

State and Government in a Feudatory Kingdom A Case Study of Pre-merger Bonai

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Abstract

Princely states numbering 562, covering 40 per cent of the total area of India, and having 25 per cent of its population, presented altogether a different domain in the administrative history of colonial India. After 1858 movement the British Government of India interfered in the affairs of these states on many pretexts, such as interest of the state, interest of the whole of India, interest of the subjects of the state or to realise the new ideals of administration. In name the states were free, enjoying internal autonomy, but in reality every sphere of their activities were regulated by the British Government. In Orissa these princely states known as Garhjat (Gadjat), numbering 26 were no exception to these principles. Often branded as 'Andhari Mulaka' or dark domain these feudatory states were a kind of administrative division protected by British paramountcy where subjects had little liberty as compared to direct administered areas. The nature of the state and government in these Garhjat were traditional. However, after promulgation of the Government of India Act 1858, we find some changes in the administrative set up of these states. This article attempts at throwing some light on the nature of the state and Government in the feudatory state of Bonai, which merging with another feudatory state called Gangpur formed the present district of Sundargarh on 01 January 1948.

Keywords: Garhjat (Gadjat), Bonai State, Royal Family, Dewan, Administration, Land Revenue

1.0 Introduction

Bonai¹, a B class state¹ and one of the 26 Garhjats of Orissa (now spelt Odisha) was, as the name suggests (from *bana* means forest) a small forested region shut on all sides by rugged forest clad hills. It was fifty eight miles in greatest length from east to west and thirty seven miles in width from north to south with a total area of 1296 square miles. Bonai as Colonel T. Dalton, the Commissioner of Chotanagpur reported in 1863-64 was not a thickly inhabited

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country and was rather for the most part an uninhabited hills (NHS 1956:1). The final report of the land Revenue settlement of the Bonai feudatory state shows that out of 1296 square miles of the total area of the state only 130 square miles were occupied by the people and the rest 1166 square miles were just hills, forests, rivers, and streams. The total population before its merger with Orissa, as recorded in the administrative report for 1943-44 shows a meagrely 92,537 people (Soreng 2008:40).

The state of Bonai located between $21^{\circ} 39'$ and $22^{\circ} 8'$ N and 84° and $85^{\circ} 23'$ E was bounded in the north by Gangpur state and Singhbhum district (now in Jharkhand state), on the east by Keonjhar state and on the south and west by Bamra state (Now Deogarh district), and on the south-east by the state of Pal-Lahara (forming part of present Anugul district (Cobden-Ramsay 1910:141).

The state continued to remain independent up to the middle of 18th century when it was over run by the Bhonsla Marhattas and treated by them as a dependency appertaining to the Sambalpur province which formed part of the dominions of Marhatta Rajas of Nagpur and was liable to pay an annual tribute of Rs.500/-. Bonai was ceded to the British Government by the treaty of Deogaon by Raghuji Bhonsle in 1803 and was restored to Raguji by a special treaty in 1806. It was reverted to the British Government under the provisional agreement concluded with Madhuji Bhonsla (Appa Sahib) in 1818 and was finally ceded by the treaty of 1826 (ibid.143).

This state of Bonai along with Gangpur was transferred to the Orissa division in 1905 and since 1st April 1933 the state remained in direct political relation with the Government of India through the political agent of the Orissa Feudatory states and the Hon'ble Resident for the Eastern states (ARA 1946:3).²

1.1 The Ruling Family

The royal family of Bonai, which had been ruling over this state claims descent from the Kadamba Branch of the Rathor Rajputs belonging to lunar race and Kshatriya by caste. The legend has it that the founder of this royal family Pratapbhanu Dev (also spelt as Deo) having come from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) founded this state in 1202 AD with the help of an aborigine chief named Indra Samant belonging to Bhuiyan tribe.

In the absence of authentic records for reconstruction of the history of the ruling family local Odia works like Kadamba Gatha and Vamsavali authored respectively by Pandit Madan Mohan Mishra and Pandit Gopinath Mishra Kavibhushan, two portages of the ruling family, provide the fictitious account about the Ceylonese origin of the ruling family. But colonial administrators cum historians like Major J. R. Ouseley³ Colonel T. Dalton⁴ and W.W. Hunter⁵ (1877:175) and E.A. Gait (Senapati and Kuanr 1975:62) have doubted this fiction of Ceylonese descent. These historians believe that the rulers were originally Bhuiyan chieftains and in the process of Kshatriaisation they did establish themselves on the royal pedigree through intermarriages with royal families of neighbouring kingdom.

