined with Poona, Hyderabad and Mysore, forming an anti-British confederacy. The conflict with these four

powers demanded the movement of British army to Madras via Odisha to deal with Hyder Ali of Mysore.

The Bhonsle chief of Nagpur thought it prudent not to have a clash with the British power. Accordingly he instructed Rajaram Pandit to extract Chauth from the British authorities, if the Governor-General asked for the passage of the British troops through Odisha. Warren Hastings dispatched a detachment under Colonel Pearse upto Balasore in 1781 and sent Anderson to obtain necessary permission from the Maratha Governor of Odisha for the same purpose through the payment of twelve lakhs of rupees. Rajaram Pandit went personally to Calcutta to settle the amount with the Governor-General and demanded twenty-five lakhs of rupees as loan with the immediate payment of twelve lakhs. After due negotiation, a sum of rupees thirteen lakhs along with a loan of rupees ten lakhs was handed over to him. With the help of some Maratha officers like Harihar Mahadeo and Magun Choudhury, Colonel Pearse marched with his army through Odisha and crossed the border of Ganjam, receiving an assistance of 2,000 horses from the Marathas. This act of Rajaram brought British closer to the Bhonsles of Nagpur. Rajaram Pandit was very firm in his action. After receiving information from Wilkinson, the British resident at Balasore regarding the oppression of the Maratha faujdar Bhawani Das Choudhury over a merchant of Barabati named Gangadhar, Rajaram dismissed him. In his place, Murar Pandit was sent as the faujdar of Balasore.

Further, he took steps to crush the recalcitrant zamindars. Snodgrass, the British Chief of Ganjam, informed Rajaram Pandit that Balarama Maharatha a refractory land-holder of the British company at Ganjam absconded and entered into the territory of King Divyasimhadeva, who gave asylum to him. Rajaram Pandit seized him and his followers in the neighbourhood of Cuttack. Divyasimhadeva, then, was handed over to Snodgrass. Of course, Balarama Maharatha tried to escape from the hands of Snodgrass and was killed. However, Rajaram Pandit chastised the king of Khurda who humbly submitted before him. Not only Rajaram Pandit was a shrewd diplomat but he was equally a good administrator. He brought all the refractory forces under his control. He also showed a great deal of interest for the influx of pilgrims to Puri from all parts of India. The prior practice of collecting revenues through hereditary talukdars was disbanded and he appointed his own men for the

same purpose. He discharged his duty very well as the Subahdar of Odisha and breathed his last in 1793.

Anglo-Maratha Conflict during Sadashiv Rao

After Rajaram Pandit, his son Sadashiv Rao became the Naib Subahdar of Odisha. He was quite friendly to the British like his father. With abolition of the British Residency at Balasore, Barabati slipped away from the clutch of British East India Company. However, Sadashiv Rao showed his cordial gesture to the company and offered Barabati to them which was attached to the British factory. Sadashiv also suppressed the local Rajas who acted against the British. In 1795, a mutinous British battalion refused to lay down their arms and were attacked by another battalion which imprisoned some sepoys of the former battalion. Other sepoys of the mutinous battalion took shelter with the king of Mayurbhanj, who did not deliver them to the British when demanded. At this stage, the British authorities approached Sadashiv Rao. Sadashiv wrote a letter to the king of Mayurbhanj who obeyed the order and drove out the rebellious sepoys from his territory. Sadashiv Rao also facilitated the march of British troops from Bengal to Madras. His cordial gesture encouraged the British to improve their postal system in Odisha. The British correspondence from Calcutta to Puri increased considerably. However, his friendly relation with the English people never marred his spirit to fight for a just cause. When Divyasimhadeva II, the king of Khurda died, there was contest for the throne of Khurda between Mukundadeva, the son of Divyasimhadeva and Shyamsundar, the second son of Birakishoradeva. Though the Britishers helped Shyamsundar, Sadashiv opposed it tooth and nail. At last, Mukundadeva asserted his legitimate claim over the throne of Khurda. However, the British occupied Odisha in 1803 CE.

Last Line to Say

The British people deceived the friendship of the Marathas. Lord Wellesley was imperialist in nature. Taking the absence of Sadashiv Rao from Cuttack in October 1803, the British General Harcourt occupied coastal Odisha. Thus, the Maratha rule came to an end in Odisha.

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