CHAPTER I
CHANGING PROFILE OF THE FRONTIER BENGALE

The south-west frontier Bengal in the eighteenth century included Orissa, Mayurbhanj, Midnapore and territories which constituted the district of Jungle Mahals in 1805 that included Bankura district. Out of these territories it is proposed to include only Midnapore and Bankura districts as the locale of the present research studies. This area, situated between 21.36° and 23.38° north latitude and 86.33° and 88.11° east longitude, was bordered on the north and a part of north-east by the district of Burdwan, on the east by the district of Hooghly, on the south by the Bay of Bengal, on the south-west by the district of Balasore and in the west by the then tributary state of Mayurbhanj.

The study of the societal changes of these two districts prompts the present scholar to look backward, to paint a picture of the land and its people in the historical perspective, since the nineteenth century dawns in this region with the thunder of peasant resistance movements against the process of maximisation of revenue and eventually that of rent of the land they owned and possessed. The movements were crushed and land settlements were enforced, marked by extortion and resumption of non-revenue paying tenures to explore the
yielding capacity of the soil. The Company Raj also undertook welfare measures to improve the cultivation process by developing irrigation and embankment projects, expanding transport and communication and exploiting forest resources, all which were necessary for the advent of industrial capitalism. Her destiny was tagged with the capitalist development in the Asiatic continent.

Accordingly, her traditional village crafts declined, consequent on the shrinkage of market abroad and loss of demand in the domestic market following the advent of machine-made commodities from England and lack of purchasing power of the potential buyers within. The indigenous entrepreneurship could not develop in the frame-work of colonial market forces and this inevitably caused a crisis in the agrarian economy. Maximisation of revenue from the landed proprietors inevitably led to increase in land rent from the ryots with the conversion of different types of produce rent into money rent, a factor which compelled the producers to pass into the grip of the usurious money-lenders. They mostly belonged to a relatively affluent middle peasantry in the rural society. Investment of inputs for land improvements through construction of roads and canals enhanced land prices leading to resettlement of taxation structure which accelerated the process of land alienation. The small land-holders lost control over
improved land holdings which they made cultivable by their labour, paving the way for land consolidation by the emergent class of relatively affluent land farmers. This ultimately gave rise to a class of prosperous middle peasantry undertaking capitalist farming and consolidating holdings for developing cash crop market-oriented cultivation. The present study would examine to what extent this premise is applicable in the case of the two districts of south-west Bengal.

This process of the rise of a section of rich peasantry, in turn, swelled the ranks of landless peasantry. The process inevitably developed lease-hold tenures out of denuding forests and by bringing uncultivable lands under agriculture at the periphery of the sparsely populated village areas by the emerging occupancy ryots. The pauperisation of the lowest rung of the peasantry, rather than depeasantisation of the primary cultivators due to favourable land-man ratio, in these two districts in the agrarian economy led to two phenomena - one, change in the demographic picture consequent on short-term seasonal migratory movements of peasantry and cultivation work force in search of increased income to the periphery of the village. The other was the urbanisation process which gave rise to a relatively affluent educated middle class who maintained close links with, and sometimes emerged out of, the segment of the agrarian middle peasantry for accelerating the process of societal change.2
This change in the agrarian scene calls for a look at the changing picture of land and its people in the historical perspective, and the causative factors for the peasant resistance movements in this first opening chapter.

The chapter is proposed to be closed with an evaluation of the successive peasant resistance movements which compelled the Company Raj to make administrative rearrangements out of which the modern two districts of Bankura and Midnapore emerged.

1. **Land and its people:**

It appears from a close examination that this area, as noted earlier, falls under three natural divisions. In north and north-west it embraces a portion of the eastern fringe of Chhotonagpur plateau and consists of a hard laterite formation. Persistence of subsistence economy and lack of agricultural expansion, coupled with maximisation of revenue pressure, led to sporadic peasant unrest in this region.

The dense sal forests covered the plains and made possible guerrilla warfare in the forest uplands. The south-eastern portion of this region, termed as nimki mahals (salt tracts), had been formed out of alluvial deposits borne down by the Ganga, Kansai, Subarnarekha and other tributaries. Rich agricultural products of this region attracted from the earliest centuries population movements from the hilly
uplands for settlement in this region. On the south and south-west is a maritime tract subject to tidal waves, which developed into a large salt producing region in the eighteenth century.

a) **Climate**: The south-west Bengal enjoys tropical climate characterised by an oppressively hot summer, high humidity nearly all the year round and well-distributed rainfall during the monsoon months. The cold weather starts from about the middle of November and lasts till the end of February. The south-west monsoon occurs from June to September. The climate factor is the singular determining factor for the prosperity or otherwise in the agricultural process of the region.

b) **Temperature**: The climate of the region influenced the working condition of the labour force and temperature fluctuations discouraged productive capacity of its inhabitants. Temperature starts rising rapidly in this region from the beginning of March. The summer heat is particularly oppressive due to the high moisture content in the air. Occasionally the maximum temperature rises to about 47° or 48°C (116.6° - 118.4°F). There is a welcome relief from the humid heat when thunder showers occur. With the onset of south-west monsoon by about the first week of June, the day temperature drops appreciably but
the night temperature continues to remain high. Because of oppressive humidity, the weaver class felt often very uncomfortable in pursuing their craft during the monsoon season, specially between successive spells of rain. The monsoon withdraws early in October when temperature begins to fall. The drop in night temperature is more marked from about the middle of November. December is the coldest month of the region with a mean daily minimum temperature of 10° to 12°C (53.6° to 55.4°F).

c) Rainfall: The average annual rainfall in the districts is 1303.7 mm (51.33"), while that during the monsoon months (June to September) constitutes about 78 percent of the annual precipitation and July and August are the wettest months. The following table shows the variation of rainfall in this area. The northern area of Midnapore and the whole of Bankura region are drought-prone areas which compelled the peasantry to fall back upon one crop cultivation process without any retative food production system all the year round.

Table No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of District</th>
<th>1896-97</th>
<th>1897-98</th>
<th>1898-99</th>
<th>1899-1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>48.35&quot;</td>
<td>57.45&quot;</td>
<td>60.39&quot;</td>
<td>55.96&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>58.27&quot;</td>
<td>49.89&quot;</td>
<td>55.98&quot;</td>
<td>73.27&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Administration Report of Bengal, 1896-97 to 1900-1901, relevant pages.
d) Forest Resources: Forest areas covered about 20.4 percent of the total area of this region. This percentage is lower than what was indicated in the National Forest Policy of 1952, namely 25 per cent of plains and 50 per cent of the hills. However, the quality of forest resources deteriorated to such an extent due to deforestation policy undertaken over a long period by the private owners that it lost considerably its value both in terms of direct benefit like production of timber, fodder and fuel, as also in indirect benefits like conditioning the climate and conservation of soil and moisture against erosion of soil. In general, the upland hill slopes and ridges are forest-clad while the low-lying areas and the gentle slopes with a deep cover of soil have been brought under the plough. The forests are distributed more or less evenly throughout these districts except north-eastern parts. Throughout the nineteenth century, with increased capital investment in cultivation process through irrigation, road construction and land improvements, land price of cultivable areas had considerably increased. This in turn led to alienation of land from the poor peasantry with small holdings and encouraged their migratory movements, both seasonal and perennial, towards forest lands. Thus, large-scale exploitation of forest resources at the periphery of
villages continued throughout the century. The successive land-settlements, beginning from 1850, confirm the process of large scale deforestation with corresponding increase in the area brought under plough. Paradoxical as it may seem, the crop yield did not increase proportionately thereby, because of the poor yielding capacity of the soil which, according to the survey and settlement reports of Midnapore and Bankura and also Gazetteer literature, stood at 10 mds per bigha in absence of proper input in land by the pauperised peasantry, who were on the constant move from the densely populated areas of the villages to the periphery of forest lands through short term leasehold tenures.

Minerals: The region in north Bankura, particularly contiguous to Bihar, was rich in mineral resources. Coal mines were situated in the extreme north of the region, and china clay was found at several places of Bankura. But exploitation of these minerals, burning coal, was not possible before the forties of the nineteenth century. The initial tempo of coal extraction was dampened due to exploration of coal with large ash content. With the introduction of railways in the twentieth century, extraction of coal in the Ranigunj belt got a momentum. As a result, this thinly-populated area turned to be densely populated, alluring dispossessed cultivators of the neighbouring districts to settle down.
in the mining districts and encouraging seasonal labour movements in the last half of the nineteenth century. In course of time this seasonal migration of cultivators accelerated cultivation expansion in the mining area and permanent residence resulted from both mining extraction and crop cultivation. The same process could also be found in the nimki mahals (salt tracts) of south Midnapore. Decline of salt manufacturing in south Midnapore encouraged settlement of seasonal migratory molungies in the khalary (salt-producing) lands where both salt production and crop cultivation continued simultaneously drawing heavily the population of the neighbouring villages. Thus, land alienation through the mechanics of property making gave rise to seasonal migratory movements of labour together with cultivation expansion in the new areas opened up for cultivation by the migratory peasantry. This was possible for the favourable land-man ratio where alienation of land holdings did not give rise to dispossession from the holdings altogether. Thus, as contended earlier, the process of pauperisation rather than that of depeasantisation of the primary producers could be found in this region.

f) Demographic Picture: A study of population would make it clear that its concentration tended to be more in south-western tracts rich in rice production and salt-producing low land areas. The following table shows the population estimate in sq. mile in the beginning of the nineteenth century.
Table No. 2
Population Estimate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Size of the area in sq.mile</th>
<th>Population in 1822</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jungle Mahals</td>
<td>6,990</td>
<td>1,394,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>8,260</td>
<td>1,914,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Great Britain House of Commons, Appendix to the Third Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons and the Minutes of Evidence on the Affairs of the East India Company, 17 February to 6 October, 1831.

An idea of the density of population can be had from the various sources which would explain the concentration of population towards south-western direction in the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, the processes like large-scale land alienation, together with the expansion of cultivation process, enhancement of marketability of land and its produce also encouraged migratory movements and brought more swampy, forest and cultivable land under the plough. That led to new settlements of land and upward mobility of caste groups under the pressure of property making, producing change in the demographic picture of the region.

With the rise of government expenditure in canal and embankment constructions, more investments in hospitals, education and public works which would be discussed in the
second chapter, yielding capacity of land improved. This, in turn, tempted the peasantry to come under the clutches of a segment of relatively affluent middle peasantry who, in turn, could divest the small holder poor peasantry of the ownership over their holdings. Thus a continuous process of more investment, more alienation of ownership from holdings and opening up of new cultivable areas continued along with the seasonal and perennial migratory movements in North Bankura and South Midnapore.

Table No. 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1813-22</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ibid

In the twentieth century the process of cultivation expansion was accelerated which could be studied from the following table.

