INTRODUCTION
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Modern Keonjhar, which is one of the thirty districts of Orissa, has continued to breathe an air of historical significance from the remote past. Before the merger with the province of Orissa in 1948, it was one of the feudatory states of the British. Keonjhar, however, is an interesting district of Orissa, from the geological and anthropological point of view. The district is rich in mineral resources and has vast deposits of iron, manganese and chrome ores. About thirty percent of its total geographical area is covered with forests. Anthropologically its two main tribes the Juangs and the Bhuyans have an interesting past. In the present days the Juangs and the Bhuyans have acquired modern ways of living. Long years before they used shields of leaves.

However, the use of shield wearing has completely gone out of use. The natural scenery of Keonjhar varied from the rest of Orissa with water-falls and varied sizes to roaring gorges with boulders rolling down the steep inclines, and rocks of varying hue which are absent elsewhere. Wild animals in Keonjhar have become rare now-a-days.

It is a matter of pride that Keonjhar has the distinction of containing the oldest rocks of the world covering an area of one hundred square kilometres at Asanpat. The rock is supposed to the thirty-eight million years old. It must have
been there before peninsular India broke away from Antartica and moved north.

After the merger of the feudatory states of Orissa on the 1st January 1948, the Princely state of Keonjhar emerged as one of the thirty districts of Orissa with the headquarters, at Kendujhar'. Different historians have made their attempts at the exposition of the origin of the name 'Kendujhara'. Basing on the historical records and tradition it is known that Keonjhar was originally a part of Khinjjigamandala and subsequently Hariharapura¹. According to the local tradition, towards the 12th century A.D. a Bhanja ruler named Joti Bhanja who is said to be the predecessor of modern Bhanjas of Keonjhar shifted his capital at a place called Jotipur on the bank of the river Baitarani². Again he shifted his capital later to a more centralised place and built his fort near a perennial spring (jhara) which originated from a foot of Kencu (ebony) tree³. Hence the capital town was thus named as 'Kendujhara-garh' or 'Keonjhar-Garh'. The name of the ex-State of Kendujhara was corrupted into Keonjhar⁴.

¹ A Joshi, History and culture of Khinjjigakota (New Delhi 1983) P.4
² K.M.Mishra, Kendujhara (Cuttack 1932) P.10.
³ SRKS P.37
⁴ ODG (Keonjhar) P.44.
² SRKS, P.37
⁴ Feudatory States Gazetteers, P.212.
Again some historians believe that Keonjha was a Tantrika land of Jahar. This is corroborated from the Tibetan work Pag-sam-zom-zang. However, this opinion is seldom reliable. The local people pronounce 'Keonjhar' both for the town and the district. The name has been Sanskritised as 'Kendujhara' by the Durbar Government. The medieval Sanskrit literature represent the name as 'Keonjhar' which goes to prove that the place was known as 'Keonjhar' long before the time of Joti Bhanja. This place was made the headquarters of the Bhanja rulers in the 12th century A.D and the State was known as 'Kendujhara' after this. It was the English writers who used to call it as Keonjhar which more correctly represented the early name 'Keonjhar'.

Physically during the medieval and British period, Orissa was divided into two parts. One mountains and inaccessible forest tract. The other part was plain and open part constituting the most fertile area of the province. The hill region was commonly known as 'Rajawaras' and the plain region was known as Khaliseh or Kot. Khalisah was the royal domain laying directly under the administration of the Hindu King without any immediate authority. Directly they collected huge amount of Revenue from this region. On the otherhand the

5 ODG (Keonjhar) P.2
6 Ibid.
8 W.W.Hunter, History of Orissa, Vol.II (London 1872) P.34
Rajawaras constituted the military, fiefs divided amongst a number of Chieftains known as Kshetris, Khandaits, Mahanayaks, Bhuyans, Bhupatis etc. However this identification differ from place to place. S.L. Maddox writes the rulers of Rajwaras were Kshetriyas (Kshetriyas or Khandaits or wearers of Khanda or sword; Bhuyans or Bhupati Lord of the soil ..........”9, However they were intermediaries between the native Kings and the tenants of the soil. A stipulated amount of rent of tribute (Peskash) either in cash or in kind was paid to them10.

