Chapter 2

A GEOGRAPHICAL AND BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF
BUNDELKHAND UPTO 1804.

Section - A: GEOGRAPHY

a. Area & Topography.

The territory, known as Bundelkhand comprised of the region which lay between the R. Jumna on the north, R. Chambal on the north west, Jabalpur and Sagar on the south, part of Gwalior on the west, Baghelkhand and Mirzapur hills on the south and east. It extended from 77 48' to 81 33' east longitude and 24 3' to 26 26' north latitude. (1) It included the district of Jhansi in the west, Jalaun in the north, Hamirpur and Banda in the east, Damoh and Sagar in the south. (2) Lalitpur was incorporated into Jhansi in 1891, which ended its separate entity. (3) The area of Bundelkhand was spread over 23,817 sq. miles, 165 miles in length and 232 in breadth. (4) It is essentially an enormous plain which is diversified by a series of mountains and hills. (5) These plains are crowned with mountains and the remarkable aspect is the progressive elevation of the soil from the bed of the R. Jumna towards the Jumna. (6) It is from the south that the plains start widening (7) and it is here that the hills approach them within a few miles, but they are several miles apart in the north. (8) Ravines cut up these plains in the Jalaun, Jhansi and Lalitpur district. The area which borders the Jumna, Pahuj, Betwa and Dhasan rivers are ravenous and therefore un cultivable. (9)
b. Mountains

The Mountains of Bundelkhand run parallel to each other and support a plateau or tableland one above the other and hence these are called ghats. (10) There are many isolated hills which rise from a common base. In shape they are pyramidal and irregular. In the words of Franklin, "they all seem to diverge from the apex of the plain expanding like sticks of a fan." (11) Though these give the impression of their standing isolated, they are parts of ranges which alternately appear and disappear in isolation or in a continuous form. (12)

The first of these ranges is called Bindhyachal. These are the northern range of the eastern Vindhyas and constitute the eastern frontier. (13) In elevation the mountains are not more than 2000 ft. and are composed of granite and syenite with a covering of sandstone, and volcanic material. (14) The second range is called Panna Range, which also of volcanic origin, south of the plateau described earlier. It runs parallel to that of Bindhachal. (15) The third range is the Bardari Range, South west of Panna. The rock material comprises of sandstone and ferruginous gravel. The area is largely hilly and the escarpments steep and nearly inaccessible. (16) The rivers Ken and Patni rise from here. This area is the most elevated part of the province.

c. Rivers

Bundelkhand is watered by numerous rivers and rivulets, prominent among which are the Jumna, Chambal, Betwa, Dhasan, Ken, Sindh etc. The Sindh rises in Malwa and forms the boundary
between Gwalior and Bundelkhand. (17) Parallel to it flows the Pahug. The Betwa flows into the Jumna. Dhasan is the principal tributary of the Betwa. The Ken is the only navigable river. (18) Since this region had a network of waterways, preservation of water became necessary. Large lakes were constructed for the purpose of irrigation. e.g. Barwa Sagar and Kirat Sagar.

d. Land and Soils.

The geographical formation of the soil of Bundelkhand greatly influenced the soil of the alluvial plain lying between the hills and the R. Jumna. The Bundelkhand soil is black and ordinarily it is called cotton soil. It has been formed by the basaltic type of alluvium which is deposited by the various rivers in the Gangetic basin, which collected by draining the trap rocks of Bundelkhand and laid down in its basin at places where conditions are favourable. (19) The soil is dry and barren in hot weather, but the peculiarity of this soil is that it can retain moisture to a marked degree and yields in favourable seasons crops like cotton and cereals. But if it is not properly irrigated it can turn alkaline and saline as it is salty. (20)

In Bundelkhand the soil is classified into the following categories a) Mar, b) Kabar or Parua. c) Rakar.

Mar is a rich black soil found in the plains and lowlands. It contains more "agrillaceous earth and carbonized vegetable remains than is found in lands to the north of the Jumna." (21)

It is peculiar for its power of retaining moisture. The next kind is known as the Parua. It is light in composition and of a
yellow brown colour and this soil is favourable for cotton and sugarcane cultivation. The third kind is called Rakar and is of two varieties. a) Moti and b) Patli. This is poorest of all soils. If rains are favourable it gives good kharif crops, but lack of moisture causes failure. The strength of the soil is soon exhausted and it has to remain fallow to regain its fertility. Besides the above mentioned primary divisions, there are two more secondary classes called Khera and Kachhar.(22) These soils derive their names from circumstance rather than being different in themselves. Khera is that land which is near the village and is irrigated from the wells. There are other kinds, one of them is called rakar. When treated it becomes fertile. When gardern cultivation takes place it is termed Kachwara.(23) Kachhar is the land in the vicinity of streams or over flowing lakes during the rains. It is generally rich and rabi crops are grown.(24)

It is worth noting that classification of soil gained prominence in India during the 16th century, when lands were assessed for revenue. Land was classified according to the character and nature of the soil and external features like texture, colour of soil, slope of land, availability of water but the most important consideration was yield of crops.

e. People

The inhabitants of Bundelkhand are a heterogeneous mixture of the various people who settled in the area at different points in history. The original and perhaps the earliest primitive tribes were the Bhils, Kols, Saheriyas, Gonds,
Bhangars, Khangars etc.(25) Some of these people are still existant today.