Table No. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total cropped area (in acres)</th>
<th>Area irrigated from Govt. canals (in acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904-05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>88,944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>1,931,700</td>
<td>85,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>1,873,200</td>
<td>51,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>2,304,900</td>
<td>69,031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

g) Food Pattern: The nineteenth century ended the process of multi-crop production tending towards monoculture. This tendency was both the cause and effect of the decline in village crafts leading to the sectoral imbalance in the agrarian economy. Rice was the main crop of the districts and occupied about 90% of the net cropped area. The winter paddy was grown throughout the districts while the summer paddy grew in relatively higher land in the west. The cultivators also raised pulses and oil seeds in plots around their homestead for local consumption only in the two districts near the river banks of the Silai, Kasai and the Darkeswar. Potatoes and vegetables were produced in good quantity on the river banks and the canal embankments on the riparian lands south of the Damodar. Maize was mostly grown in Bankura and north Midnapore on lands adjoining dwelling houses. Sugarcane was usually cultivated on the banks of canals with facilities of irrigation in north Midnapore and parts of south Bankura. This crop, however, requires careful attention which includes frequent manuring and constant irrigation. It is thus that while plantation economy developed in north and east Bengal, in Midnapore and Bankura neither jute cultivation nor any other cash crop except rice and a small quantity of pulses and sugarcane could develop due mainly to paucity of irrigation facilities and inadequate rainfall.
This perpetuated the traditional subsistence economy under monoculture instead of year-long multiple cropping and thereby put a physical constraint to an industrial growth of the region.

h) River System: The principal rivers of this region flow from north-west and west to south and south-east. They are mainly hill streams arising from western uplands and having a seasonal flow of water during and after rain in the west. In summer they mostly dry up while during the rainy season heavy downpour in the uplands led to heavy inundation in the catchment areas. With the end of rainy season water subsides gradually. With the onset of summer the channels, specially the smaller rivers, are reduced to arid beds of sand. Most of the ancient and modern urban habitations are constituted on the bank of the rivers as without sufficient water primary need of the people could not be fulfilled. From the eighteenth century onwards the river system of this area was used as an easy means of transport and internal trade developed through the maritime tracts having terminating points in Tamralipta, Gaunkali, Khajuri, Haldia and other ports in south Midnapore. The most important feature of the modern civilization is to enhance productivity by irrigating the cultivable lands from the river water and the process of urbanisation started through these river systems.
The Hooghly river nowhere intersects the south west Bengal and flows along its eastern side. The Rupnarayan taking water from Dalkisor or Darkeawar and Silai join the Hooghly on the eastern side of this region. Tributary rivers of Haldi are Kasai (Kangsabati) and Kapaleaswari which have much influence in this region. The Subarnarekha enters this region on the north-west and passes through the south-west of Jhargram subdivision intersecting Gopiballavpur thana and through Balasore of Orissa falls in the Bay of Bengal. Upto the nineteenth century almost all these rivers had a significant role to play in trade and commerce as all these rivers were navigable. From an early period canals and embankments were constructed for irrigation purposes. To make the process remunerative the government undertook elaborate measures of canal construction and embankment maintenance since 1802 which would be discussed at great length in chapter two. Consequently, the ryots were protected to some extent from recurrent droughts and floods by the control of flood water. These embankments, however, obstructed natural drainage system of the soil leading to spread of tropical diseases.

The topographical features of this region have had both uncongenial and beneficial effects on the life of the people. They made the people regional but patriotic. The fertility
of the soil (particularly in the south and south-east), excessive moisture in the atmosphere and river system made possible better cultivation, since the peasantry depended heavily on river system for both irrigation and navigation. But the north and north-west with forest-infested hilly uplands, interspersed with drought-prone uncultivable virgin soil was inhibited by peasantised tribal ethnic groups. With the dawn of the nineteenth century these peasantised tribal groups, named chuars, thundered against the revenue experiments of the Company Raj which spelt economic ruin to the upper segment of the agrarian society and brought in a schism between the upper and the newly-settled middle segment of the peasantry. Recent research studies on the economic history of Bengal have neglected to study a separate historical development and ethnic homogeneity of the region. This study seems to be necessary to explain why land-man ratio has always brought about mutual dependence between the landed proprietors, ryots and sub-tenant occupancy share croppers effective means of cultivation in this region and why peasant movements had socialistic overtones rather than a communal colour, which was a significant factor in the land relations in east Bengal.

2. **Historical background of the people**: South-west Bengal, comprising mainly these two districts, is situated in a cross-section of two cultural streams of Indo-Aryan and native aboriginal elements. Stray references in the Vedic literature
and unearthed archaeological remains near the Susunia hills, in the coastal belt of Tamralipta and in the river beds of the Kasai and Subarnarekha proved beyond doubt that racial migration took place along the river valleys and the coastline of south-west Bengal.  

In the historic period contemporary literature throws light on the life of the inhabitants. The ancient port of Tamralipta, known to be a stronghold of the Kaibartas, a fishing and maritime caste, was mentioned in the Vaisnavya Sambita (Yajurveda) as Kaibartas who may be the same as the 'Kevatas' of Asokan Pillar Edict. A segment of the population of the frontier Bengal belonged to the Santal community. Both Dalton and Risley had analysed the life and religion of this people and for the worship of the cult 'Marangburu' even identified them to be a sun and hill worshipping community like many other pre-historic tribes of the ancient world. Many of their social institutions might have been later absorbed into the Hindu social ritual system. Next to them rank the Coras, the Lodhas and the Mundas. The Santals and the Mahalis speak, more or less, a similar dialect. The Santals and the Mundas mainly work as agriculturists or agricultural labourers. The Coras also depend on agriculture and work as day labour. The economy of the Mahalis revolves round basket-making and agriculture. The Lodhas were predominantly food gatherers, mainly depending on the exploitation of
forest produce, supplemented by catching of snakes and hunting. But when the local forest tracts went into the possession of the Rajas (kings) or the Zamindars (landlords) they became practically homeless and took to criminal activities.

There are the Koles who mainly practised agriculture and the Kakmaras or crow-killers, to whom the flesh of the crow is a treat. These peasantised tribals are a nomadic community and never practised agriculture of any type. But those tribals in the eighteenth century were peasantised, lived in the periphery of villages and served as labour force of the upper segment of the agricultural community as an integral part of the cultivation process. Sometimes they cleared marshy lands and forest tracts on behalf of their higher caste landlords and actually cultivated parcels of land-holdings borrowing plough, spades, even cattle and seeds from their masters on terms of temporary leasehold tenures and on the basis of produce rents. But the grinding chariot of maximisation of rent divested them not only of the borrowed agricultural implements but also of the leasehold tenures which they themselves had made cultivable. It would be wrong to discover a picture of discord and tension between the peasantised tribal labour force and the affluent middle peasantry in the frontier Bengal, a picture which is easily discernible in north Bengal. On the other hand, a picture of mutual dependence and an endeavour to control each other could be found.
In the aboriginal sub-stratum there are a good number of untouchables like the Dom (Scavengers), Hadis (sweepers), etc., mainly artisans and craftsmen based on bamboo, forest logs, copper, iron implements, forest animal skins, clay and stone potteries. They are outside the four-tiered 'varnashrama' of the Hindu social hierarchy. In the rural areas there are other lower caste Hindus, subjected to a lot of social injustice and disabilities. They are Bagdis, Baurias, and washerman castes. Besides these communities clean Sudras, Moira (confectioners), Napit (barbers) and blacksmith, Malakar (flowerists), Swarnakar (goldsmith) and Kumar (potters) are considered to be artisans, who extended their services to the Hinduised upper caste land-holders and got service price in produce, non-taxable land for cultivation and social privileges in return.

Other dominating caste groups of this area were the Karanas, Mahisyas, and Sadgops. Most of them were land-holding communities and this segment of the relatively affluent middle peasantry cultivated their lands as permanent (thandi) ryots on 'mauresi mokarari' (Permanent Settlement) basis actually made culturable by peasantised tribals for them. They were consequently prosperous, ambitious and imbibed the social value of generosity since many of the welfare works in this region were the result of generous contribution of these caste groups. The Karanas claimed the
statue of Kayasthas of Radha in the social hierarchy although their descendants migrated from Orissa during the imperial Ganga and Gajpati rule in Bengal. In social customs they continued to follow the ways of life in Orissa. The Rajus and Khandaits are also originated from Orissa but in the nineteenth century they increasingly identified themselves with the urbanised upper segments of the society in frontier Bengal. The Brahmans were dominated by the Utkal group, and strengthened by the Rarhi group, they claimed themselves as the Deccan Vaidik class in contradistinction to Kanyakubja progeny. They emerged as professionals and agents of the local government machinery. Their descendants also came to this region along with other land-owning communities to function as priests and completed the process of Hinduisation. In return, they became landed proprietors resuming opened up and cultivable landed estates under the Raj.

In this typical four-fold hierarchical division, the kshatriya (warrior) group did not have a place, but a few kshatriya/karanikas (scribes) sometimes claimed the status of the second tier in the caste hierarchy. The village community thus took a heterogenous character, dominated by the Utkala Brahmans and of other land-holding castes like the Mahisyas and Kaibartas. The peasantised tribals were pauperised, sometimes landless, holding temporary lease-hold
tenures on share-cropping basis. In the village-like tiny republics, maintaining traditional conventions for generations, this peasantised community of Hinduised tribals and the upper caste property makers lived in close proximity with one another. They maintained mutual dependence coloured by labour exploitation through the mechanics of property making. This ultimately introduced an element simultaneously of mutual dependence and discord, a process of social love-hate relationship which coloured the freedom movement of the twentieth century frontier Bengal.

a) Process of peasantisation of tribal ethnic groups:

The genesis of tribal unrest lay in the historical transformation of the tribals into the peaceful cultivators till they felt their position threatened, consequent on the crisis engulfing the agrarian economy in the eighteenth century frontier Bengal and contiguous Orissa and Bihar. The tribal transformation had three stages of development: First, the sixteenth century witnessed the process of integration of non-cultivating tribal population within the large Hindu community, a process which is generally termed as the process of 'Sanskritisation'. The decline of Gupta empire led to state formation of the tribals, upward mobility of the lower castes, attainment of political power within the Hindu caste hierarchy and of the right to ritual services of the Brahmins,
sanctification of the claim of the warrior castes to their descent from the Karnata Khatriyas and later on from the Rajputs when the Muslim invasion started.

The second phase marks the peasantisation of the tribals with the expansion of wet rice cultivation through the feudal market forces and the process of socio-ethnic integration within the ritualistic caste hierarchy through the Hinduization process as a cementing force within the multiple of ethnic groups. Since the sixteenth century the tribal kshatriyas championed Hinduism as a slogan against the Muslim taxation extortion and strove to protect their tribal exclusiveness with emphasis on tribal Vaisnava identity against the combined fiscal oppression of the Muslim and Maratha rulers. In the third phase, with the introduction of British rule in the eighteenth century the private property concept knocked down the remnants of communal mode of production. The increased export of agrarian and forest produce demanded by the larger capitalist market forces started the process of pauperisation of the tribal peasantry.