It was Raja Mansingh one of the Generals of Akbar the Great, the eminent Mughal emperor of India was the first man to prepare a written statement of overall political organisation of Orissa. He therein incorporated some new terms in the same old administrative divisions of Orissa like 'Mughalbundee and Garhjat'. Again the Hindu title like Khandaits or Bhupatis etc. was substituted by the term like zamindar11

Of the course the use of the term Garhjat was not a new thing in Orissa. The term 'Garhjat' was discovered from the inscription of the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri12. However

9 Sterling's Orissa, P.4.
10Ibid.
11SNRR, PP. 37-38
Commissioner for the affairs of Cuttack to the major General Wellesley, June 19, 1804.
12H.K.Mahatab, Oddisa Itihasa (Cuttack 1948) P.181.
the term has been in use since the time of Govinda Vidyadhara (1541 AD to 1549 AD) the Bhoi ruler of Orissa. It is known that the term Garhjat was used in the inscriptions for the tributary states of Orissa during the Sixteenth Century A.D. During the Mughal administration the term got popularity in Orissa.

The term 'Mughalbundee' belongs to the Hindi Language. It means territory or the division attached directly with the Mughal administration. The Mughalbundee area comprised all the coastal plain and the open part of Orissa. However this region paid a regular assessment to the Mughal administration.

The term Garhjat is derived from the Hindi word Garh or fort or Quila. Sometimes an estate in the hill tract was called as Quillajat estate. According to F.B.Laurie, "The original meaning of Quila was fort or a strong place on a hill or mountain, though in a later time it has come to be applied to all kings of fortified places. All these fortified places were called as Killajat estates during the Mughal rule."

Analyzing the terms like Garhjat and Quillajat, Mac Neile

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14Ibid..
15H.H. Wilson, Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms of British India (London 1855), P.345.
16F.B.Laurie, Orissa the Garden of superstition and idolatry (Edinburg, 1850), P.123.
17 Ibid, PP.122-123.
writes "Each Chief had a brick and mud fort called Quilla. Hence they were known as Garhjat as Quillajats".

The Marathas during their regime did not change the method of administration implemented by the Mughals and continued the previous method, i.e Mughalbundee and Garhjat. It was the British only who changed the method and names as the 'Tributary mahal', 'Feudatory States' and lastly the 'Princely States'.

Thus during the British rule in Orissa there were twenty six Garhjat States. Among those States Keonjhar* was one of them. It remained under the Raja till the merger of the State.

The modern district of Keonjhar is situated between 21°.10' and 22°.10' North latitude and 85°.11'E and 86°.22' East longitude. It is bounded on the north by the district of the Singhbhum in Jharkhand, on the east by the district of Cuttack and Dhenkanal and on the west district of Dhenkanal and Sundergarh*. The extreme length of the State east and the West is about 85 miles and its average breadth, north and south about 36 miles. The total area was found at the topographical survey is 3096 square miles. According to the census of 1991 the total population of the district is

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* Vide the Map of Keonjhar.
19 SRKS, P.12
20 Ibid
13,15,627, out of which 68026 is male and 54,7601 is female\textsuperscript{21}. It is divided into two broad tracts - Upper Keonjhar and Lower Keonjhar\textsuperscript{22}. Upper Keonjhar contains mountains, high lands, hills and dense forests. On the otherhand lower Keonjhar is an area of valleys and low lands. This part was once included in the Mughalbundee region as it was directly under the Mughal administration. Lower Keonjhar was popularity known as Athagada or Anandapur Sub-division. It is about to 900 to 1500 feet above sea level\textsuperscript{23}.

The major portion of Upper Keonjhar is covered with hills and forests which forms the natural boundary of the district of Keonjhar. These hill tracts have been the abode of primitive tribes like Juangs, Bhuyans, Kols, Santhals etc.

