

Colonial Administration and Changes in Traditional Patterns of Resource Use in the Tribal Region of Jaunsar-Bawar of Uttarakhand

Paper Submission: 04/04/2021, Date of Acceptance: 13/04/2021, Date of Publication: 25/04/2021

This paper discusses how, through its colonial apparatus, British colonial administration introduced significant changes in resource use and management in tribal area of Jaunsar-Bawar in particular and in India in general, even at the local level for their essential and commercial use. Environmental historians have drawn our attention into those territorial zones and Jaunsar-Bawar is one of them, where autonomous tribal and other forest communities with a nominal feudal control over them were subsisting in primary symbiotic relationship with the nature. Now historians have started studying forest dwelling communities along with, Agropastoral communities, who were otherwise remained exclusive domain of study for Anthropologist. In a newly emerging discipline of ethno-history the tribal and agropastoral studies have received their due attention. This paper will address into these issues in case of Himalayan tribal area of Jaunsar-Bawar of Uttarakhand.

This work attempts to revise the sources collected from the various records, reports, official or otherwise, which are collected from the National Archives and state archives. Help of reference books by the eminent scholars on the subject has been copiously taken.

Keywords: Jaunsar-Bawar, Colonial administration, Sayana, Thokdar, Customary law

Introduction

Indian historiography has focused its major attention for last few decades on peasant communities. This has increased our basic knowledge of rural society and has also put peasant history on stronger footing as an area of specialization. However, the phenomenon of conversion of tribal nomadic and pastoral communities in settled peasant communities, Colonization of their lands by outsiders and impact of colonial rule has received less attention than it deserved.

Jaunsar-Bawar is the hill tract of Himalayan ranges in the Dehradun district of Uttarakhand state. It's a triangular tract of mountains situated between Sirmour and Jubbal district of Himachal Pradesh and Tehri and Dehradun district of Uttarakhand. This tract is between latitude 30° 31', and Mt 51°, longitude 77° 46' and 78° 9'.

During British period Jaunsar-Bawar was the name of two parganas. The whole pargana is entirely composed of hills and mountains. According to major young and Frazer there was not a single spot of one hundred yards of level ground in whole pargana. The hills of Jaunsar-Bawar have the characters of being one of the wildest and most ragged tracts, affording naturally very little level ground and that only in small patches. The mountains are peculiarly rough and precipitous characterized cliff by steep sturdy rocks and very few villages. The cultivation was necessarily small and very laborious. The rocks are predominantly fly limestone, which gives irregular character to the mountains.

Jaunsar was bounded on the north by Lokhandi Mountain, on the east by the river Jumna, and on the west by the river Tons. It therefore consists of a triangular tract having apex at kalsi. The land form north to south and next Lokhandi extending from east to west over the width of the pargana, then Bawaar occupying all the northern third of triangle. At Deoghar, the trans-Tons portion of pargana, is an irregularly shaped piece of land. having mainly contact with native states during British times.

Surendra Singh Bisht

Research Officer,
Dept. of History,
HNB Garhwal University,
Srinagar Garhwal Uttarakhand, India

Jaunsar-Bawar consisted entirely of a succession of mountain ranges and steep gorges. The great physical features of the pargana are the ridge separating the drainage area of the Tons from the Jamuna.

Aim of the Study

To reveal impact of colonial rule on Jaunsar-Bawar area of Uttarakhand. To highlight changes and modification in historical context in diversified livelihood patterns of local people and, to show changes that occurred in traditional use of natural resources through introduction of colonial apparatus.

Colonial Administrative Officials

After the establishment of the rule of East India Company in the ceded and conquered districts, the income of the government was derived mainly from two sources namely the mal or the land revenue and the sayar or the non-agricultural revenue collected from a large number of imports and taxes. During later period, Sayar duties were known as Inland duties and included the custom duties, excise, salt tax and stamp tax etc.