The present study will reveal that the resistance unrest of the tribals was, in fact, a protest against the colonial market economy for regaining their unhistorical and unattainable golden past, where no taxation or oppressive
state machinery was in existence. This idea developed a hatred against the 'dikus' (foreigners) as an organic instrument of change in their imperceptible social dynamics. The millenial dream for the revival of the rural bliss was, however, common in every agricultural society during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In some cases a fanatical belief in a mythical 'golden age' stimulated the tribal peasantry to strive for a society devoid of alien tax collectors, large land owners and officials. But this utopian concept also prompted them to protect the inherited feudal privileges of the peasantised tribals over land holdings. They were not opposed to the Raj not because of their military superiority but because they were alien god-send white men to protect them from the exploitation of native but alien 'dikus', a wide spread belief prevalent even in the Garjat areas of contiguous Orissa and Bihar.

But these movements were not in any way directed against the traditional landed gentry, whose ancestors emerged from the tribal leadership and also from the upper caste property holders from Orissa and Radha (frontier Bengal). This segment of the landed gentry exploited the surplus labour of the community to further their individual profit motive collaborating with the emerging capitalistic market forces. The revolts are the vocal expression of defensive mechanism.
of a society in transition through protest unrest against a superimposed state machinery which brought immediate economic misery and threatened the position of property makers and land captains. This unrest, in fact, epitomised protest against the process of modernisation of life style threatening traditional values and mores of life. 18

b) Emergence of political units with Bhum-suffix:

The process of peasantisation of tribals was associated with the phenomenon of emergence of political and ethnic units with Bhum-suffix. Since the fifteenth century with the expansion of rice cultivation, as has been noticed earlier, state formation took place simultaneously with the process of peasantisation of the tribals. This led to the Hinduisation of the tribal society with the upward mobility of castes while states with Bhum-suffix emerged in this area. 19

The period between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries marked a transition in the religious and literary fields as rapid change came in the society based on agrarian economy, crafts based on bamboo and cotton. Feudalisation in the administrative machinery, decline in the oceanic trade and shrinkage in money circulation brought an end to the self-sustained politico-economic units in the villages in the shape of council of five elders and the village chief, the 'gramikas' or the 'graminis'. The village panchayats, however, remained
only to conduct socio-religious functions. But the period witnessed the assertion of rights and privileges of the village-level state organs in terms of revenue collectors of the absentee sovereign. This gave rise to dual leadership in the village society, the village panchayat on the one hand and the sovereign's revenue collectors on the other.

This process of duality synchronised with the emergence of the glory of the popular cults of Rankini, Basuli and other Hinduised tribal deities absorbed from the tribal Tantrik cults. The temporal leadership was taken sometimes by the traditional Pahans, Manjhis or Singhs and at other times by the village-level royal personages coming from outside the village units like the Tungas, the Barahas, and the Manas who mainly migrated from Orissa and settled down as popular leaders in the Bhum-ending tracts of the Jungle Mahals. Sometimes it led to revolt under the leadership of the traditional armed retainers of the village chiefs belonging to the Mahisya and Kaibarta caste groups against the financial extortion of the military bureaucrats of Hindu imperialism from Orissa in the Tamluk and Contai Subdivisions of Midnapore, as depicted in the Mangal epics.

In this critical moment of political anarchy the inhabitants of the Bhum-ending tracts succeeded in having their own monarchs with the backing of the traditional religious leaders consisting of neo-brahmins and worshippers of the mystic popular cults.
Some scholars think that the tribals of this region were being absorbed into the Hindu social organisation. The Hindu mode of absorption was spelt out by N.K. Bose in terms of their integration into economic organisation of the caste hierarchy. But there were very few elements of Hinduism in this mode of absorption. That the south west Bengal developed political and ethnic homogeneity with the adjoining forest tracts was attested to by the existence of tiny principalities with Bhum-suffix covering an area of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The emergence and growth of Bhum tracts from the stray literary evidences testify to the fact that the origin of some of the forest tracts with Bhum-suffix goes back to a much earlier period than the fifteenth century.

Blochmann is inclined to regard the Bhum-ending territories as a single block of land. His argument is not without truth. The Antiquities of the Bhum countries go back to the sixth century A.D. During the Pala period the appearance of other territorial names ending in Bhum-suffix suggests that the original Bhum countries broke up into different political units each of which perhaps was owned by a variety of local chiefs.

At a later period marked by the rise of Vaisnavism, various literary sources dealing chiefly with the cult of popular Vaisnavism indicate that two powerful Bhum countries, Mallabhum and Bhanjabhum, had emerged into considerable political eminence. New and small units like Tungabhum, Darabhum,
Brahmanbhum and Adityabhum were absorbed into one or the other units leading to extension of power of the two powerful principal Bhum countries and this polarisation of power seems to have taken place during the survey and settlement in the early Mughal period. The Aina-i-Akbari refers to different parganas of the Jaleswar Sarkar three of which were Bhanjabhum, Brahmanbhum and Dwarshorbhum. From James Grant’s analysis it is evident that Murshid Quli settled his revenue arrangements in ‘Jumma Kameil Tummari’ with the Rajas of Bhuban, Mallabhum and Panchet. But there is no mention of the other numerous small forest and salt tracts in the Fifth Report which noted the earlier revenue settlements in Bengal.

Some scholars like Surajit Sinha have explained the process of state formation in Central India which includes the Jungle Mahals. Kumar Suresh Sing elaborated the central theme of Sanskritization, the process of upward mobility of the tribal ruling communities in the state formation in south west Bengal Presidency. The Santhals and non-Hindu tribal communities put on the sacred thread and claimed the status of Khatriyas. The kings claimed themselves to be the descendants of the Rajputs of Central India. Under the Mughal rule the trend of Sanskritization encompassed tribes and non-tribes even in the Jungle Mahals. This tendency obtained an added momentum with the colonization and establishment of settlements (Bhums) by peasant castes who were encouraged by the Mughal rulers to reclaim dry lands of the Jungle Mahals. They offered
various incentives to the migrant peasantry from the neighbouring provinces of Orissa and Bihar. Thus, the emergence of Bhum tracts coincided with the extension of improved method of cultivation and immigration of population to the Jungle tracts of south-west Bengal from the neighbouring provinces of Orissa and Bihar in the pre-colonial period. 30

3. Mughal Rule : The process of peasantisation completed:

The economic structure changed during the Mughal period ushering in societal change since the sixteenth century. On the eve of the Muslim invasion rigid caste institutions, based on socio-economic hierarchy, weakened the imperial superstructures both of the Senas of Bengal and the Gajapatis of Orissa despite social reform measures undertaken by them. But, Vaisnavism, as propounded by Chaitanya, had a unifying force in the south-west Bengal. It stimulated the cultural life of 'Radha-chuara', synchronising with the polarisation of power among the Bhum tracts leading to the emergence of Bhanjabhum and Mallabhum to predominance. It gave a socio-political cohesion in the Jungle and the Nimki Mahals attaching new values to the role of individual in society and heralded the concept of individual ownership over landed property.

The process of the decline of the agrarian economy in the region started during the Mughal rule and not with the establishment of the East India Company's Government. The so-called land settlement of Anangabhimagdeva, illustrated in the Madla Panji,
which was followed by Todar Mal's rent roll, testified to the fact that the monarch had to assign half of the territorial possessions for the support of his administrative chiefs, army personnel and the Brahmins. The feudalisation of the economy encouraged the process of pauperisation of the peasantised tribals and swelled the number of landless labourers who could only get compensation in shifting cultivation and reclamation of non-revenue paying forest lands. Thus, the process of pauperisation of the primary producers was a perennial feature in the southwest Bengal. The Muslim land settlements since the sixteenth century, following the Hindu mode of absorption, accelerated the migratory movements of population towards the non-cultivable forest tracts in the Bhuma-ending region. Migration was considered to be an escape route from being tortured through exorbitant tax-exactions and forced labour of both Hindu and Muslim rulers and their Hindu tax collectors.

Drain of wealth started with the extension of Mughal rule in this region but not towards the capitals of Orissa or Bengal. It was shifted towards Delhi via Bengal but not via Orissa. The ryots and artisans got back negligible amount as the price of agrarian products and crafts sold in the market for utilisation of the court, army and the alien bureaucracy. The community and state ownerships over land and water gradually gave way to the individual ownership over property, which caused misery to the peasantised tribals at the periphery of villages as explained in the Bengali literature by Kabikaakan Mukundaram and Ghanaram Chakraborty. A large amount of bullion went to
the royal exchequer as land tax. The feudal Jungle chiefs could augment their income by intensifying their economic exploitation over the peasantry through imposition of abwabs and religious taxes imposing extra levies over the wealthy sections of the Hindu population and through daylight plunder of temples and the rich Hindu palaces. The Muslim rulers left untouched the Hindu revenue system of Orissa in the south-west Bengal.

The Mughal rule in the south-west Bengal completed the process of peasantisation but sowed the seeds of pauperisation of the tribal-Hindu peasantry. The kings, 'Besoi', 'Naik' and other feudal tribal 'sardars' (chiefs), in the role of liaison agents between the peasant community and the Mughal sovereign, took the responsibility of establishing market places or 'Gunjes' for ensuring safety of the merchant caravans. The chiefs in different strata of the social hierarchy asserted individual ownership over property. This process started in motion a tendency of consolidating individual landholdings in the community's agricultural operations. Simultaneously, it led to the enhancement of their tax-paying capacity. During the declining days of the Mughal rule the process of pauperisation of the tillers of the soil started with the extension of rice cultivation over the settled and resumed land holdings through exploitation of unpaid subsistence labour. This led to abandonment of cultivation in these areas and consequent shrinkage in production. The short Maratha rule between 1751 and 1803 in Orissa and parts of Midnapore and the recurrent Bargir invasion
in the south-west Bengal caused a steep rise in the volume of gross taxation and other irregular impositions through invasions and plunders and the consequent abandonment of fallow lands and loss of production in the agricultural operations resulting in man-made famines.33

