

CHAPTER II HISTORY

RISE AND FALL OF THE BISHNUPUR RAJ

THE history of Bānkurā, so far as it is known, prior to the period of British rule, is identical with the history of the rise and fall of the Rājās of Bishnupur, said to be one of the oldest dynasties in Bengal. "The ancient Rājās of Bishnupur," writes Mr. R. C. Dutt, "trace back their history to a time when Hindus were still reigning in Delhi, and the name of Musalmāns was not yet heard in India. Indeed, they could already count five centuries of rule over the western frontier tracts of Bengal before Bakhtiyār Khiljī wrested that province from the Hindus. The Musalmān conquest of Bengal, however, made no difference to the Bishnupur princes. Protected by rapid currents like the Dāmodar, by extensive tracts of scrub-wood and *sāl* jungle, as well as by strong forts like that of Bishnupur, these jungle kings were little known to the Musalmān rulers of the fertile portions of Bengal, and were never interfered with. For long centuries, therefore, the kings of Bishnupur were supreme within their extensive territories. At a later period of Musalmān rule, and when the Mughal power extended and consolidated itself on all sides, a Mughal army sometimes made its appearance near Bishnupur with claims of tribute, and tribute was probably sometimes paid. Nevertheless, the *Sūbahdārs* of Murshidābād never had that firm hold over the Rājās of Bishnupur which they had over the closer and more recent Rājāships of Burdwān and Bīrbhūm. As the Burdwān Rāj grew in power, the Bishnupur family fell into decay; Mahārajā Kīrti Chand of Burdwān attacked the Bishnupur Rāj and added to his zamīndāri large slices of his neighbour's territories. The Marāthās completed the ruin of the Bishnupur house, which is an impoverished zamīndāri in the present day.

ORIGIN OF THE RAJAS

"This ancient and renowned family is, of course, a Kshattriya family, and some thousands of people living in all parts of

Bānkurā district, and who are descended from the old servants or retainers, soldiers or relations of the Bishnupur Rājās, are Kshatriyas also by caste... The story by which the Bishnupur Kshatriyas connect themselves with the Kshatriyas of Northern India, is thus told in Dr. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*:

'Raghunāth Singh, the founder of the dynasty of Bishnupur, derives his origin from the kings of Jainagar near Brindāban. The story of his parentage is as follows: The king of Jainagar, being seized with a desire to visit distant countries, set out for Purushottam, and on his way thither passed through Bishnupur. While resting at one of the halting places in the great forest of that country, his wife gave birth to a son; and the king foreseeing the difficulty of carrying a child with him, left the mother and her baby behind in the woods, and went forward on his journey. Soon after the father had departed, a man named Sri Kasmētia Bāgdi (an aboriginal inhabitant), when gathering fire-wood, passed by the halting place, and saw the newly-born child lying helpless and alone. The mother never was heard of; and whether she was devoured by wild beasts, or found shelter with the natives, remains a mystery to this day. The woodman took the infant home, and reared him till he reached the age of seven, when a certain Brāhman of the place, struck with his beauty and the marks of royal descent that were visible on his person, took him to his house. Soon afterwards, the king (an aboriginal prince) having died, his obsequies were celebrated with great pomp, and people from all parts went to the funeral feast. The Brāhman being very poor went among the rest, taking Raghu with him. When the Brāhman was in the middle of his repast, the late king's elephant seized Raghu with his trunk, and approached the empty throne. Great was the consternation and terror, lest the elephant should dash the boy to pieces; but when the royal animal carefully placed the lad on the throne, the whole multitude, thunder-struck at seeing a deed so manifestly done by the will of God, filled the place with their acclamations, and the ministers agreed to crown the boy on the spot. Raghunath Singh, therefore, was the first king of Bishnupur.'

Such is the story of the descent of the Bishnupur Kshatriyas from the Kshatriyas of Northern India. If it were not ridiculous to apply the rules of historical criticism to a story which is