Among the Hindus, the Brahmans who occupied the highest echleon of caste society, belong to the jajhotia, kanyakuvja, gaur etc. sects.(26) The Rajpoots were another important caste and sub-divisions of this are the Bundelas, Panwars, Parihars, Chauhans, Kachhwaha, Sengar, Chandella, etc. Generally the Bundelas remained economically backward. However, with time they settled down into respectable cultivators.(26a)

The business community comprised of the Vaish class. The Kayasthas had assumed landlordship titles and had proprietary interest in Bundelkhand.(27) Amongst the others were the Lodhis who ranked as the highest agricultural class but below Brahmans, Rajpoots and Baniyas.(28) Since the Lodhis had become big land owners they were addressed as Thakurs.(29)

The Kurmis were the main cultivator caste and belonged to the low Hindu caste. They lost ground in the British period when the twenty years settlement was introduced in 1835. Leases were frequently cancelled for defaults of payments of revenue and their land transferred to outsiders.(30) This caused great resentment and culminated in mass uprisings in successive years.

Section B : HISTORY

The history of Bundelkhand dates back to ancient times. The Puranas state that Pururava Alia, grandson of Manu, ruled the area between Prasthithana (near Allahabad) to Malwa,
which included Jhansi. (31) In course of time his successor, Yadu, founder of the Yadava dynasty, inherited the territory watered by the Chambal, Betwa and Ken. (32) This branch of the Yadavas was eclipsed, and the Yadavas of Berar (Vidarbha) penetrated in the north and Kaisike founded the Chedi line and became ruler of the region known as Chedidesh. (33) It corresponded to the land lying south of the Yamuna between Chambal and Ken and corresponded to modern Bundelkhand. (34) The Chedis were probably absorbed into the Nanda empire in the 4th century B. C. (35) After the Nandas it formed part of the Mauryan Empire as a province. (36) The Sungas succeeded the Mauryas who held sway over Bundelkhand and Malwa. (37) The Sungas were replaced by the Kanvas, who in time were overthrown by the Andhra Kings. (38) The Satvahanas of the Deccan replaced the Andhra Kings. (39) Towards the end of the 1st century A.D. the district formed part of the extensive Kushan empire, under Kanishka and continued till 145-176 A.D. (40) This district finds mention in Prolemv's geography as 'Prasaike' the country lying to south of the Yamuna. (41) During the 3rd and 4th century A. D. the Nagas held sway over Bundelkhand. Numismatic evidence corroborates the fact that the area between the Jumuna and the upper course of the Narbada and from the Chambal to the Ken in the east was ruled by them. (42) About the middle of the 4th century A.D., as a consequence of Samudra Gupta's conquests, Bundelkhand passed into the Gupta empire. It was part of a bhukti (province) which covered the greater part of modern Bundelkhand. (43) The disintegration of Gupta period began during 477 -500 A. D. and taking advantage, the Huns ravaged the
It was at this time that Hieun Tsang visited these parts around 641-642 A.D. and he mentions it by the name of "Chi-chi-to".

We find that during eight centuries the Pratihara Rajputs, the Chandellas in the 9th century A.D. and Rashtrakutas in the 1st quarter of the 10th century A.D., held sway over the region. Around 1169-1197 A.D. Prithvi Raj Chauhan became the ruler but unfortunately he could not retain control over this region.

Early Muslim invaders ravaged the areas with their frequent onslaughts. The central authority at Delhi ruled the region directly or with their representatives, resulting in the fragmentation of the region in the hands of titular Muslim representatives.

The Bundelas entered the scene after the downfall of the Chandelas. The Bundelas multiplied fast and established principalities all over the land—Orchha, Chanderi, Erich etc. It was Champat Rai Bundela of Mahoba and his son Chattrrasal who tried to revive Bundela power to its pristine glory. Champat Rai threw off the Mughal allegiance and established his independent supremacy over his lost dominions.