During the late eighteenth century the state machinery demanded payment of revenue in cash from traditional land magnets for military necessities, mainly in south and western India although payment of feudal dues by the ryots in both produce and services remained unchanged. The peasantised tribal leaders increasingly shifted the incidence of money rent on to the tillers of the soil and to the daily labourers holding land as share-croppers and occupancy ryots. The system of shifting cultivation aggravated the ever worsening economic climate of the destitute peasantry already on the brink of subsistence level since the seventeenth century. The unequal barter system and arbitrary price fixation by the outside merchants ate away the saving capacity of the subsistence peasantry. This complex socio-economic development of automatic expansion and shrinkage in the agricultural operations threatened by natural and man-made calamities resulted in tribal conflicts against the dikus who were despised as aliens and vanguards of corruption through manoeuvred money-lending in the late eighteenth century.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, when the Mughal empire was disintegrating, the economic condition of
the class of upcountry merchants like Khemchand and Chintaman Shah and later on Bhairam Gopal Das, Sambhu Bharati and Udipuri Gossain and a host of money-lending bankers and Gossain merchants became still more vulnerable and precarious. There were signs of peasant resistance against the exorbitant demands of the tax collectors and farmers of revenue which naturally assumed a religious garb. The peasantised tribal community in the Bhum tracts were being constantly threatened by different categories of feudal lords who were always in need of credit facilities from the money-lenders for internecine warfare in order to repay their loans. Thus credit network by the indigenous bankers and internecine warfare between the landholders was rolling in a vicious circle which very often took the garb of tribal unrest in the early eighteenth century. 34

Against this backdrop of socio-economic crisis escape routes were sought in two directions, first, through internecine warfare among the tribal states for bringing more land under cultivation. The Calendars of Persian correspondence and the British records despatched from the neighbouring provinces of Orissa and Bihar are replete with reports of internecine warfare among the tribal chiefs. The latter invariably plundered the booty of neighbours like cattle, grain and even womenfolk for extending their means of production. 35 The second escape route against the excessive state demands and those of the merchant money-lenders were defensive, that is,
working through the religious rituals of Meriah and buffalo sacrifices. This was more evident in the Garjat areas of Orissa as well as in the Chhotanagpur region of the then south west Bengal. Increasingly new cults, magic and rituals were sanctified as typical examples of defensive mechanism of the tribal community against unexplained man-made economic exploitation coupled with the vagaries of nature on their self-contained but stagnant life style.

There was also a third defensive device. Under the guise of continuous military preparedness to resist the monetary exploitation and daylight plunder of the Maratha bargs and neighbouring militia of the tribal leaders, the Jungle chiefs were always ready to plunder the half-ripened harvest of their neighbours. Invariably before the beginning of the crop-cutting season, the tribal peasantry, after having harvested their own crops, took refuge in the inaccessible hills and forest fastnesses and launched for plunder of the harvest, cattle and cultivable implements of their unprepared neighbours before the harvesting was undertaken in full swing. When the British military operations were started by Fergusson for revenue settlement some of these tribal chiefs like those of Jhargram, Ramgarh and Lalgarh accepted ungrudgingly the superior military might of England as God-send, while the leadership of the tribal peasantry was helpless to protect their very existence against the plundering hordes of their neighbours and Maratha bargs from the Pataspur region of Midnapore and Orissa.
Advent of the East India Company's Rule:

The battle of Plassey (1757) is considered as the year of foundation of the East India Company's Raj in Bengal. In 1760, the Company became the Zamindar of Midnapore, a district seething with agrarian discontent since the beginning of the eighteenth century which reached its climacteric point after 1760. Those revolts have been characterised as resistance movements against the Raj, the first national war of independence, baronial resistance of feudal chiefs against the capitalist rulers and the violent response of the aboriginal bandit tribes against the intrusion of Hindu culture. An objective analysis of the socio-economic forces at work would show that these characterisations are off the right track. The colonial rule ended the relative isolation of the tribal society, brought it into the main stream of the new Europeanised administrative set-up and put an end to the political dominance of tribal chiefs, already peasantised and Hinduised, in these forest and salt tracts. The colonial system, as elsewhere in India, followed the dual policy of weakening the feudal crust of tribal societies introducing imperceptibly the capitalist mode of land settlements and rent structure, and simultaneously creating conditions in which their Hinduised feudal economy and political system were undermined by the rampaging capitalist market forces.

Following Ascoli the British period in the south-west Bengal in the eighteenth century may be divided into three phases.
The first phase, terminating with the famine of 1770, was one of territorial expansion and hesitation in revenue settlement by the Company Raj. Since 1773, with the promulgation of Regulating Act in the period of experiments, the farming system was introduced in the revenue administration. In 1785, Warren Hastings left India and Lord Cornwallis introduced Permanent Settlement in the third phase with determination. The inherent defects in the Decennial Settlements, characterised by maximisation of revenue and land rents, financially ruined the traditional landed aristocrats and impoverished the tillers of the soil. It reached the point of climax in the Chuar Revolts of 1798-99 when the Company resumed non-revenue paying lands but could not re-established the age-old law and order system. The revolts, as would be discussed in subsequent sections, may be analysed in five distinct phases in the six different locations of these two districts. In the 'sixties and 'seventies, the movement was mainly concentrated in Dhalbhum area, the second phase in the 'eighties was called Mandal revolt. The third phase, called by J C Price as Chuar revolt in Karnagarh mainly belongs to the nineties. The fourth phase is associated with Bogri parganas. The last phase was called Ganganarayan Hangama or the Bhumij revolt by J C Jha. In 1805 the Company Raj created the district of Jungle Mahals but ultimately the district was parcelled out among the neighbouring districts in 1833.
The challenge of revenue experiments and restoration of the British legal system was felt in the Jungle and Nimki Mahals in two ways. First, the land system in the tribal areas was integrated within the broad spectrum of Hinduised land tenure system inherited from a hoary past. The tribal but Hinduised chiefs in the forest tracts were legalised as the zamindars (landlords) of the resumed landed estates. This recognition had once been accorded to them by the Mughal rulers. Thus the institution of village headmen (monds and sardars = in Oriya 'Mund' means head), leaders of the tribal communities, was endowed with the ownership of the reclaimed community holdings. The most striking feature of this period was the breakdown of the community mode of production and recognition of the private right in land by completing the process of peasantisation of the tribals.

The second development was the accelerated activities within the tribal economy of the capitalist market forces. The colonial system demanded the introduction of money currency in the non-money economies to pay land revenue, rents and other impositions of the British Raj and to buy the necessities of cultivation for generating marketable agrarian products while keeping the producers under subsistence level. This picture in the south-west Bengal was sharply different from that of east Bengal where the plantation economy and commercial agriculture intensified capitalist exploitation leading to the depeasantisation of primary producers.
The Company's Government was confronted with several interconnected questions after the assumption of the zamindary rights of Midnapore and the adjacent parganas in 1760. These were, how effectively the land revenue could be collected and how to find out the real owner of the soil. The economic relation between the revenue receiver, proprietor of the soil and the primary producer also needed to be investigated into. The other problem was how the Company's Government would be able to establish direct relation with the primary producers by eliminating intermediaries from the cultivation process. In dealing with these questions, the Company's Government had to face three types of difficulties. The Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta had his own difficulties, the European collectors in the Company's service had their own, while Indian collectors of revenue, i.e., zamindars and farmers in their estates, had to face the tendency of maximisation of revenue which was beyond the yielding capacity of the soil. Thus, a commercial company had been called upon to draw up regulations for revenue collection regarding which they had little experience. This issue was made more complicated by the multiplicity of local customs, standard of measures, weights and currency. There was also a growing suspicion in the mind of the revenue officers that the revenue agencies, established by the Mughal government, were deliberately working to deceive the Company. Consequently, the Company's government could not finalise within two decades as to how the land revenue could be collected from the ryots and whether the proprietary right of zamindars would be recognised over their estates.
This indécision to reach a final land revenue settlement by the Company's higher and local officers led to rack-renting in the Jungle Mahals, which gave rise to protest from the Indian collectors of revenue, i.e., the zamindars and farmers, in the changed political environment after 1761. The zamindars were disallowed to collect extra taxes other than land tax. The non-revenue paying lands were resumed and the rate of land settlement enhanced with each zamindar to meet the pressing demands from England and the heavy expenses of war in India. Johnston, the first Resident at Midnapore, was required to protect the commercial interest of the Company. He was also to administer criminal justice. His duties ranged from revenue settlement to the expulsion of gangs of robbers from the district. In 1764, Anselm Beamount succeeded Burdett as Resident. He pleaded for grant of lease to the zamindars for a term of years instead of an annual settlement. The next Resident, Hugh Watts, was in favour of making annual rent settlement with the ryots. Graham, during his tenure at Midnapore, proposed settlement of land revenue by resuming waste land. The net result was the enhancement of, and uniformity in, revenue settlement but the introduction of new coinage proved detrimental to the revenue payers. The traditional zamindars, apprehensive of increased jumna (revenue), always tried to win over the Kanungoes (land record keepers) by giving them farms at a reduced rate of rent. The opinion for the abolition of the office of Kanungoes was respected but their position was restored in 1774 with reduced authority. 46
After the grant of Diwani in 1765, the Company was obliged to undertake the task of maintaining law and order in and around old Midnapore against the Maratha incursions, of safeguarding the Company's interest in the salt tracts and of bringing the zamindars of the Jungle Mahals, covering north Midnapore and the present Bankura district, under proper control. Lieutenant Fergusson set out with a contingent of army to settle the annual revenue with the traditional landed proprietors. The zamindars of Kalianpur and Pulkusuma accepted Fergusson's land settlement. The zamindar of Jhargram played for time and then submitted. The zamindar of Jambani submitted without resistance. The zamindars of Sankacolia (means in Oriya broken bangla), Lalgarh and Ramgarh agreed to enhance revenue as shown in the following table:

Table No. 5
Fergusson's Settlement of Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paid formerly</th>
<th>Parganas</th>
<th>Net Settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - S - Rs</td>
<td></td>
<td>A - S - Rs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126-6-0</td>
<td>Ramgarh</td>
<td>616-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sankacolia</td>
<td>879-11-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-15-10</td>
<td>Jambani</td>
<td>616-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238-11-15</td>
<td>Jath huni</td>
<td>703-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jhargram</td>
<td>400-11-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3215-6-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: B S Das, Changing Profile of the Frontier Bengal, Delhi, 1984, pp. 75-76; Civil Rebellion in the Frontier Bengal, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 37-38; Fergusson to Graham, 11 February, 1767.
Revenue settlement with the zamindars of jungle-infested north Midnapore was finalised and the Residents came to terms with the landed proprietors of Supur and Ambicanagar in modern Bankura as shown in the table below:

Table No. 6
Fergusson's Settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parganas</th>
<th>Annual revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alla. Sicca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supur</td>
<td>54 - 0 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambicanagar</td>
<td>311 - 0 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barabhum</td>
<td>441 - 0 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manbhum</td>
<td>316 - 0 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatna</td>
<td>879 - 11 - 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 2496 - 11 - 0