so apparently a myth, we would ask one or two questions. If Sri Kasmētia Bāgdi, we would enquire, found the child by itself in the forest, how did he (or any one else) know that it was the child of the queen of Jainagar, and not of some unfortunate woman of the neighbourhood who might have better reasons for abandoning her child. If the king of Jainagar, again, found it impossible to carry the new-born child with him, could he not have left some part of his establishment with provision to take care of the queen and the male child until he returned from Purushottam. Is there any evidence, one is inclined to ask, beyond the signs which the learned Brāhman observed on the boy's forehead and the conduct of the inspired elephant, to shew that the boy was a Kshatriya boy, and not a Bāgdi boy? And, lastly, is there anything to fix the date or the authenticity of the story, or to show that it was not fabricated when the Rājās of Bishnupur were powerful in Western Bengal and had assumed Hindu civilization, and were anxious, therefore, to make out a respectable royal descent for themselves. But it is needless to make such enquiries; the story is exactly such as is prevalent in all parts of India among semi-aboriginal tribes who connect themselves with Aryan ancestors. The fact that the Rājās of Bishnupur called themselves Mallas (an aboriginal title) for many centuries before they assumed the Kshatriya title of Singh, the fact that down to the present day they are known as Bāgdi Rājās all over Bengal, as well as numerous local facts and circumstances—all go to prove that the Rājās of Bishnupur are Kshatriyas, because of their long independence and their past history, but not by descent. The story of descent is legendary, but the Kshatriyas of Bishnupur can show the same letters patent for their Kshatriyahood as the Rājputs of Northern India or the original Kshatriyas of India could show, viz., military profession and the exercise of royal powers for centuries."*

The country over which these Rājās ruled is called Mallabhūm, a term now used for the tract of country comprised in the thanas of Bānkurā (excluding the Chhātnā outpost), Ondā, Bishnupur, Kotalpur and Indās. Originally, however, the term was applied to a more extensive tract of country. To the north it is believed

* R. C. Dutt, *The Aboriginal Element in the Population of Bengal*. Calcutta Review, 1882.

to have stretched as far as the modern Dāmin-i-koḥ† in the Sāntāl Parganas; to the south it comprised part of Midnapore, and to the east part of Burdwān; and inscriptions found at Pānchet in the Mānbhūm district show that on the west it included part of Chotā Nāgpur.†

The term Mallabhūm is said to mean the land of the wrestlers, and is explained by the legend that the first Rājā received the title of Adi Malla from his skill in wrestling. The name Malla (a wrestler) is a Sanskrit one, but it appears more probable that the title is really an aboriginal one. "The name Malla", writes Mr. W. B. Oldham, "is a title of the Rājās of Bishnupur, the acknowledged kings of the Bāgdis, and of the present Māls who are their neighbours, around whom are centred the most concrete legends which refer to the connection between these two tribes. The Hindu genealogists of the house of Bishnupur assert that this hereditary title Malla means the wrestlers, just as Mānbhūm should be Mallabhūm, the land of the wrestlers. As far as I know, except for the mere coincidence of sounds, both assumptions are equally gratuitous." "There is," he further points out, "an intimate connection between the Māls and the Bāgdis. To this day they partake of the same hookah and admit a common origin, and, in the case of Bishnupur, a common sovereign; and my observation of both people leads me to conjecture that the Bāgdis are the section of the Māls who have accepted civilization and life in the cultivated country as serfs and co-religionists of the Aryans; while those Māls who are still found scattered through the Bengal delta, and who are not clearly traceable to the Māls of the hills, are either the descendants of isolated and conservative fragments of the race, or of those members of it who tried to follow the example of the Bāgdis, after the latter had become constituted as a recognized and exclusive caste, and therefore failed."*

To this it may be added that other portions of the district appear also to have been originally the homes of aboriginal races and to have subdued by military adventurers, who were either aboriginals themselves or Aryan immigrants. Such are Dhalbhūm comprised in the Khātrā thana, Tungbhūm in the south of the Rāipur thana and Sāmantabhūm in the Chhātnā outpost. The

† W. B. Oldham, *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwān District*, Calcutta, 1894.

† *Reports. Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. VIII, pp. 180, 199, 205.

* W. B. Oldham, *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwān District*, Calcutta, 1894.

legends connected with these portions of the district will be found in the articles on them in chapter XIV, and it will be sufficient to state that they were eventually overshadowed by the Malla kings of Bishnupur.

The names of some of these tracts are of considerable antiquity, being found in the *Bramanda* section of the *Bhavishyat Purāna*, which was probably compiled in the 15th or 16th century A.D. "Varāhabhūmi," it says, "is in one direction contiguous to Tungabhūmi, and in another to the Sekhara mountain; and it comprises Varabhūmi, Sāmantabhūmi, and Mānbhūmi. This country is overspread with impenetrable forests of *sāl* and other trees. On the borders of Varabhūmi runs the Dārikesi river. In the same district are numerous mountains, containing mines of copper, iron and tin. The men are mostly Rājputs, robbers by profession, irreligious and savage. They eat snakes, and all sorts of flesh; drink spirituous liquors, and live chiefly by plunder or the chase. As to the women, they are, in garb, manners and appearance, more like Rākshasis than human beings. The only objects of veneration in these countries are rude village divinities."* Among the chief villages of this tract we find mention of Raipur and two Sārengās. It may be added that the name Varāhabhūmi appears to be preserved in the modern Barābhūm and that the Sekhara mountain is probably Parasnāth. A portion of the Gangājalghāti thana, which is known as Mahiswarā, forms part of Sekharbhūm, or as it is known locally Sikharbhūm.