Commonly Oriya is used as the mother-tongue. But the tribal people use their own dialect. The Oriya script is in vogue all over the district. Even the tribals who use their own dialect prefer Oriya script while writing their dialect. The Oriya script is is vogue all over the district. Even the tribal people who use their own dialect prefer Oriya script while writing their dialect. The people speaking other Indian Languages use their respective scripts. People of different caste, creed and religion survives in the district. Again it is known that people belonging to scheduled tribe inhabits in

\textsuperscript{21} District Census Report, P.36  
\textsuperscript{22} K.M.Mishra, Kendujhara Itihasa (Cuttack 1930) P.1.  
\textsuperscript{23} SRKS, P.12.
Keonjhar. Among them Bthudi, Bhuyan, Bhumij, Gonda, Ho, Juang
Munda, Santala, Sabara Saunti etc. are important. Among these
tribes Juang is the primitive tribe found in Keonjhar and
Dhenkanal. Due to leaf dress of the Juanga W.W.Hunter says
them : Leaf Wearing Tribes”.

The district is divided into three sub-divisions, seven
Tahasils and nineteen Police Station.

Wide ranges of lofty hills and dense jungles form the
boundary between Keonjhar and the neighbouring district of
Dhenkanala. From the eastern side of this range a large
plateau extends to Mayurbhanja and Singhbhum on the one hand
and to the borders of lower Keonjhar on the other. With the
exception of isolated hills and undulating tracts, this vast
plateau is generally open and occupied by large villages and
numerous hamlets. Towards the east is the lower Keonjhar
comprising Anandapur Subdivision and a portion of Keonjhar
Subdivision. For the first 16 km this tract emerges in a
gently slope from the belt of hills and then spreads out into
an open plain towards Cuttack district flanked by two long
ranges of hills to Sukinda and Mayurbhanja borders. This tract
is similar to the adjoining district of Baleswar and Cuttack
containing little jungle and is dotted with a few low isolated
hills. It is well cultivated and thickly populated. Though the
valleys consist of rich alluvial soil the uplands consist
mainly of the hills, streams etc.
The important peaks are Gandhamardan (1,060 m) about 10 km. from the headquarters with a wide ridge on the top. Mankadnacha (1,117 m), Tomaka (785 m), Bolat (554 m), Khajura (918 m), Ranga (897 m), Mahaparbat (716 m), Khandadhar Parbat (915 m), situated near the border of Bonai and Pal-lahara; and Sitabinji (670 m) situated at a distance of 19 Km. from Kendujhargarh in an easterly direction. The height of the highest cliff of this hiss is 183 m.

The rivers of Keonjhar emerge out of the hilly tracts into the plain country with great velocity and are charged with large volumes of water during monsoon. In summer they become almost dry. Their heads are usually rocky which render them unfit for navigation. There are a large number of hill streams in the district which form the major water resource. The following is a poetic description of this hill streams as given by Cobden-Ramsay: "In the highlands ......clear pellucid hill streams flow prennially, babbling over stones and rushing in tinkling waterfalls between grass-clad banks and sedgy shores, shaded by towering trees; many are the deep silent pools with the banks fringed with masses of white lilies, and the silence broken only by the gentle gurgle of the stream as it slowly trickles from the pools or by the splash of some rising fish! here the kingfisher darts to and fro in all his glory and birds of every hue imaginable brighten the scene; in
the rains these streams become wild tearing torrents sweeping all before them”.

The river Baitarani is the largest river of the district. It rises from the Kendujhar subdivision. The term Baitarani means the river which is not possible to cross by boat. It is treated as one of the sacred river unlike Ganges²⁴.

At a distance of about 60 Km for Keonjhar there occurs a deep pool in the river Baitarani known as Bhimkund. According to a legend Bhima, the second pandava, took his bath here in this pool when the Pandavas lived in disguise in Biratnagar. Before it reaches the pool the Baitarani flows through a gorge in steps forming a series of picturesque rapids. At one place the gorge is hardly 4 feet wide in winter when the river disappears underground and emerges at the pool. Bhimkund is encircled by precipitous stone walls. The natural scenery of the site is exquisitely beautiful. According to another legend Rama on his march to Lanka to rescue his wife Sita from the ten-headed demon Ravana stayed on the banks of the Baitarani on the border of Kendujhar. During Makar (Pongal) festival in mid-January large number of people gather here to take bath on the auspicious day in commemoration of this legend.