Fergusson succeeded in bringing the landed proprietors under the Bishnupur estate to submission and making them a part of Midnapore chakla. The collection of Bishnupur was entrusted to one Gulam Mustapha by Md. Reza Khan in April, 1769 and revenue was fixed at about S.R. 280, 501 by 1769-70 despite the prevailing drought and famine conditions.
It took not less than twenty years for the Company's officers to realise that the revenue settlement in the Jungle Mahals, including Bishnupur, had been over-assessed in terms of yielding capacity of the soil. Strangely though, they could not understand why the zamindars of Ghatsila, Mayurbhanj, Bogri, Barabhum and Singbhum protested against the Company's assessment and challenged their authority. The recorded instances show that those Jungle zamindars had a secret understanding among themselves to defy the British rule once at a time. Some of the zamindars, like those of Barabhum and Chhatna, refused to pay revenue and took shelter in the dense forests but the Raja of Dhalbhum proved to be the most refractory and made preparations to resist the Company's revenue settlement. 47

After the resumption of non-rental (nankar) lands with the actual cultivators of the soil, these Chuar paiks (chuara = land rats living on the produce of the soil) found themselves overnight competing with the peaceful settled thani and pahi ryots for their subsistence. Towards the end of 1769, the Chuars living between the Parganas of Dhalbhum and Barabhum, between Panchet and Patkum in the north and Singbhum on the south-west, were led by Subla Singh, the Jagirdar of Koilapal, Jagannath Patra, sardar of Dompara and Samgunjan (may be Samgan Jena), the sardar of Dhadka, and voiced resentment against forcible rent collection from their ryots through new thnasildars by Lt. Noon and Capt. Forbes.
The Chuar sardars maintained Paik militia of three categories: (1) Paharias who carried large shields and khandā swords to guard the fortress, (2) Banua who used match locks and (3) the Dhenkiyas who had some match-locks but depended mainly on bows, poisonous arrows and Khāndā swords. The Company’s troops were well equipped and organised, although helpless in unhealthy climate and incongenial geographical locations which spelt havoc on the health of the Company’s troops protected by match-locks and guns. Pearce, the collector, persuaded the Raja of Mayurbhanj and the Bhonsle of Nagpur to keep the zamindars of Kuchang and Bamanghati in the Maratha-dominated Orissa in good humour and marched punitive expeditions against the reluctant sardar rebels. Lt. Goodyer undertook military expedition which, as the Company Raj later realised, called for permanent and annual engagements from fixed outposts.

These military skirmishes, enhancement of revenue, forcible resumption of non-revenue paying holdings, steep rise in rent of the settled ryots, replacement of cowrie currency by the scarce copper and silver currency, recurrent drought and famine conditions and hoarding of crops by the corn-dealers and money-lenders (mahajans) to sell them at a price beyond the purchasing power of the ryots resulted in the severe famine of 1769-70 and the consequent depopulation in the rural south-west Bengal in 1771 as spelt by Hunter.
In the mid-eighteenth century the net result of military operations undertaken successively by the Nawab's troops, Maratha bargirs and the Company's battalions, accompanied by economic drain in the shape of revenue exactions and natural calamities, was to make the forest and salt tracts a land of poverty and famine. The agricultural labourers died in alarming number and fled to the Maratha districts of Orissa with the expectation of cheap corn and non-revenue paying lands. This was the time when the Company decided to stand forth as the Diwan of Bengal Suba and to introduce five years' farming system in 1772.

Consequently, it enhanced the volume of revenue pressure and affected the settlements of Bishnupur, Birbhum and Panchet. The Raja of Bishnupur became the farmer. Bishnupur, Panchet and Birbhum were placed within the jurisdiction of the provincial council of Burdwan which was abolished in 1781 and British collectors were appointed in the district. The Regulating Act of 1773 reorganised the judiciary to protect the benefits of new land settlement for the traditional landed proprietors. In practice, however, the interest of the traditional proprietors was overlooked and ways and means were devised for the entry of a class of urban new rich of farmers in the land settlement. But friction between the judiciary and revenue departments over the question of jurisdiction on the zamindars culminated in the Kasijora case of 1779-80.

The Company decided to let out the lands to the revenue farmers for a period of five years. The farmers were not
recognised as owner of the soil but considered only as tax collectors. New adventurers, coming from the urban areas as vakils and tahasildars, looked for only a temporary profit, subjected the cultivators to every kind of exaction disrespecting the authority of the zamindars and as such defaulted in paying the promised revenue in time. The land estates were thus turned into a commodity to be auctioned and mortgaged. In many areas of the Jungle and Nimki (salt tracts) Mahals, however, the zamindars themselves were converted into farmers and some were converted to be kutkinadars under the farmers who generally lent them money for revenue payments.

With the negation of the hereditary right of the zamindars over the soil, the problem of repairing and maintaining embankments came to the forefront. The Company's government was slow to take over the responsibility. For drought and inundation sometimes remissions were granted but it was a long-drawn process. The aim of the Company to protect the interest of the ryots failed and the policy of maximisation of revenue was the logical corollary to that of rent. The confusion and corruption bred anarchy and the five years' farming system resulted in increased lawlessness in rural Bengal. The age-old arrangement of maintaining law and order by the local zamindars ended with the confiscation of Nankar (non-revenue paying and non-rental) lands.

Since the sixties of the eighteenth century the Jungle Mahals represented a picture of anarchy and unrest. The economic condition
of the primary producers became tormenting. Utmost oppression was practised in the collection of zamindar's demand by his tax-agents. It was alleged that families, ruined by famine, were dispossessed by revenue agents and then depended mainly on robbery. The official letters of correspondence contained graphic picture of disturbances which took place after 1780. In the midst of disturbances Hastings returned to England and Cornwallis followed the policy of centralisation with determination to solve the agrarian problems of Midnapore and Jungle Mahals. In 1786 Bishnupur and Birbhum were erected into separate collectorships but in 1787 the two were amalgamated for administrative economy. But serious disturbances took place when the Raja of Bishnupur was imprisoned for arrears of land revenue. Bishnupur and Birbhum witnessed complete suspension of the British rule. Similar was the case of Bogri and other estates in Midnapore where the peasant resistance movements, generally termed as Chuar revolts, were led by the disbanded paik militia of the zamindars.

In this background three subsequent phases of peasant movements may be discussed of which the first occurred between 1787-89. The economic historians described the revolts of 1787-89 as the Mandal revolt of Birbhum, north Bankura and Bishnupur against the revision of the Rent Roll in the Birbhum estate following the increase in revenue assessment by Collector Keating. The revenue revision had a pernicious effect on rent fixation. The pahi-kasht cultivators were hard hit by this resettlement since they could not compensate their enhanced rent
over their settled holdings unless they could open up the uncultivable jungles for temporary 'toila' cultivation. Thus it had a chain reaction over the whole agrarian economy of Birbhum, north Midnapore and Bankura.51

The next phase of the peasant protest movement of 1799 was titled by J C Price as the Chuar rebellion of the Jungle Mahals which covered an wide area and taxed equally the modern economic historians and the Company's government in the nineteenth century to analyse its causes and effects. The result was the formation of the Jungle Mahal district by Regulation XVII of 1805 which continued up to 1833. The third phase which started in Bogri Pargana in 1806, was marked by Naik revolt led by Achal Singh, naik or paik52 leaders of the dispossessed Raja Chuttar (=Chhatra) Singh of Bogri. In the last phase of 1832 the Munimij Revolt took place at Barabhum following personal enmity between two tribal peasant leaders, Ganga Narayan Singh and Madhab Singh which culminated in murder of the latter. In 1833 the Kolhan areas of Chhotonagpur rose in revolt more or less simultaneously. A change of administration was decided upon by Regulation XIII of 1833, the Jungle Mahal district was abolished and the greater part of it was formed into the districts of Bankura and Manbhum.

6. Peasant Resistance Movements:
   a) Changing agrarian relations:

   The peasant movements of the last half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the product of the changing
agrarian relations which followed the emergence of the British Raj in the eighteenth century. The introduction of British rule led to large-scale alienation of cultivable land from the ownership of actual cultivators. This process reached its climax after 1760 because of the phenomena of (a) maximisation of revenue producing maximisation of rent, (b) frequent natural calamities owing to the failure of the Raj to adopt remedial measures, previously adopted by the landed proprietors and naibs, (c) usurious credit system spread by the village-level corn-dealing mahajans, and (d) short-term and seasonal migratory movements of ryots to the low revenue paying areas. But the British inherited some phenomena responsible for impoverishing the economy of south-west Bengal since the beginning of Muslim rule. The factors were: (a) neglect of multifarious agricultural operations, (b) maximisation of revenue leading to enhanced gross land rent, (c) inability of artisans to take to land as a source of sustenance after the lose of family trade, (d) impoverished state of trade units to merchants remaining under constant political threat of the naibs.

To these inherent problems the British rule contributed its share which accelerated the process of pauperisation. For the causation of the Chuar revolt these aspects of the political economy changing agrarian relations may be studied. One of the remarkable features of the early British rule in the Jungle Mahals was maximisation of revenue through annual land
settlements and military operations. The net collection of revenue in 1767-68 had increased by 12% compared to the last sixty years of the Muslim rule and it was further increased by 25% between 1770 and 1805. In 1799 the tempo of maximisation of revenue was temporarily stalled but it reached a new height after 1830. The maximisation of revenue was sought to be justified, since the government expenditure in civil administration and works of public utility had increased and the restoration of law and order in the countryside created a congenial economic environment to enhance the cultivation process. But that the supposed peasant's prosperity was illusory, was proved by the recurrence of natural and man-made scarcities arising out of famine conditions throughout the period of the present study.

It is generally believed that the maximisation of revenue made the native zamindars defaulters leading to the purchase of zamindary estates by the new rich of Calcutta. Eric Stokes believed that the emergence of land market in India was a direct consequence of development of new proprietary right in land. As the Company Raj was determined to explore the maximum yielding capacity of the estates, the hereditary zamindars always found themselves defaulters when 75% of the holdings were non-revenue paying and the maximisation of rent over the permanent settled ryots led to desertion of rent paying holdings, leaving the land fallow and thus creating famine conditions. But auction purchase of landed estates did
not lead to eviction of zamindars from the estates. They remained under possession as kutkinadars, sometimes they were replaced by their near relations giving rise to family feuds and sometimes by their naibs and lawyers in benami transactions who made illegal collusion among them. With the operation of sale laws the defaulting estates were auctioned at Midnapore collectorate, allowing mainly money speculating lawyers and the Company's gomasthas and amlas to purchase these estates as highest bidders. Instances are there of estates changing ownership from the hands of hereditary zamindars to those of their crafty naibs and lawyers who collusively auctioned the estates.

But it would be wrong to say that the entry of new speculative farmers and the new urban rich marked the ruin of traditional native landed aristocracy. True, the new zamindars were mostly non-agriculturists, mainly interested in getting quick return through the control of their estates. But as most of them were amlas and lawyers, they were looked down upon as imposters by the cultivators and settled ryots as well as by the non-revenue paying land-holders attached to the zamindary establishments. Thus, these new farmers of revenue would not realise maximum rent of the resumed land from the settled ryots who, for fear of large-scale plunder of holdings by the Chuar sardars, had to flee with their half-rope produce to the hill tops and forest fortresses. This temporary desertion of holdings
ultimately made them defaulters in rent payments. These are instances of passive resistance of the ryots compelling the Company Raj to return the estate to the traditional Rajas.