But yet certain dominions of the Bundela possessions remained in the hands of the Muslim Government and this factor roused the patriotic feelings of the Bundelkhand chieftains as they loved their freedom and instigated them to rebel. The Agent of the Governor General writes in 1872:

"I could not fail to observe in passing through
Orchha that this country of rocks, passes (dang) and forts is populated by thousands who but for British prestige would make the old hills ring again with their war-cries". (47a)

The state of affairs at this time in Bundelkhand was that the land west of the Dhasan river was occupied by the Orchha Bundelas who were firmly fixed in their possessions, but the country east of the river was disunited and divided amongst various powers. (48)

After the death of Champat Rai, his son, Chatrasal sought to enhance the glory of the Bundelas and throw off the Mugal yoke. The prolonged Deccan wars of Aurangzeb and the struggle for power after his death enable Chatrasal to establish an independent kingdom for himself eastern Bundelkhand. (49) The endeavours of Chatrasal to expand the Bundelkhand dominion were resented by the Mugal Subedar of Allahabad who wanted Bundelkhand to be included in the Subah of Allahabad. (50) Early in 1727, Bangash, the Mugal Subedar began his campaign against Chatrasal. The Bundelas got scattered as the Mugals laid siege to Jaitpur fort where Chatrasal had taken refuge. In sheer desperation, Chatrasal appealed for Maratta help and sent a message to Baji Rao who was at Devgad. The message read:

"जो मातृत्व वाह करून हो, लोँ मातृत्व जानेह आज, बाजी जात हड़ते हो, रायजी बाजी हाज" (51)

Unfortunately, neither the Peshwa nor Chimanjji Appa could come to Chatrasal's help and it was only in 1729, that Baji Rao
was able to come to the assistance of Bundela chiefs. (52) In appreciation of help rendered by the Peshwa, Chatrasal bequeathed Kalpi, Sagar, Jhansi, Sironj and Hardinagar which yielded a revenue of thirty three lakhs. (53) By the legacy of Chatrasal the Peshwa had become possessor of a large portion of Bundelkhand, thus opening a new chapter in the history of Bundelkhand. The Peshwa's penetration into Bundelkhand extended further the frontiers of the Maratta kingdom and served as a base for the concentration of Maratta forces and then advance into the imperial domains. It also strengthened their position to operate against the Jats and Bundelas. After the death of Chatrasal, the position of the Marattas became stronger. However, the policy of Chatrasal to bequeath the foresaid territories had an adverse effect on the morale of the Bundelas who were now heaped upon with Maratta domination and subsequent subjugation of Bundelkhand independence. (54) The Bundelas received a blow and this resulted in a long series of domestic trouble and internecine warfare which resulted in the parcelling out into a multitude of divisions which eventually gave rise to numerous petty states.

The Peshwa, meanwhile, assigned a portion of his share of Bundelkhand which consisted of Banda and Kalpi to Shamsher Bahadur, his son by a muslim concubine. (55) But the Mugal suzerainty over Bundelkhand was not easily relinquished and the Subedar of Allahabad considered himself to be the legitimate master of Bundelkhand. To this end, did Himmat Bahadur a Gosain in the services of the Subedar of Allahabad began to ply with
Bundelkhand affairs, seeking an opportunity to annex it.

The Maratta governors looking after the Peshwa's possessions in Bundelkhand were apprehensive of the growth of Muslim domination and in fact Naru Shankar, was afraid of Shuja-ud-daula's power, who was the viceroy of Allahabad. The Marattas withdrew and Imperial rule was re-established in Jhansi. Malhar Rao Holkar recaptured Jhansi a few years later. In 1794, Shoo Rao Bhao succeeded to the governorship of Bundelkhand which had become a play ground for Mugal, Bundela and Maratta powers. The region was in the throes of civil a war.

Ali Bahadur, the successor of Shamsher Bahadur was desirous of holding an independent authority, which again created jealousies in Pune as the ruling Peshwa did not approve of the revenues of valuable possessions passing out of Maratta control, even though Ali Bahadur had belonged to the Peshwa lineage. Consequently an arrangement was worked out between Ali Bahadur and the Peshwa, wherein, the sovereign and paramount rights of the Peshwa over the conquests of Ali Bahadur in Bundelkhand was acknowledged. Confidential trustees of the Peshwa were sent for superintending and controlling the collections and disbursement of the public revenue. But the Marattas were never able to effect complete conquest of this region. Their plans to invade the British dominions by way of Bundelkhand did not meet with success. Himmat Bahadur, the crafty Gosain, in the service of Shuja-ud-daula made overtures to the British Government to assist in transferring the country to them. The proposal of Himmat Bahadur was readily accepted and this is the origin of the
first occupation of Bundelkhand by British troops in 1803.(61) During the negotiations between Himmat Bahadur and the British, Shamsher Bahadur arrived but his efforts to establish his authority were unsuccessful. Captain Baillie, the political agent in the province made an offer to Shamsher Bahadur of a pension of four lakhs per annum and residence at Banda.(62) He surrendered to the British on 18th October 1804 and submitted all the forts held by his adherents. Captain Baillie was appointed agent to the Commander-in-Chief.(63)