In India British had a vast ceded and conquered areas, so that main objective of their policies was decentralization of administration of land revenue and to maintain law and order. Therefore, commissioners were appointed in each division, who were officers of considerable seniority and belonged to the coveted civil services of India.² Similar to other ceded and conquered areas, Jaunsar-Bawar earlier was a part of Sirmor kingdom, ceded to the British Government by Gorkha in 1815. For short period it was part of Kumaon, division. But by the Act of 1829, it became part & portion of Dehradun District under Meerut Division.³ Though it was under a non-regulation tract. The Revenue Board did not have a control over it, as was the case with districts in the plains subject to the ordinary regulations. The administration of justice and revenue collection was in such offices as the Lieutenant Governor.

Under the commissioners was the Deputy Commissioner who was the counter part of the collector in the regulated districts. The difference between the Deputy Commissioner of non-regulated tract and collector of a regulated district was that the deputy commissioner had also the civil power of a judge, which was not the case with the later who were earlier designated as collector of Revenue. He was supervisor to the Assistant Commissioner (or the Deputy Collectors of the regulated areas). Upto 1833, only the post of the rank below that of assistant commissioners were open for Indians.

Tehsil was headed by a Tehsildar. The Tehsildar was the most important officer in the revenue administration. He was authorized to give adequate publicity to a proclamation issued by the government to make revenue settlement subject to the approval of the government. To obtain authentic information regarding land revenue, to fix in consideration of the records at the previous year's etc. the Tehsildar was the highest paid Indian official till 1833. He was an officer of police also, both revenue and police duties had very limited powers.⁹ The last in

hierarchy was the Patwari or Lekhpal, but he was a officer of local significance.¹⁰ The Patwari in the hills, was an institution created by British and was unknown under previous rulers.¹¹ Though some of the or Kanungos in the large patties enjoyed the assistance of writers Likhwars. The records of the languages were found imperfect and as these officers had always remained at headquarters. And for knowledge of each village, trusted the reports of their deputies.¹²

Changes in Traditional Use of Natural Resources

In the Himalayas, the forest plays a most important part in the life of the people. They provide them cheap fuel, leafage fodder agriculture implements and dwellings. Jaunsar-Bawar was thickly connected with forest of deodars. From the early 1860's the forest of Jaunsar-Bawar had attracted the attention of the state. These forests were important for three reasons, as a source of wood for the railway, as inspection forests for training students at the forest school in nearby Dehradun and for supplying fuel and timber to the military cantonment of Chakrata. In 1868 forests of Jaunsar-Bawar came in to the hands of the forest department and became good source of income for British.

The important economic source of the people of Jaunsar-Bawar was agriculture, animal husbandry and forest products. Their economy not only depends on agriculture, but they were also a good shepherd. They had rich forest resource. Before reservation of forest, they used it freely.

After mid-19th Century British administration promoted commercialization of agriculture. The main products introduced were opium, which brought better revenue income for British. Introduction of tea made them to gain large tracts of forest lands.

British East India Company had purely mercantile activities in India. In the beginning of their rule, they made large indents on the timber wealth of the country. The newly established British administration in India was not aware about the careful husbanding of forest resources. They were under the false impression that the forest wealth of India was inexhaustible. The British themselves were new to the ideas of systematic forestry, as they had not developed forest organization in Britain.¹⁵

The pre-colonial state of forests was used for only local consumption. The market for forest produce was not developed. Forest produce were considered unlimited and a free gift of nature. The only coast was at going to forests and collects the produce. There were some forest produces, which were considered scarce and had a market e.g., ivory and sandal wood. On that stage commercial use of forest produce were only marginal. The resources were so abundant that question of regeneration did not arise. Needs of local populations for fuel, food, fodder and timber for house construction and agricultural implements fulfilled easily without any let and hindrance. They also burnt entire forest areas to convert wood into ash for fertilizing land and also for cultivation on a shifting basis. Forest resources were not regenerated as scarce.¹⁶

British administration promoted commercialization of agriculture, in which main

product were onion gingers and Potato in Jaunsar-Bawar. All these commercial crops were good source of income for British. 19th century was known for growth of Industrial Revolution in India. The mechanization led to commercialization of agriculture and forest. The Industrial base of country, also widened by mechanization of agriculture and forest.¹⁷