The maximisation of revenue led automatically to maximisation of land rents. But there was a limit to maximise collection of both produce and money rents in terms of yielding capacity of the soil beyond which rent could not be collected for fear of desertion of cultivation process by the laborious thani (permanent) ryots. Beyond the yielding capacity of the soil holdings also could not be settled with a pahi ryot even on temporary leasehold tenure for fear that the land might remain fallow resulting in non-collection of rent, thus accelerating famine conditions and making the zamindars defaulters. Thus, the traditional zamindars in the Jungle Mahals attached to the estates could not enhance rent collection even from the settled ryots for fear of becoming defaulters in revenue payment and consequently running the risk of being evicted from their estates.

The phenomena of large-scale distress sales arising out of eviction from holdings and resumption of service tenures led to pauperisation, but not to depeasantisation, of ryots since the ownership of holdings changed hands but the peasants continued to cultivate as pahi ryots of the holdings they sold. The resumption of service-tenure made the position of the tenure-holders deplorable because in many cases by distress sale they were converted into pahi ryots with inferior title on the holdings they possessed. As tenants at will
they had either to agree to the terms of the zamindar or to migrate to other estates or villages where they could secure better terms by opening new cultivable lands. This process, starting from the period of chuar revolts, reached a climacteric point by 1859. In north Bankura, where mining areas opened up by the thirties, and also in south and south east Midnapore, where salt production diminished by the fifties of the nineteenth century, the question of dispossession from holdings became out of the question because of mutual dependence of the ryots and rent receivers.55

The years preceding the Permanent Settlement were in many ways a period of transition which witnessed the consolidation of the British grip over south-west Bengal.56 It witnessed the gradual Europeanisation of the administrative machinery and enhancement of magisterial power of the District Collectors. But that could not ensure peace in the countryside. The principle of 'local police, local responsibility' was abandoned and the arrangements for making zamindars responsible for law and order, remained in cold storage. As no definite thanadary system was evolved between 1770 and 1785, the rampant gang robbery could not be checked causing army deployment in the lawless areas. The pre-Permanent Settlement period witnessed the increasing recognition of the zamindars' right over the soil but not over its fruits.
The post-Permanent Settlement period witnessed fast decline not only in the status of the propertied classes but of the primary producers as well. This was the background against which the peasant resistance movements may be studied. The revolts were partly a protest against the stringent sale laws by which the traditional as well as the new adventurous absentee talukdars were wiped out. Moreover, the policy of the government to resume non-revenue paying lands spelt economic ruin to the traditional big estate holders and also to their non-rental land holding armed retainers termed as naik or paik sardars. Thus, the introduction of two principles that the zamindari tenures are liable to sale for arrears of jumma and resumption of non-revenue paying lands which touched the position of the general agricultural community, was the main source of social discontent of the period. This was, of course, early detected by the government with the result that in 1800 the land holders of the Jungle Mahals were vested with the joint charge of the police of their respective estates in concert with the darogahs appointed under Regulation XXII of 1793. They were required to be on guard against the chuar resistance which might suspend rent collection from their resumed paikan lands. The Chuar revolt of 1799, like the paik disturbances of the previous decades, took place under the leadership of the naiks or paik sardars who belonged traditionally to a military caste and were for generations considered as land captains responsible for opening new cultivable land and procuring produce rents for the estate holders. They were supported by the peasants who had so long tilled small holdings on behalf of these paiks without rent. But due to rent settlement now they were subjected to the new system of taxation.
b) Mandal Revolt:

The second phase of the revolt is generally called the Mandal revolt covering the districts of Bankura, north Midnapore and Birbhum. In July, 1787, the Mandals (headman = mands in Orissa) assembled a number of ryots and incited them to an insurrection vowing that they would not submit to the 'Jumma bundy' (revenue and rent settlements). The Government threatened the zamindar of Bishnupur with dispossessing of his estate if the amount of his revenue balance was not paid within three days. In October, 1788 the unrestrained insurgents, mainly paik chuars, long enjoying non-revenue paying lands but now dispossessed of them by the direct cultivators with implements, ransacked the treasury. In February 1789, the hill men and dispossessed landless chuars, broke through the cordon of outposts en masse and created panic in the neighbourhood. Keating was compelled to call out troops and he recruited a militia of settled ryots to act with the regulars equipped with firearms. The peaceful settled cultivators also joined the dispossessed and disgruntled chuars, since they had to bear the brunt of incidence of heavy land rent and usurious credit exploitation. In November 1789, the position of the Government became precarious. Rajnagar fell into the hands of rebels. Bishnupur and Birbhum witnessed complete suspension of the British rule. From 1790, the Company's diplomacy proved successful. To save harvest pahikasht ryots stood against the dispossessed rebels, since they were lured to become owner, of their temporary lease-hold tenures. Bands of
infuriated settled peasants fell upon the rebels dispossessed of service-tenure and co-ordinated with the civil government to restore law and order. According to Hunter's estimate, the amount of property destroyed during the period of insurrection was worth £70,000 sterling, about ten times the value of the then rupee. The revolt also spread to the adjoining areas of Panchet.

c) Third phase of Chuar Revolt:

In 1795, Nilambar Mitra, a Calcutta merchant, bought the zamindary right of Barabhum and Panchet with a token sum but the landed proprietors prayed in vain the cancellation of the sale. In 1798, Government tahasildars could not collect a single paisa as land tax from the ryots. Lal Singh, the sardar of Satarkhani, took the leadership of the revolt at Barabhum. In modern Bankura district there were mainly two centres of Chuar revolt. In Bishnupur proper, the revolt originated out of long-standing grievances. Recorded instances reveal that the pargana of Bishnupur was over-assessed. Samuel Davis, the collector of Burdwan, persuaded the Board of Revenue that as the assessment in the Decennial Settlement of Bishnupur was over-rated, a second thought would be given. But the Board ordered the sale of the estate and sent a seizawal (auctioneer) to attach the estate. The successors of Chaitanya Singh with a band of armed paiks refused entry to the seizawal and began to issue 'Brahmottar' and 'Devottar' (religious grants) grants in respect of disputed lands for making them rent-free with a wishful thinking that the volume of revenue assessment would
be lessened. Burgess, the Collector, recommended immediate attachment of lakheraj grants which only rekindled armed insurrection against the Government tahasildars as well against the pahi-kasht ryots. Eventually, in 1806, the ancestral estate of Bishnupur was sold for arrears of revenue by the Government and bought up by the Raja of Burdwan.

The chunar rebellion also took place in the estates of Raipur and Bogri which were held by Durjan Singh on a semi-permanent lease. On failure to clear his revenue he was imprisoned. He appealed to the Diwani Adalat against the Government notification but again he failed to clear his dues. In concert with the Raja of Dhalbhum and Bogri, he prevented the entry of the Government tax collector and rejected new settlement of lands with the actual cultivators of the soil. His estate was ultimately purchased by one Hiralal, who failed to collect rent from the ryots. Frustrated by the rebels with the total stoppage of tax collection, the Government persuaded Hiralal to relinquish the estate to Durjan Singh.

Renewed troubles started in Bogri by Chuttar (Chhatra) Singh, Sundarnarayan in Fulkusuma and Fateh Singh, the eldest son of Durjan Singh, in Raipur, the collector of Midnapore convinced of the necessity of coming to terms with the rebel zamindars. Around Midnapore the paiks assembled in full strength in Bahadurpur, Salbani and Karnagarh. The local officers showed utter helplessness in suppressing the violence. In July 1798,
about 400 paiks under Govardhan Dikpati, a bagdi leader of pargana Bogri, appeared in Chandrakona and took possession of the town. Revenue collection by the government tahasildars was thoroughly suspended. Troubles started in Kasijora and reports of frequent skirmish with the Sepoys in Basudevpur of pargana Tamlook reached the district headquarters. Krishna Bhanja, the ijaradar of tupa Bahadurpur (6 miles west of Midnapore), was murdered by the rebels. Salbani was plundered and its surbarakar Bhaktaram was murdered. The peaceful ryots fled to Anandapur thana for protection. An Amin Ram Chakravorty, deputed to make a 'jumma bundy' of Salbani and the adjoining villages, was surrounded by the rebels and he had to escape to protect his life. In 1799 the troubles in Jungle Mahals alarmed the authorities at Calcutta, who could realise that the collection of rents would have to be suspended until the revolt was completely crushed.

The Rani of Karnagarh was kept under house-arrest. The tahasildars of Balarampur thana were in danger of life as communication was cut off and there was large scale immigration of peaceful ryots. The darogahs of Raipur, Silda, Sathpathi and Manbhum were dismissed as they appeared to have left their station. To disperse the rebels new regiments were brought. Despite these active measures throughout the year of 1799 the paik insurrection continued unabated. The rebel chiefs (sardars) like Lal Singh, Durjan Singh and Mohan Singh were arrested. In 1800 the strength of the chuar paiks was
considerably decimated and remission of revenue granted. The zamindars of Jungle Mahals were armed with power to maintain peace in the locality and stringent sale laws were suspended temporarily. Blunt, the Magistrate, suggested the annexation of the Jungle estate of Raipur to the revenue unit of modern Bankura as measures of security against periodical inroads. He even proposed that the zamindar of Burdwan might be induced to relinquish his right in the land of the Senapati Mahals to remove the difficulty of collecting revenue from the dispossessed tenants. A general amnesty for all political offenders was declared. 61 Even then the defiant chuars were not completely crushed. In the years 1806 and 1809, as official correspondence shows, some chuars, depending on the defiant peace-breaking elements in the peasantry, assembled in the Jungle estate for committing depredations but they were dispersed by the thanadars and newly-emerged affluent middle peasant resistance. 62

In this historical background a new Jungle Mahal district was created under a Magistrate by the regulation XVIII of 1805. Two military outposts were stationed at Jhalda and Raghunathpur to assist the civil government in emergency. The zamindars with their armed retainers were entrusted with police duties. But that could not also completely crush the revolt of the defiant dispossessed peasantry in Midnapore and the adjacent Jungle Mahals till the Jungle Mahal district was abolished in 1833 and Bankura as a separate revenue collecting unit came into existence under the south-west Frontier Agency and was
ultimately included with in Burdwan only to be created a separate
district in the seventies of the nineteenth century.

d) Fourth phase : Naik Revolt of Bogri:

The paiks (consisting of early nomadic but now peasantised
tribes or the low caste Hindus, i.e., chuars) became the major
irritant to break the British law and order system, when the
Company's Raj had been trying hard to maintain peace on the
ashes of the main chuar rebellion of 1798-1800. Thus after the
temporary suppression of the rebellion of 1799, there was a confla-
ration in the Bogri pargana in 1806, under the leadership of
Achal Singh, which covered the northern portion of the district.
This was called the Naik Revolt.