Meanwhile, the Peshwa had been driven to Bassein by the rebellion of Jaswant Rao Holkar and other Maratta chieftains, he concluded the Treaty with the British Government, which is known as the Treaty of Bassein, 1802, 25th October.(64) Shortly, after this transaction, the Peshwa proposed that the district the Savannore and other lands which had been assigned by him to the British insteate of subsidy, should be restored to him in lieu of other matters, stipulated in the supplemented articles of Treaty of Bassein and a portion of the territory in Bundelkhand, should be ceded to the East India Company. Thus the British acquired a large portion of Bundelkhand province.(65)

On January 6th, 1804 the British entered into an alliance with Sheo Rao Bhao by which the latter undertook not protect or give refuge to any enemy of the British and to assist them in their expeditions against neighbouring states.(66) By the Treaty of June 13th, 1817, the sovereign rights of the Peshwa were transferred to the British in the province of Bundelkhand
including Jhansi and land held by Nana Govind Rao. This terminated the authority of the Peshwa in Bundelkhand and the only advantage which the British Government took of this cession in their favour was to require from Nana Govind Rao, the cession of a small portion of his territory with a view to complete the frontier line. In return he was constituted hereditary ruler of the remainder of his territory and released from payment of tribute. (67) With this, four of the Bundelkhand states, Jhansi, Jalaun, Jaitpur lapsed into British hands and Bundelkhand passed into the jurisdiction of the British. (68)

Creation of Bundelkhand Agency:

The political change was created in 1852. After the Treaty of Bassein, a political officer was attached to the forces operating in Bundelkhand for the purpose of introducing order into the civil administration. In 1811, when the country was settled and agent to the Governor General for Bundelkhand was appointed with headquarters at Banda. In 1818, the headquarters moved from Banda to Kalpi. In 1824, it moved to Hamirpur and it was moved back to Banda in 1832. In 1835 the control passed to the newly appointed Lt. Governor of north west provinces, whose headquarters were at Agra. In 1849, the superior control was handed over to the commissioner for Saugor and Nerbudda territories and Political Assistant was appointed for Jhansi holding immediate charge under the commissioner. The Assistant was soon after moved to Nowgong the superior control being transferred to the Resident at Gwalior.

In 1854, the Central India Agency was created, the
control thereby passed to the Agent to the Governor General for central India. From 1862 - 1871, the Baghelkhand charge was held conjointly with that of Bundelkhand, the political Assistant being replaced by a political agency in 1885. As a measure of economy, the agencies of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand were amalgamated on 1st December, 1931. The headquarters of the combined agency were at Nowgong. The officer incharge of the combined agency was designated as the political agent in Bundelkhand.(69)


3. Ibid. p. 68.

4. Imperial Gazeteer. op. cit. p.78.

5. Ibid. p. 69.

6. Atkinson. op. cit. p. 54.


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid. p. 275.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Imperial Gazeteer. op.cit. vol. iv. p. 68.


15. Franklin. op. cit. p. 275.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid. and also Franklin. op. cit. p. 274.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.


26. Atkinson. op. cit. p. 58 and also Lurd, C.E. Bundelkhand Caste. p. 8

26a. Russel. op. cit. vol. IV. p. 440

27. Lurd. op. cit. p. 14


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. vol XI. p. 438


32. Ibid. p. 274.

33. Ibid. p. 248.

34. Ibid p. 23.


36. Ibid. pp. 61,79.

37. Ibid. p. 38.

38. Ibid. pp. 95 -99


27
42. Ibid.

43. Majumdar. op. cit. Age of Imperial Kannauj. p. 344

44. Imperial Gazeteer of India. op. cit. vol. XII. p. 25.


47a. Atkinson. op. cit. p.24


49. Srinivasam. op. cit. p. 76.


51. Ibid. p. 72. and also Atkinson. op. cit. p. 28. Srinivasan. op. cit. p. 76.


54. Srinivasan. op. cit. p. 12.
55. Sardesai, op. cit. vol. II. p. 450.
56. Pogson. op. cit. p. 119.
61. Ibid.
63. Ibid. p. 37. and also Aitchinson op. cit. pp. 5,6.
64. Franklin. op. cit. p. 271 and also Atkinson. op. cit. p. 34. Bundelkhand Agency File. op. cit. p. 5.
65. Aitchinson. op. cit. p.4.
66. Misra. op. cit. p. 34.
68. Ibid. p. 5.
69. Bundelkhand Agency File 651 of 1913.