

The Kolhan Government Estate and Damin-i-Kho : A Comparative Overview of British Land Revenue Policy

Rajesh Hansda, P.G Department of History, VBU, Hazaribag. email: bhaai.hitendra@gmail.com

Ho desum or the country proper of the Hos. Presently known as the Kolhan area of Singhbhum District of Bihar, Lieutenant Tickell in 1840, described the extent of the land of the Hos as comprehending “a tract of open undulating country averaging from 60 miles in length north and south, from 35 to 60 miles in breadth”. Col. Dalton had described it, as an area containing a series of fertile and fair plans, broken, divided and surrounded by hills and bounded by Dhalbhum and Manbhum Districts on the east and north. Lohardaga (previously Ranchi District) on the north and north-east tributary states of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Bonai, Gangpur (at present included in the States of Orissa) on the south and south-east.

In November 1836 a detachment of the Company’s forces again entered the land of the Hos, who after offering resistance for nearly four months submitted in February 1837 and agreed to pay revenue direct to the East India Company’s administration. The entire area of Hodesum was brought under the direct control of the East India Company and the Hos were told then they no longer required following the orders of the various chiefs of Singhbhum. A new administrative unit known as Kolhan was brought under the control of an English Officer of the Company’s administration, but the traditional officials of the Hos-‘The Mankees and Mundas were allowed to function as petty revenue and police officers under his control.

Before the end of the British rule in India, the position was that the Manki used to collect from the Mundas, the rents of the villages as fixed by the settlement and deposit into the treasury of the District. In case of failure in doing so, the Deputy

Commissioner, Singhbhum, had the right to recover the amount due, by the sale of the Manki’s property either movable or immovable and even to dismiss him. A Manki used to get remuneration amounting to 10% of the gross amount collected. A Manki had the power to appoint Tehsildars or villagers accountants. He had also the duty to prevent outsiders, who were not already recorded as resident raiyats, from cultivating or holding lands in his ‘Pir’ without getting a written permission from the Deputy

Commissioner. A Manki was also entitled, in consultation with his Mundas, to settle the village wastelands, with the resident raiyats and assess such lands at the rates not exceeding those established by the settlement.

The Munda is the village Headman, and his village is settled with him under the terms of a patta. The rent is not liable to enhancement during the period of the lease, but Government reserves the right to increase the rates of different classes of lands, at any future settlement. The Munda is responsible for the payment of the village rent through the Manki of the Pir, according to the Kists and is entitled to receive as Commission @ 16% of the gross village rent. Should he fail to pay the whole or part of any Kist, the Deputy Commissioner may recover the amount due by Sale of his property whether movable and immovable and may dismiss him from the Office of the Munda. Neither he nor the Manki is entitled to an abatement of rent in consequence of the failure of crops.

A Munda is liable to fine and dismissal for disobedience of lawful orders or for breach of the terms of his patta and to dismissal if he does not reside in the village of which he is the Mundas. In case he dies during the term of his lease, his heir, if qualified, is entitled to succeed to the Mundaship. In the event of not being a qualified heir, or the Munda being dismissed for misconduct, the Manki, and the resident raiyat were to elect a successor, subject to the approval of the Deputy Commissioner. In a few cases, where the Mundas are minors, Juridars or Assistant Mundas are appointed to perform the duties of the office during their minority. As in the case of the Manki, the office may not be transferred by gift, sale or mortgage, and if a Munda does so transfer it, he is liable to dismissal.

The Tehsildar is the village accountant and is appointed by the Manki. He gets a commission, two percent of the village rent, and may be dismissed by the Deputy Commissioner for his misconduct. His duties are to help the Munda in collecting the rent, to grant receipts to the raiyats in the prescribed form, and to keep such accounts as may be prescribed. In theory, there should be a Tehsildar for each village, but in practice, the Manki appoints one or at most Two Tehsildars for his elaka (area) and the Tehsildar is usually a member of the Manki's family.