²⁴Quoted in K.M.Mishra, Op.cit, P.34
Sarbatra Sullabha Ganga, Trisu Sthansesu Dullabha
Hardwara Prayaga cha Gangasagar Sangame,
Hardwarat Prayga cha Gangasagar sangamat
Bisesat tarayet Jasmat tasmat Baitarani Smruta.
The river Machhakandana has two waterfalls named Badaghagara and Sanaghagara 23 meter and 18 meter in height respectively. The Kalinjari is about 56 Km in length rises in the hills near Gonasika and meets with Baitarani south of Udayapur. The Kukurakata is about 32 Km in length rises in the forest near Jhalabera and falls into the river Baitarani. Some important relics of historical interest are found on its valley. The noteworthy relics being those of painting and inscriptions at Sitabanji. The Kusai rises from the Rebna forest and finally debouches into the river Baitarani. On the bank of the river is located the village Deogan which is famous for the temple of Kusaleswara Siva of the medieval period. The Salandi rises in the Simlipal hills of Mayurbhanj district. In enters the districts of Keonjhar at Champapal. At last it fails into the river Baitarani in Bhadrak district. The other important rivers of the district are the Seeta, the Musala, the Somakai etc.

The district of Keonjhar has the credit of having some waterfalls. The Murga fall occurs in Champua Subdivision. Underneath the fall is situated the shrine of Lord Siva known as Murga Mahadeva. The Handibhanga fall about 30 metres height occurs in the Handibhanga hill. Besides these there are some other minor waterfalls in the district famous for their scenic beauty.
The forests of Keonjhar are of monsoon type classified as (a) Tropical moist deciduous forest and (b) Tropical semi-evergreen forest. The first category forest is chiefly characterised by Shora Terminalia Diospyros and Schieichera. The second category forest is confined to hilly areas. The forest plays a vital role in the economy and ecology not only of the district but also of the country as a whole. Now the Government is taking drastic steps to check deforestation. The Government derives a major source of revenue from forest produce like Timber and fire-wood. Again minor produce plays a vital role in forest management and bring in a sizeable revenue to the State. Besides providing gainful employment, the forests play a very important role in the rural economy of the district. It helps for the uplift of the socio-economic standard of the people. The rural population depend on the forest for the collection of minor forest produces. The important items of minor forest produce are Kendu leaf, sal seed, Mohwa flower and seeds, honey and wax, resin, tasar, myrabilon, tamarind and sitali leaves and fibres.

The wild life has assumed tremendous importance. The Government has shown extra interest in protection of wild life. The common animals in the districts are Tigers, Leopards, Elephants, Sambars, Snakes and Monkey’s etc. The different types of birds are visible in the forest tract of Keonjhar.
The district is bestowed with extensive deposit of iron ores and manganese ores with chromite and a few other minor mineral occurrence. Keonjhar district plays a major role in contributing sizeable production of iron-ore. The most important Singhbhum-Keonjhar-Bonai iron-ore belt runs through this district. The manganese ore deposits are scattered over an area of 500 sq.Km. More than 90 per cent of Orissa’s production comes under the Keonjhar-Bonai region. The Chromite deposits of this district are associated with the ultramafic rocks of Nuasahi and Boula area. Orissa holds the first place in the production of chromite Ore contributing over 90 per cent of all Indian output. Besides these the district is bestowed with China clay, Bauxite etc.

The climate of Keonjhar is characterised by an oppression hot summer, high humidity and well distributed rainfall during the monsoon season. The year may be chiefly divided into four seasons, the hot season from March to May, the period from June to September is the South West monsoon October and November constitute the post-monsoon season and the cold season is from December to February.

Thus the woodland district of Keonjhar covering an area of 3096 sq.miles played a significant role during the British period. It was important due to its vastness, culture and tradition which is a matter of interest.  

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