1.2 Organisation of administration

Bonai being a tribal pocket, the nature of the state and government before the establishment of British paramountcy was traditional. There was no written law and the kings managed the administration with the help of a Bhuiyan tribal Zamindar, the Samanta of village Kaleiposh under present Lahunipada block of the Bonai sub-division and two tribal military fief holders—the Gond Jagirdar Mahapatra family of Khuntgaon and Dandapat family of Sarsara Balang.

But after establishment of direct control over the state's administration by the colonial government we see significant changes in the administrative set up of all the princely states of India including the feudatory states of Orissa. Here after all the states continued to remain under Agency Management; the Political Agent, Orissa states holding direct supervision of the administration. The state of Bonai was no exception to this principle.

That is why we find the hereditary tribal dewans dropped from incumbency and English educated Indian or English men in the state civil service being deputed by the Government to serve as the Dewan. The Bhuiyan Samant family of Kaleiposh who still claim to be the 'king maker of Bonai' enjoy the right of conferring *tika* (mark on forehead) at the time of the accession of the new Raja (*see* Hunter 1877:169). The family also claim to be the hereditary dewan of the king. But with the introduction of this new system of administration, this family was deprived of its hereditary right. Over this issue the Samant picked up quarrel in 1871 with Prince Dayanidhi Indra Deo who was managing the state due to the insanity of his father which however was settled by J.E.K. Hewitt, the Commissioner of the Chhotnagpur in 1879 (Senapati and Kuanr 1975:64). Thus, after the establishment of paramountcy over these states we find significant changes in the administrative structure of the state.

1.2.1 *The Chief*

The ruling chief of the state was called Raja. He as the administrative head ruled the state in accordance with the provision of *sanads* (a government charter in India) which defined the status, position and power of the chief. The five Sambalpur state (Bamra, Rairakhol, Sonapur, Patna, Kalahandi) transferred from central provinces on 1905 had received their sanads in 1867. The states of Gangpur and Bonai which now form Sundargarh district had received their sanads in 1899 (Cobden-Ramsay 1910:93). As the actual power exercised by the chief varied from states to states the power exercised by the chief of Bonai was not the same enjoyed by his counterparts in other states. In the sanad the chief was empowered to try in his court all criminal cases occurring within his territory except those in which Europeans were involved. However, the chief did not have the power to try heinous offences such as murder, homicide, robbery and torture. The chief was directed to refer these cases for disposal to the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals⁶. The chief's powers were limited in the cases of imprisonment to a term of one or two years and in case of fine to a sum of Rs.1000/, and 30 stripes in case of whipping.

The only state where the chief had the power to award imprisonment up to five years was Mayurbhanj (Samal 1988:75). But the power of the chief of Bonai state was limited in case of imprisonment to a term of two years and in the case of fines to Rs.50. He had no power of whipping. The sanad granted to the king of Bonai too limited his powers and prevented him to be

oppressive. It laid down that the chief should administer justice fairly and impartially to all alike; he should recognise and maintain the rights of all his subjects and on no account oppress them or cause them in any way to be oppressed (ibdi.:5).

1.2.2 Dewan

The chief executive officer of a princely state was the dewan. The ruling chief usually invested his dewan with his power or somewhat smaller power and confined himself to appellate cases. In case of Bonai we find important people from Bengal-Bihar-Orissa state civil service officiating as dewan in different periods. During the minority of the last ruling chief Dharanidhara Indra Deo, G.M. Shanahan served as the manager of the state. Later on, the famous Anthropologist and historian Roy Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, the author of the book *Hill Bhuiyan of Orissa*, was appointed as the dewan cum tutor of the Raja Bharat Chandra Nayak of Sambalpur; he was the dewan of Bonai from 1924 to 1927 (Nayak 1966:139-171); cited in Senapati and Kuanr 1975:67, fn.1.). Famous Literature and a multi-talented person Professor Rajkishore Roy was for sometime the dewan of this state.