The expanded nature of Industrialization leads to rapid growth in forest industries, so it necessitated an increased exploitation from the Himalayan forests. The building of roads into inaccessible forests became necessary to facilitate increased extractions. The relative isolation of many hilly areas ended because major highways and all-weather roads were built to transport timber and other forest produce to urban markets, along with the communications network created by contractors, whose jobs was to transport the produce to be processed by large scale industries in the private sector and also by forest department.¹⁸

Tempering in Customary Laws and Practices

The tract of Jaunsar-Bawar was administered according to its customary laws and practices with limited tempering from colonial rulers. In olden days the disputes were decided by the village panchayats, and village elders were guided by their traditions and their own sense of right and wrong. It was mainly the system of judicial administration in those days which preserved the customary law of the khasas the inroads of Brahmins. The Padhan or Thokdar used to be the Sarpanch and the Panchayat dealt not only with social matters but also with civil and criminal.

At the time of the rule of Gurkhas, Padhan had authority to determine small suits without appeal, but always with the assistance of a Panchayat.²⁰ Francis Hamilton noted that, in Nepal the disputes were settled through the Panchayats. The Gorkhas greatly relied upon the Panchayat system. According to Modyson, half of the judicial business of the Nepal kingdom was done through Panchayat but unfortunately their Panchayat system was not adopted in hilly region of united provinces, under the Gurkhas Government there was not regular system of justice. All civil and criminal cases were disposed, off by the commandant of the troops, to whom the track was assigned. The important cases were disposed off by the Government of the provinces assisted by the military chiefs who were present at the headquarters.²²

The British conquered hilly region of Uttar Pradesh from Gorkhas. Their rule introduced centralized courts of justice and a strong central authority. Which had the will and means to impose the decisions of these courts.²³

From the Battle of Plassey in 1757, till the subjugation of the Punjab a new province and, new states had constantly and successively been brought under British rule, either by cessation or conquest. They were found to pass different laws and customs and the various rights of property.

After conquest from Gorkhas the hilly tract of Jaunsar-Bawar was put with Kumaon division under

regulation of 1817. The civil and revenue administration was to be divided by instructions from governor-general in council. The whole regulation of 1817 was repealed by regulation XXI of 1825. Dehradun was placed under Kumaon division and after the passing of regulation of 1829, both Jaunsar-Bawar and Dehradun were removed from Kumaon jurisdiction and put with the Meerut Division.

The board of criminal jurisdiction of Jaunsar-Bawar was also free from the operation of regulation X of 1817. The power was given to Governor General in council to frame the rules for Dehradun and Jaunsar-Bawar's criminal jurisdiction.²⁵

In 1860 pargana of Jaunsar-Bawar was removed from jurisdiction of the judge of Saharanpur and the Sadar Court. By act XXIV of 1864 the administration of justice and the collection of revenue in Jaunsar-Bawar was vested to Lieutenant Governor who appointed all officers these officials on their turn were guided by rules framed for the Tarai district under Act XIV of 1861.

Act XXIV of 1869 did not remove Jaunsar-Bawar from the sphere of the regulations. The pargana was from the first instance was outside the pale of the regulation law. It was clearly recognized by the court of judicature and the government and legislature. The commissioner of Meerut was only allowed civil cases in the hill stations of this division on duty for one month in the year. So that all sessions cases either had to wait till the visiting month of commissioner or the whole of the parties had to go as far as Sahampur or Aligarh for justice.²⁷

The local custom which was named Dastur-ul-omul, was drawn up by the Sayanas under the supervision of Mr. A. Ross during the settlement concluded in 1852. When the question of legislation for Jaunsar-Bawar was under consideration in 1862-64. Dastur-ul-omul was brought to the notice of the government but the form in which, the rules had been cast was too crude, and some of its provisions were too starting for receiving legislature recognition.²⁸

Local code known as Dastur -ul-omul was a procedure for the use of the local Panchayats for administration of justice among themselves. It was compiled from the customs and traditions prevailing at that time amongst the people, colonial authorities felt that it required modification based on their morality and commonsense.²⁹ The main purpose served by this code was to recognize and to standardize certain local conventions with regard to land-tenure and revenue, the duties and privileges of the Sayanas and inter village and inter-khat relations. To a great extent, the interrelations and demarcation of property rights between the villagers and the government. This code was expected to help the villagers to manage village affairs according to a standard.