It has already been noticed that even after the voluntary
surrender of Raja Chutter Singh of Bogri, the resumed estate
was never restored to him, except the tarap (Tarf) Behala which
was predominantly a non-revenue paying estate. Thus Bogri Raj
had been deprived of the right of enjoying his revenue paying
property and, in course of the Naik revolt also, the Nankar
Behala mouza was taken away from Raja Chutter Singh by the
Company's Government (1806-16), on the plea of his failure to
resume non-revenue paying estate and for neglecting regular
remittance. The Bogri pargana was at first leased out to the
farmer Dhananjoy Roy. As he defaulted to remit enhanced revenue,
it was auctioned in favour of Raghunath Basu, a benamdar of
Kanak Singh. On his failure to remit revenue, the Collector of
Burdwan resold the mauza in auction to one Ramnarayan Mallick,
a benamdar of Durga Charan Mukherjee in 1206 B.S.
After Durga Charan's death his son Sambhu Charan agreed to remit the enhanced revenue through the Mallicks till 1816 when the zamindari Company of M/S. Robert and Watson bought the whole pargana from the Mukherjees and Mallicks and continued revenue collection till 1903 and leased out the whole estate to numerous pattanidars in the early years of the twentieth century. These traditional land-holders held these lands parcelled out in numerous non-revenue paying estates or parganas as their fixed jagirs awarded by the Bogri Raj, who was entitled to get active assistance for service of these Layeks or Naiks sardars as soldiers or paiks under his authority. When the Bogri mouza as a whole had been taken away from the Raja and was ultimately transferred to other farmers. The naik sardar Achal Singh, under the title of the Bogri Raj, was forced to take up arms, since the Raja and the peasantised people of Bogri had common grievances against the British rulers which caused the general uprising in Bogri.

Hamilton has given a vivid description of the Naik Revolt of Bogri in this passage: "Although within sixty miles of Calcutta, upto 1816, owing to peculiar local obstacles, the authority of the Government had never been firmly established in the tract. In Bogri the leaders of the chuars continued to act as if they had been independent of the Government and endeavoured to maintain their predominance by the most obvious act of rapine, and frequently the murder of the individuals in revenge for having given evidence against them........... every attempt to establish an efficient police having failed, it
became necessary to concentrate the powers usually vested in different local authorities in one functionary, under the immediate direction of the Governor-General, which was accordingly done and Mr. Oakley departed to execute the arduous commission. 67

Raja Chuttar (Chhatra) Singh tried to regain his lost estate by arresting and handing over Achal Singh to the Government who sentenced him to death. Chuttar Singh fondly hoped that his conciliatory policy would induce the government to restore Bogri in his favour, but unfortunately he was arrested and departed to Hoogly in 1816 for trial. There he remained imprisoned till 1823. There was no proof available to substantiate the charge of his contumacy with the rebels brought against him. 68 Even during his confinement the Company forced the Raja to give up the residue of his revenue-free hereditary property by a deed of relinquishment and for this an annual pension of Rs. 600/- was granted to him. This was payable in monthly instalments of Rs. 500/- and that was reduced to one half as regards his selected heir, when Chutter Singh was in prison. Chutter Singh also by a Hebanamah (deed of relinquishment) nominated Man Mohan Singh (daughter's son) as his successor. 70

The Naiks of Bogri again revolted against the government's enhancement of rent of resumed land. In 1823 the old imprisoned infirm Raja of Bogri, Chattrra Singh, submitted an ekramnamah (agreement of promise) to the Company's government. 71 Bhadra Risa was the ying leader of the rebels and Ajit Singh, the adopted son of Chutter Singh, was able to kill Bhadra Risa and managed
to receive a certificate of loyalty and monetary reward. Thus ended the fourth phase of so-called Naik Rebellion of Bogri.

4) Fifth phase: Ganganarayan Hangama:

In 1832 the peace of the newly-born district of Jungle Mahals was broken as the disturbances, known as Ganga Narayan Hangama broke out. In the preceding century, Raja Balak Narayan died leaving two sons, Raghunath and Lachman Singh. The latter, though younger, was the son by the elder Pat Rani and as such he claimed to succeed his paternal throne. His claim was, however, rejected and he was driven out. Since he continued to make efforts to wrest the estate from his brother, he was apprehended and later died in Midnapore jail. On Raghunath's death in 1798, an exactly similar dispute arose between his sons Ganga Govinda and Madhab Singh, which was decided after lengthy litigation by the Sadr Diwani Adalat in favour of the former, the eldest son. Madhab Singh settled his difference with his brother and became his Diwan but, unfortunately for himself, put himself in direct opposition to Ganga Narayan Singh, son of the uncle Lachman Singh, who maintained his father's feuds against the other.

Madhab deprived Ganga Narayan of Pancha Sardari, the largest of the Ghatwali Tarfs, which had been formerly held by Lachman prior to his arrest and death. Diwan Madhab appears to have made himself unpopular by imposing additional rents on the holders of different ghats and a general house tax or ghartaki throughout the estate. Over and above this, he went extensively into money-lending business at usurious rates and made full use of the
court butchery (collectorate) and his official position to exact
the utmost payments from his debtors. These oppressive measures
resulted in his murder on 2 April, 1832, by Ganga Narayan Singh
who came upon him with a large force of ghatwali paiks from
Panchasardari and Satrakhani while he was checking his store
of grains in an outlying village. Madhab was seized and taken
to a small hill near Bamni and there he was deliberately
murdered by Ganga Narayan himself. The latter, though he struck
the first blow, insisted on every Ghatwal peasant shooting an
arrow into the victim's body, ensuring thereby their continued
co-operation with him, all being equally implicated in the
murder. With a large body of ghatwals thus attached to him,
Ganga Narayan proceeded to grab the whole estate and, on 1 May,
marched on Barabazar where the Munsiff's butchery was attacked,
the bazar was plundered and the zamindar forced to concede all
Ganga Narayan's demands including the surrender of taffe Pancha
Sardari as also his Kharposh or subsistence grant.

On the following day, Ganga Narayan burnt down the Munsiff's
and Salt darogah's butcheries and the police thana. On 14 May
he attacked, with a force of three thousand chuars, the troops
brought up by Russell, the Magistrate. The latter tried to
reason with the insurgents, but an essential condition of the
parleys being the surrender of the murderers of Madhab Singh,
the negotiation failed. Between 4 and 6 June, the whole of the
Government force had to retreat to Bankura leaving Barabhum in the
undisturbed possession of Ganga Narayan. A lull followed but, as the
rice crop had been planted in August, Ganga Narayan collected his
followers again and proceeded to plunder the estate, Akro, Ambikanagar, Raipur, Shyamsundarpur and Phulkuma to the east of Barabhum which now formed a part of modern Bankura district. The Bhumi of these areas as well as of Silda (now in Midnapore) and Kailapal for the most part joined the insurgents and the whole countryside was in turmoil until the end of November. When the 34th Regiment of Native infantry reached Raipur, Ganga Narayan had already retired through Dhalbhum to Dhadka and later Baridih, from which places expeditions were sent out by him to Gokulnagar and Pucha.

The operation would have probably extended further north into Panchet but for the arrival of Braddak and Lt. Trimmer with a force of sepoys and barakandazes. They succeeded in repelling an attack made on them by Ganga Narayan at Chakultore, a few miles south of Purulia. Braddak's force then reoccupied Barabazar, a thana was established at Balarampur and the intervening country was held in force and further incursion to the north was prevented. In November Dent assumed charge of Chakultore and offered a free pardon to all concerned in the disturbance except Ganga Narayan himself and ten leading Sardars. As the offer bore no fruit, Dent proceeded to launch a simultaneous attack on the night of 16 November on Bandhadih, Ganga Narayan's headquarters, as also on Baridih and Bhorui, those of two other leaders, all of which were successful. During the following months elaborate military expeditions were undertaken. Small detachments were sent out in all directions through the hilly
country to break up, destroy and secure the surrender of the recently disorganised forces of Ganga Narayan, who had retired into Singbhum with some of his followers and then met with death in attempting to establish among the Kols his reputation as a military leader by attacking a strong post held by Thakurda, the chieftain of Kharsawan. With Ganga Narayan’s death the disturbances came to an end and order was quickly restored.

As a consequence of the Ganga Narayan Hangama it was decided to change the administrative pattern of the Jungle Mahal district. Regulation XIII of 1833 provided for the separation of certain tracts included in the districts of Ramgarh, Jungle Mahals and Midnapore, from these districts and for placing them under an officer designated as the agent to the Governor-General. So far as a Jungle Mahal district was concerned, all the Mahals in that district, except Senpahari, Shergarh and Bishnupur, were included in the newly formed administrative unit, termed as the South West Frontier Agency and placed under an Agent to the Governor-General, Senpahari, Shergarh and Bishnupur were merged with the district of Burdwan. The agent to the Governor-General was to remain in charge of administration of civil and criminal justice, superintendence of police, collection of land revenue, customs, abgari, stamp duty and war branch of the Government, within the South-West Frontier Agency. The Court of Diwani Adalat was abolished and appeals against the decisions of the Agent and his assistants in civil suits were to lie with the Sadr Diwani Adalat in Calcutta.74
7. **Historical Significance of Peasant Movements**

Attempts have been made by historians to explain the chuar and paik revolts as rebellions of the paiks directed against 'the maladministration of British officials and native subordinates'. They rose as a body against the British. They had suffered the most on account of the short-sighted policy of the government. Since 1761 in the South-West Bengal Presidency a series of peasant resistance movements took place. There were the revolts of the jungle zamindars in 1765-73, Chuar Revolt of 1798-99, Khurda Revolt of 1817, Ganga Narayan Hangama and Kol unrest of 1833, Santhal rebellion of 1856, revolt of Surendra Sai of Sambalpur and sporadic revolts of the Gonds and khands in the Garhjat areas of Orissa throughout the middle of the nineteenth century.

All these resistance movements were undertaken by the old zamindari militia of the paiks because the British revenue experiments led to resumption of their paikan lands resulting in their loss of social status and financial privileges in the agrarian society. The revolts were, no doubt, popular as the general population lent support to these resistance movements. It would be tempting to compare these movements with the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58 or to analyse these revolts as the first spark of national liberation movement of India. Like the Sepoy rebels the Khurda paiks urged the reluctant Khurda Raja to lend his support to the movement. Like Surendra Sai of Sambalpur its leader Jagabandhu Vidyadhar, who in 1803 supported
the British annexation of Orissa to legalise his landed possessions forcibly occupied during the Matatha regime, turned national leader of the rebels when his possessions were sold out collusively by the Bengali speculator, Krishna Chandra Singh. In the Jungle Mahals also the Dhalbhum zamindar Jagannath Dhall or Rani Shiromani of Karnagarh turned to be popular leaders of the rebel paiks who were dispossessed of their non-revenue paying paikan lands and turned destitute paupers.