Bamadev Mishra was the dewan of the state in 1944 and was succeeded by Rai Sahib H.P. Deb in 1945. He made extensive tours of 174 days a year in the interior, in order to keep himself in close and constant touch with the subjects and gain personal knowledge of their needs (ARA 1946:4).

1.2.3 Other Executive and Judicial Officers

The dewan was to be assisted by an assistant dewan. From the administrative report of the state (ARA 1946) we learn that one G.C. Mohapatra served as the assistant dewan and district magistrate of the state and also held the charge of the treasury office.

Suryamani Mohanty, M.A. B.L worked as joint Subordinate Judge of Bonai and Pal Lahara states with headquarters at Bonai.

Uday Nath Sahu and P.C. Mohapatra held the charges of the Sadar and Koira Sub-division. As Mohapatra was untrained, he was deputed to receive civil subordinate officers' training at Angul in February, 1945 and U.N. Sahu remained in charge of his office.

One L. Panda was appointed as a tehasildar on 07 July 1945 with the power of a third class magistrate.

The chief of the state Bonai like his counterpart in Gangpur was empowered by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal as Honorary Magistrates and Munsifs to nominate for appointment such persons as he might wish to appoint from time to time (Samal 1988: 75). By exercising the same powers the king appointed Raj Kumar Harish Chandra Deo, the younger brother of the chief as Honary Development Officer and a Magistrate of first class from 01 August 1945 (ARA 1946: 4). Similarly, Raja Dharanidhar Indra Deo nominated Lalit Mohan Biswal, a native of Bonai state who served as the headmaster of the only M.E. School of Bonai for appointment in the state executive service in 1945.

It is in fairness of things to argue that an elite class of native populations emerged as the British administration required their services directly or for the court of the protectorates like feudatory states. Appointment of dewans from among the native people is an example. The emerging elite class formed a network of its own and members of this class were privileged persons to participate in the governance of post-independence India. The class itself generates forces by capacity building of its members through better opportunity for self-sustenance, at least for a few generations. Bharat Chandra Nayak, the dewan of Bonai can be taken as an example. His son Dr. Bibhu Prasad Dash became the Vice Chancellor of Sambalpur University and his son-in-law Professor Bhubaneswar Behera was the first principal of Regional Engineering College, Rourkela (now National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela) and the first Member of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), New Delhi till 1981. In 1947, he was appointed as an irrigation engineer in the Kalahandi State Government of the then Orissa. Among Professor Behera's four children, the daughter is a professor in English and a Sahitya Academi Awardee in 2020. Among the sons one is a medical doctor, and two others are high rank police and railway officers⁷.

1.2.4 Police Administration

The police administration of Bonai state, though under the control of the chief, was guided by Act V of 1861 Police Act of British India. (ARA 1946: 15-16). After creation of Orissa Police Force from 01 April 1936, the Orissa Police manual revised in 1938 (Patra and Devi 1983:288) came to be implemented in Bonai state. There were eight police stations in the state of Bonai and they were at Sardar, Koira, Banki, Gurundia, Kamarposh Balang, Sarsara Balang, Mahulpada and Sulguda. However there was no post of SP (Superintendent of Police) and in the entire police organisation there were one inspector, six sub-inspectors, eleven assistant sub-inspectors, one havildar and fifty-three constables in the state. Out of the total number of 82 police personnel 59 were residents of the state and 28 were from aboriginal classes (ARA 1946: 16).

The state however did not have a military force of its own. It contributed its share annually for the maintenance of the joint police force of the Eastern States Agency⁸ for military aid in case of emergency.

1.2.5 Panchayat System

In the post second world period the state adopted various measures to raise the standard of living of the subjects. In Bonai state Panchayati system was introduced in the year 1943, under Bonai state village Panchayat Order 1943. As a result, in 1945 we find 103 Panchayat Unions in 443 villages of the state. Udaya Nath Sahu, Sadar S.D.O. continued to work as the Panchayat Officer. The Panchayats were entrusted with simple administrative powers to lay the foundation of local self-government and train the masses in the art of Civil Administration and self help, like improvement of irrigation, maintenances of existing tanks and reservoirs, supervision over primary education, etc. The Panchayat disposed large number of petty criminal cases and saved the villagers from undergoing a lot of expenses which could have been incurred in taking recourse to law courts. In the year 1945-46, a total of 600 petty criminal cases and 479 miscellaneous cases were disposed of by the Panchayats. Daya Nath Sahu, S.D.O. Sadar continued to work as Panchayat Officer throughout the year (ARA 1946: 12).