Conclusion

Traditionally, society in Jaunsar-Bawar was described as a conglomeration of village communities, which had a control over the means of production and over the resources needed to reproduce it. But the forest management struck at very root of traditional social and economic organization.

Through reservation of forest basic change in strategy to use forest took place. It was a transition from collective to individual use of the forest. It meant a fundamental change in the agrarian life of villagers. The loss of community ownership had effectively broken the link between humans and the forest.

Although the government had in certain areas, had allotted use of limited tracts of forests to the villagers, the so called third class or village forest. British intervention in Jaunsar-Bawar introduced Jaunsaries with outside world. Establishment of educational institutions, hospitals, new economics sources, it has affected them day by day, particularly after post-independence era their peculiar cultural practices are on the verge of extinction.

British also tried to tamper with their social institutions like polyandry which was directly linked with the social-economy of the people, with the introduction of cash economy, this institution gradually started vanishing. But efforts at spreading the Christianity failed entirely. Therefore, colonial rule to a late extend made possible to expose this non-regulation tract to north Indian main stream society, which made its impact in the form of adoption of caste system and other conservative Brahmanical ritual practices which were otherwise not prevalent among the peasantry. Therefore, replacement of customary tradition from Sanskrit conservancy becomes possible under colonial dispensation.

References

1. Banerjee P. "Indian Finances in the days of the company" pp- 250-51 (Calcutta 1948).
2. Zaheer & Gupta "The organization of the Government in Uttar Pradesh" pp. 177.
3. Whalley's 'British Kumaon the law of the extra regulations tract subordinate to the govt. of the North Western Provinces. pp- 191., 1870 reprint Varanasi 1991.
4. Zaheer & Gupta "The organization of the Government in Uttar Pradesh pp. 115-16.
5. Journal of U.P. Historical society (JUHS) Vol. II Part I, 1954 pp-26.
6. Baden Powell B.H. "The land system of British India" pp-25-28 Vol.-I.
7. Ibid. •
8. Journal of U.P. Historical society (JUHS) Vol.-11 Pan-1 1954 pp-26.
9. Ibid.
10. Moreland W.ff the Revenue Administration of United Provinces pp-736.
11. Watton H.G. "Almora Lake fleer pp-127. 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Chatterjee C.D. "Forestry in ancient India" pp- 3-28. 1966.
14. Banerjee A.K. Indian Forest through the ages" pp-29-56. 1966. 5.
15. Negi, S.S. "Indian forestry through the ayes pp- 14-15 1994. 5.
16. Madhave G.P. Varfak V.D. "Secred Groves of western Ghats of India" Economic Botany Vol.-30. pp- 152-60. r.
17. Singh & Sandhu. "Agricultural Problem in India" pp-184.
18. Srivastava B.P. & Singh V.P. "Working plan too the W.Almore forest Div. Kumaon circle. 1966-67 to 1975-76 (Nainital 1967).
19. Joshi. L.D. "The Khasa Family Law" pp-33. London 1929.
20. Fransis Hamilton "Account of the Kingdom of Nepal- pp-36.
21. Journal of the Asiatic Researches of Bengal Vol. 20 pp-122. Delhi 1980.
22. Betten J. H. "Offical Report of the provinces of kwnaon" pp -20.1851. (Reprint Calcutta 1878).
23. Ibid.
24. Stowell V.A. "A Manual of land tenures of KumaonDiv" Page-I. Allahabad 1937.
25. National Archive New Delhi. Home Department (Judicial) 21" February 1863 (A).
26. Walton H.G. "Gazetteer of Dehradurt pp- 192-93. 1911 Reprint Dehradun 1995.
27. National Archive N. Delhi Home Department (Judicial). 21" February 1863 (A).
28. Walton H.G. Gazetteer of Dehradun pp-192-93.
29. National Archive N. Delhi Home Department (Judicial). 21" February 1863 (A)