They resisted the British policy of resumption of paikan lands and committed atrocities against tax collectors and newly settled landholders. One may find echoes of the Khurda revolt (1817) in the resistance movements undertaken by the Larks Kols of Singbhum and Phumij unrest of Dhalbhum in the 1830's in South-West Bengal Presidency.

Expansion of the tribal settlements consequent on the population growth led to the intensification of exploitation of the state machinery over the tribal communities since the Mughal period. Introduction of money economy and development of trade and village level industries consequent on the Mughal revenue settlements led to the immigration of an urbanised non-agricultural population of Bengal and Orissa into these tribal societies. They introduced land revenue system of Bengal, new currency, weights, measures and money-lending business into their villages which unsettled their consolidated, monolithic tribal social organisation. The resistance against the invading system of exploitation of this urbanised entrepreneur mahajan class
found articulate expression when the British rule was extended to these regions during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Of course, some of them were Hindu Bengalees but not mohanty Brahmins of Orissa as contended by J C Jha. This is simply because mohantys belonged to karana caste group and the utkal brahnins were hereditary landed proprietors since the time of the imperial Ganga rulers who conquered these territories before the advent of Muslim rule in this region. But it would be an over-simplification to call the resistance movements as tribal protests against the Hinduisation policy of the Hindu Oriya and Bengalee invaders to their society.

The protest of Kols and Bhumij peoples, like those of Orissa, was a blow to the fast developing money-lending business conducted by the mahajans and other alien officials connected with the British bureaucracy. But the Kol insurrection of Chhotonagpur and the Bhumij revolt of Singbhum were the direct outcome of British revenue settlements which accelerated the process of both peasantisation of the tribals and pauperisation of the resident ryots and unsettled cultivators without implements and cultivable lands of their own. The Rajas, the Koonwars, Thakurs and other Baboos like the Raja of Khurda in Orissa, new revenue farmers under the revenue system of the Company, turned against the dispossessed resident ryots to enlist the British support against the landless cultivators.

The Kol sardars, the Munda tribal leaders and the naiks of the Bhumij people like the rulers of Bamanghati, Kol peers
and leaders like Ganga Narayan supplied leadership to the rebels. No doubt, like Jagabandhu Bidyadhar of Khurda or Surendra Sai of Sambalpur these sardars and naiks had their personal pecuniary interests. They wanted to revive the feudal privileges, which they had been enjoying during the declining days of the Mughal rule. With the powerful support of the militia cultivators they were expanding their taxable capital by encroaching upon the neighbouring revenue paying lands and conniving at converting the revenue-paying settled lands into non-revenue paying settled ghatwali lands. 81

In the ultimate analysis the colonial system bore harshly on the tribal communities who, with a sensitivity born out of isolation and with a relatively intact social mechanism of control, revolted more often with outrageous violence than any other peasant community in the eighteenth century agrarian India. The official records, scattered over a vast spectrum, refer to acts of depredations and so-called outbreaks of violence or uprising, the character of which has yet to be analysed.

The scholar would have to keep in mind the timeframe of these tribal unrest and peasant resistance movements because there is a tendency to regard all tribal movements as an integrated whole. As the structure of the tribal society responded to the changing administration, so too had the character of the regional revolts. But this unrest coincided with
the rise, expansion and consolidation of the British Raj in the
south-west Bengal and assumed the character of resistance movements. Resistance is inherent in all responses to challenge of the invading systems and production relations but during this phase of the British rule it was spontaneous, widespread and sporadic. The tribals played a dominant role, but by no means an exclusive role, in it; large sections of the non-tribals also joined hands, lending the movements the character of a regional upsurge. The movements were led by the traditional landed and military aristocracy who had been dispossessed of their property and were thrown out of their traditional occupations of maintenance of local law and order and rent collection by the new capitalist economy. These were resistance movements against the new classes of people who were inducted by the new land revenue system, government officials, landgrabbers and exploiters through money-lending and trade, all of whom were to be thrown out in a violent upsurge. This formulation was applied to all the resistance movements of the early nineteenth century in the south-west Bengal.  

It is equally tempting to equate these peasant uprisings with the peasant war in Germany of 1525 in order to emphasize the revolutionary significance of the movements following similar studies of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Marx described the German uprising as the most radical fact of German history. But the Jacquerie in France (1357), the peasant revolt by Watt Tylar in England (1381), the Hussite movement led by John Huss in
Bohemia (1419-37) and the peasant war in Germany (1525) took place in different social, economic and historical settings. These risings synchronised with the decline of feudalism in Europe and signalled the rise of a mercantile capitalist bourgeois society. Lenin also brought out the revolutionary significance of the peasant uprisings in Russia. The uprisings of Stephen Razin (1667-71) and those led by Pugachev (1773-75) were directed against the effective survival of feudalism and oppressive serfdom. In South-west Bengal Presidency, the socio-economic conditions were dissimilar and corresponded to a different stage of social development. Like the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64 in China, these uprisings took place in conditions of colonial domination. They were directed against the feudal anarchy of the period which was tied up with the colonialism of the western capitalism. These movements proved popular and radical to the extent that the revolts had anti-colonial and anti-feudal contents.

The British revenue experiments, resulting in the farming system and the Permanent Settlement, provoked not only popular discontent but also sharp criticism from the British philanthropists. For instance, Alexander Dow and Henry Pattullo criticised the agrarian policy of the Company’s Government and traced the decline of Bengal to the beginning of British rule which was equated with the Roman rule of Europe. Opponents of Warren Hastings like Philip Francis, advocates of laissez faire economies like Adam Smith and liberal historians like James Stuart Mill,
vehemently criticised the revenue experiments of the Company as a tyranny and misgovernment. But these philanthropists did never want the termination of British colonialism in the Bengal Presidency. It had been pointed out by the Marxist writers that they wanted to put an end to colonialism based on merchant capital and to inaugurate a new era of colonialism based on industrial capitalism. To them, short-term farming settlements were the manifestation of merchant capitalism, while Permanent Settlement was the victory of industrial capitalism in Great Britain which terminated the trade monopoly of East India Company in India in 1833.

Karl Marx pointed out that Permanent Settlement in the Bengal Presidency was no solution to colonial exploitation but the aim of the industrial capital was to convert feudal India into an economic appendage of industrial England. Marx noted that under the new arrangement there occurred 'the confiscation of ryot lands in favour of the zamindars', who acquired absolute power to exploit the labour power of the ryots. Under the Permanent Settlement, Marx observed, "conditions of the ryots were humbled and oppressed still more and the whole revenue system was thrown out of gear causing a whole series of local risings of ryots against the landlords". 85

It would appear that the psik and ghuar revolts were the peasant resistance movements against the new concept of rent collecting landlordism. This was the creation of the colonial
rule of Great Britain dictated by industrial capitalism which
spread its wings all the world over. Thus the paik rebellion
was a part of the long series of revolts which took place all
the world over against British capitalism.

But the question remains, were the Ghuar revolt of 1799,
the Khurda revolt of 1817 and the Bhumij and Kol unrest of
1830-32 conscious attempts of the disgruntled paiks to terminate
the colonial rule in the Jungle Mahals, Bihar and Orissa?
Like the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, these were essentially a militant
reaction of some disgruntled anarchical elements in the society
who could not have any idea of ushering in a new industrial
phase in the economic history of the Jungle Mahals and Orissa.
The movements were neither democratic nor widely popular and this
explains their easy suppression by the British bayonets. But
like all other peasant movements of the period, suppression of
the revolts terminated the feudal phase of the economy in
South-west Bengal Presidency and laid the foundation, however indire-
cctly, of a capitalist phase in the region. The Permanent Settlement
of 1793 in Bengal and the Mahalwari settlement of 1837 in Orissa
may be described as the capitalist device of a colonial ruling
machinery to introduce the norms of capitalism and British
finance capital in the agrarian sector of the south-west Bengal
and Orissa. This is a proposition which demands adequate
studies in the subsequent chapters.
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33. B.S. Das, Civil Rebellion in the Frontier Bengal, 1760-1806, pp. 137-147.

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35. ibid, pp. 114-15, CPC.


37. W.K. Firminger ed., Bengal District Records Midnapore, (1963-67), Vol. I, No. 150, In 1784 the Company's Government was obliged to reduce the Revenue at Rs. 3200/- (Com. of Rev. to Dynely, Calcutta, 2 August, 1784, Collector of Midnapore, to the Com. of Rev., 13 April, 1785).

38. CPC (Calendar of Persian Correspondence), V. No. 34, October 23, 1776, Select Committee Prog., 17 September 1761 (henceforth CPC).


43. (a) J.C. Price, *Chunar Rebellion, Appendix of Changing Profile of the Frontier Bengal* by B.S. Das, Delhi, 1983.


46. B.S. Das, ibid, pp. 20-23.

47. Fergusson to Graham, 16 February, 1767 (Midnapore Collectorate Bundle), (henceforth MC).


52. Probodh Chandra Sarkar, *Shalful*, (historical novel), December, 1897, Chapter 3 & 8.
54. B.S. Das, 'Chuar Revolt in Frontier Bengal', Agrarian Bengal under the Raj, Calcutta, 1986, pp.76-78.
60. Imhoff, The Collector of Midnapore to the Board of Revenue, 25 May, 1799 (M.C.).
61. Letter from Board of Revenue to Imhoff, 29 April, 1799, 4.9.18, October, 1799 M.C.
62. Hunt to Dowdeswell, 19 March, 1808 (M.C.).
63. Who was one of the rebel leaders of the first Chuar Rebellion of 1768-83, Photocopy of Amlanama in Appendix A.
65. ibid.


69. Persian Parwannah, April 1817, Appendix B.


71. Appendix D, Resolution, 22 July, 1817, by Vice President in Council (Judicial Dept.) (henceforth VPC).

72. Ekramama, 7 Kartik, 1230 BS, Appendix D.

73. Government order for release, 22 October, 1823, VP in C (Judicial Dept.), 22 July, 1811.

74. B.S. Das, *Changing Profile of the Frontier Bengali*, pp. 84-85.


80. J.C. Jha, The Bhumi Revolt, 1832-33, Delhi, 1967, p. 54.

81. Regulation XIII of 1833 was enforced with minor modifications, Wilkison to Tickell, 13 May, 1837, P.C. Roychoudhury, Singhbhum Old Records, Patna, 1958, p. 270.


85. Karl Marx, Notes in Indian History, New York, pp. 116-120.

86. Excellent Manographs on these aspects of Bengal's rural history are Ranjit Guha, A Rule of Property for Bengal, (Paris, 1963) and Sirajul Islam, The Permanent Settlement in Bengal : A Study of its Operation 1790-1819 (Bacca, 1979), Partha Chatterjee, Agrarian Structure in Pre-partition Bengal in A Sen et al, 6, IMD, p. 114.