1.2.6 Municipal Administration

Notwithstanding introduction of municipal system in some of the developed states of Orissa, Bonai state did not have any Municipal Organisation. For sanitation purpose, only conservancy staffs⁹ consisting of four sweepers and one zamandar were maintained. The department was under the control of the chief Medical Officer Dr. Nilamani Acharya. The entire cost was being borne by the state (ARA 1946:39).

1.2.7 Land Revenue Administration

The first regular land revenue settlement of Bonai was done in 1879 by J.E.K Hewit, the Commissioner of the Chhotanagpur state. The survey of land was made using native bamboo pole called *padika*. However, this survey was confined to the *bahal* or wet land. Lands belonging to other categories like *mal*, *kudar*, *berna* and lands lying within Zamindari areas were excluded from this survey. This first settlement was followed by the second settlement in 1910 conducted by one W G. Kelley which completed in 1913 (Senapati and Kuanr 1975:65-67). It included all the wet lands including those in Zamindari area. The term of this settlement was for 10-years but the period was subsequently extended to 20-years. One noticeable feature of this settlement was that cultivable bahal (wet) lands were surveyed for the first time with the use of Gaunter's chain¹⁰ just on the line of original survey in government settlement.

A revisional settlement was started in 1930 by Indra Bilas Mukherjee, Deputy Collector of British India. The entire area of the Bonai state was cadastrally surveyed and mapped with exception of only 15 villages but the operations were suddenly stopped in the attestation stage on financial grounds. But in 1935 Nayabadi settlement was made by Nimai Charan Pattnaik. (ARA.:6) .

In 1940-41 another settlement was made in respect of 167 villages, tenants of which had agreed to pay enhanced rent in lieu of rendering forced labour or *bethi*. Of these villages final publication in regard to 129 villages only was completed when the operation was suddenly stopped at the behest of the Political Agent who advised for a regular settlement in 1942. According to the Garhjat states (ARA 1946:6). The work was accordingly taken up in 1943 under the supervision of the dewan of the state who was assisted by S.C. Das, assistant settlement officer who had experience in Orissa settlement works. On the whole, 32533 acres of land were assessed to rent in 319 villages bringing a fixed revenue of Rs 9500 excluding Gaunti commission (ARA 1946:7) i.e., the commission or fee paid to Gauntia or the village head in the charge of collection of land revenue from the tenants.

There were altogether 525 villages in the state of Boani and like many other states of Western Orissa Gaunti system prevailed here. The gauntias or village headmen collected rent and cesses from the tenants and credited the same into the treasury after deducting their commissions at 12½ % from the land revenue only. The gauntias also enjoyed *bhogra* or service lands on payment of full rent assessed there to. They were held responsible for the realisation of land revenue and cesses of their villages. Land revenue was collected in three *kistis* (instalments) in three fixed days namely, 15th December, 15th February and 15th March.

The revenue administration of the state was in this way controlled by the dewan who acted as the collector. He was assisted by two tehashildars: Lalit Mohan Biswal and L. Panda. The settlement staff consisted of one revenue inspector and 11 *amins* (surveyor) for making local enquiries into reclamation and encroachment case and for the maintenance of records (ibid.:8).

1.3 Signs of changes Administration

On the eve of achievement of independence from colonial rule we see significant changes in the administration set-up of Bonai. Raja Dharanidhar Deo, the last ruling chief of Bonai was an able ruler and reading the signs of the time, when colonial rule was coming to an end, he introduced certain reforms in the administration. He was personally cordial and not oppressive like his counterparts in Talcher, Dhenkanal, Nilagiri or Ranapur. Through the *Halia* (Plough men) Regulation of 1943 he was able to save these tillers from the tyranny of the unscrupulous *sahukars* (money lenders). Again in order to solve the problem of the agricultural indebtedness of the subjects, he stopped the practice of *kadhia* loan or grain lending. He also abolished an arbitrary tax called 'Tika Pancha' from the village headmen (gauntias) and purohit (priest) tax from the temple priests. He granted the tenants right over trees reserved or unreserved standing on their recorded land. He allowed tenants to kill wild animal like wild boar, bear, rabbits and birds causing damage to the crop. Under crop protection act, arm licenses were issued to the leading tenants, gauntias and skilled hunters. He also formed a selection board to select state officers drawing salaries below forty rupees (Soreng 2008:44).