The tenancy laws give a lot of protection to the resident raiyat. Every resident raiyat has the right to extend his cultivation by reclaiming a portion of the wastelands within the village boundaries provided that he has obtained permission from the Manki and Munda. Wasteland in any protected forest block may

not be cleared without the special permission of the Deputy Commissioner. Such a raiyat has a preferential right as regards the settlement of abandoned holdings, and a Munda is not at liberty to settle such lands with a non-resident raiyat if a resident raiyat is found willing to take them over at the rent fixed by the settlement.

In 1819 Sutherland had recommended about the formation of a separate Government Estate to be known as Damin-i-koh. The actual work of its demarcation was carried out by ward between the years 1824 and 1833. Ward assisted by Captain Tanner, had actually demarcated the outer-boundary of the Government Estate of Damin-i-koh. The plan of the East India Company's administration was for the establishment of a compact Estate covering the entire hill-tract occupied by Hill people or the Paharias. Status of Santhals and Paharias were recorded by Captain Sherwill of the Revenue in 1851. There was an outbreak of Santhal rebellion or Hul of 1855-57. The rebellion of the Santhals was followed by the formation of the District of Santhals Parganas comprising the Damin-i-koh and some other areas 'inhabited principally by the uncivilised race of people called Santhals. The first was of Indian independence or the so-called Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58 had little impact on this area, though some sepoy's stationed at a place named Rohini, near present Deoghar, were the first to take part in the mutiny. The Santhals, who had reason in rebellion against the East India Company's administration as late as 1855-57, did not take any significant part in the outbreak of 1857-58.

There was a renewed unrest in this area and a fresh threat of an outbreak of rebellion by the Santhals of Santhal Parganas including the Damin-i-koh in 1871. This threatened rebellion led to a change of the policy of the Government and Regulation III of 1872 was enacted which made a provision for the introduction of a new system of administration based on non-regulation principles. The new regulation of 1872 has empowered the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to order a settlement of the whole or any part of the district including Damin-i-koh and had provided for the suspension of the ordinary jurisdiction of Civil Courts during such operations. The settlement officers were given powers to inquire into the cases of Headman and raiyats, who have lost their office or lands since 31st December 1858. This regulation had also provided for the restoration of the possession of such of them, who were justly entitled to such possession. A provision was also made for acquiring the right of possession from 12 years continued possession of any land. It was also provided that rents settled by the Settlement officers were to remain unchanged for at least a period of 7 years.

The first settlement was conducted by B.Wood during 1878-79. The next was conducted by Craven in 1888-1894. This settlement was better than the earlier one, as Craven had prepared maps for each village which had not been done on wood. Craven had also used the method of the magnetic compass and had prepared Khatian for each raiyat and had settled his (raiyat's) rent, which had not been done by Wood. In the settlement conducted by Wood, a general record of rights was published, but Craven had published a Jamabandi of each village containing details of the area held and rent decided and fixed for individual raiyat. A very comprehensive and detailed settlement of Damin-i-koh and the Paharia areas was done by Mc Pherson, who has left a very detailed account of it, in his Final Report.

There were special provisions for the settlement operations in the Paharia areas of Damin-i-koh. As early as 1823, the EAST India Company's administrations had announced its policy of non-interference with regard to the lands held by the Paharia tribal, who were considered to be more backward than the Santhals. In 1832, the areas inhabited by the Paharia's were demarcated by Ward, but only a very few of them were then brought under the settlement. In 1867, some lands of the Paharia's were settled on very low rent and some of the villagers of this area were brought under the settlement in 1879. Oldham, a Deputy Commissioner of Santhal Parganas, was asked to inquire about the feasibility of bringing the Paharia areas under the settlement. In 1881 this officer submitted his plan for holding settlement in the Pahria area. But for reasons best known to it, the British Indian government followed a halting policy and was not very much willing to bring the Paharia's areas under a general settlement. In 1891, some Paharia's belonging to Pakur sub-division applied for holding settlement in their area which later on becomes a model for settlement in other Pahria areas, which were held during Mc Pherson settlement of 1893-97.

References

Dalton-Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Bengal 1866, Part-II, PP 163-64

Report on the District of Singhbhum Ricketty Paras 10-11, general proceedings no.137 dt. 29TH April 1858 State Archives W. Bengal, Calcutta.

Singhbhum Dist. Gazetteer-Roy Choudhary, PP 371-376