To alleviate the misery of the flood victims of river Brahmani and its tributaries which had divested 60 villages in 1943 he granted taqavi loans¹¹ to the affected people. To placate the Paudi Bhuiyans (plain Bhuiyans) he organised Bhuiyan Durbar in 1944 at Bonaigarh in which Bhuiyan Sardars were presented with red turban and other rewards.

Thus in the pre-merger Bonai we see significant changes in the nature of administration. That is why Prajamandal Movement had not taken a firm root in the state as the subjects treated their king most benevolent.

1.4. Conclusion

The article apparently describes the nature of the government of Bonai feudatory state during colonial period. It outlines the organisation of administration and the function of officers and officials. This apart, it points to several intricate issues that may be of further academic interest and theoretical engagement. Though the article is about a particular state, it gives a general idea on several issues including British administration policy and relations with feudatory states.

The significance of myth in the origin of a royal family and the relation of the king with the tribal subjects, the Bhuiyans provide an interesting area of investigation on the topic of legitimacy in monarchy. The prevailing system of administration in feudatory state and the British policy towards it account for the emergence of elite class in Odishan society. This could be the topic of analysis on social and power inequality in post-independence Odisha. Another interesting point to note is that administrators of a feudatory state did not exclusively belong to the state itself. They came from different states and communities. That is why Odia and non-

Odia population of the colonial period have formed into modern Odia identity. The article, no doubt, exposes to different areas of academic interest.

Notes

1. The Garhjat states of the then Orissa were categorised into 11 A class, 13 B class and 02 C class by the British administration on the basis of the area and the amount of revenue paid.
2. ARA or *Annual Report on the Administration of the Bonai State 1945-46* was published by Bonai Durbar, sent to the Political Agent, Orissa State Sambalpur by H. P. Deb, the Dewan of Bonai. The report was submitted vide Office of the Dewan Bonai State, Office No. 2263, on 29 May 1946. A copy is available in the Record Room of the Sub-Collector, Bonai Sub-Division, Sundergarh District.
3. Ouseley writes that King Indradeo of Bonai was Rajput (Basu 1956:168)
4. Dalton notes that the chiefs and kings were originally Bhuiyans who in the process of Kshyatriaisation were admitted in the fraternity of Rajputs or Kshatriyas. (NHS1956:6).
5. W.W. Hunter narrates the theory of Cylone origin and belonging to Kadamba dynasty of the royal family. But he discounts this theory and links them to be of Bhuyina origin. Citing Colonel Dalton's theory of Bhuiyans' participation in Rama and Ravan battle, Hunter argues that 'the family of the chief had taken advantage of an ancient legend, to conceal their obvious aboriginal ancestry under the fiction of Singhalese descent' Hunter 1877:175).
6. The Garhjat states as a whole were known as Tributary Mahals because they paid tributes i.e. land revenue to the British Government, the territory and revenue were not subject to any regular settlement.
7. The author knows them. The title of Bharat Chandra Nayak's son is Dash because he was adopted in his maternal uncle's family. Affinal and consanguinal relatives of Mr. Nayak in different districts of Odisha and states belong to elite section.
8. The Garhjat states of the then Odisha formed a part of Eastern States Agency under the charge of a Resident.
9. Officials for conservation and preservation of environment
10. A measuring device introduced by Edmund Gaunter, an English clergy and a mathematician in 1620 to measure land. The chain was introduced in India for measurement of land by East India Company. The device is named after Gaunter and is also called surveyor's chain.
11. Taqavi is a Persian word. Taqavi loan is the loan granted for improvement of agriculture by the administration to purchase of seeds, bullocks or dig well.

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