LEGENDARY HISTORY

The following sketch of the traditional history of the Rājās of Bishnupur has been prepared from an account furnished by the District Officer, which was based on the papers kept by the Rāj family. It differs materially from the *Pandit's Chronicle* given in the *Statistical Account of Bengal* and in the *Annals of Rural Bengal* by Sir William Hunter.

In the year 102 of the Bengali era, i.e., in 695 A.D., a prince of one of the royal houses of Northern India made a pilgrimage with his wife to the shrine of Jagannāth in Purī. While on his way thither, he halted, in the midst of a great forest, at the village of Lāugrām, 6 miles from Kotalpur, and there left his wife who was about to give birth to a child, in the house of a Brāhman named Panchānan, after arranging that a Kāyasth[a] named Bhagīrath Guha should look after her. He then proceeded

* J. Burgess, *Geography of India*, Indian Antiquary, Vol. XX (1891), p. 421.

on his way, and a few days afterwards his wife gave birth to a son. The mother and child remained at Lāugrām in the care of the Kāyasth, and when the boy reached the age of 7 years, the Brāhman employed him as a cowherd. One day, when overcome with fatigue, he had fallen asleep under a tree, two huge cobras, raising their hoods above the sleeper's face, shaded him from the rays of the sun, till they were startled away by the approach of Panchānan searching for the boy. Impressed at this wonderful sight, the Brāhman augured that it foretold the future greatness of the boy. Returning to his homestead, he gave orders to his wife that in future the boy should never be given the leavings of their food, and obtained a promise from his mother that, if her son ever become a king, he should be made his *purohit* and the Kāyasth his prime minister. From this time the boy ceased to be a cowherd. Another sign of the greatness in store for him was soon forthcoming; for one day, while fishing with other boys of the village, he caught gold bricks instead of fish. He now received the education of a warrior, and when he was only 15 years old, had no equal in wrestling in all the country round. His skill in this manly art endeared him to an aboriginal ruler called the Rājā of Panchamgarh, and earned for him the sobriquet of Adi Malla, the original or unique wrestler.

THE MALLA CHIEFS

Adi Malla soon became a chieftain owing to the favour of the Rājā of Padampur, a place near the modern village and police outpost of Jaypur, 8 miles from Lāugrām. This Rājā gave a feast to all the Brāhman round about, to which Panchānan went accompanied by Adi Malla. The boy, being a cowherd, was not allowed to eat with the Brāhman, but sat outside in the courtyard. The Rājā, attracted by his beauty, held an umbrella over his head to protect him from the sun and rain, whereupon the Brāhman declared that, since the Rājā himself held the umbrella over him, the boy was destined to become a king. He was then invested with the ensigns of Rājāship; and the Rājā made him a grant of Lāugrām and some villages in its vicinity. One of the first acts of Adi Malla, on returning home, was, we are told, to install the goddess Dandeswarī under the tree where the snakes had raised their hoods to shade him from the rays of the sun. An opportunity for extending his small domains soon occurred, when a neighbouring chief,

Pratāp Nārāyan of Jotbihār, withheld the tribute due to his suzerain, the Rājā of Padampur. Adi Malla successfully waged war against him and annexed his territories.

Adi Malla reigned in Lāugrām for 33 years and is known to this day as the Bāgdi Rājā, a designation which seems to show that the district was then inhabited by aboriginal races, over whom he established his rule. He was succeeded by his son Jay Malla, who invaded Padampur and took the Rājā's fort, the possession of which in those days meant the government of the country. To avoid capture by the conqueror, the Padampur royal family perished in the waters of tank, still in existence, which is known by the name of Kānāisāyar. Jay Malla, having extended his dominions on all sides, removed the capital to Bishnupur.

Of the kings who succeeded him at Bishnupur we have only fragmentary accounts, which serve, however, to show how steadily the borders of their kingdom were extended. The fourth of the line, Kālu Malla, defeated the neighbouring chief of Indās and annexed his territories; the sixth, Kāu Malla, conquered the king of Kākatiā; the seventh, Jhāu Malla, overcame other neighbouring princes; and the eighth, Sūr Malla, subdued the Rājā of Bāgri (now a *pargana* in the north of Midnāpore). A long list of 40 kings then follows, but their reigns are barren in interest, the chronicles merely recording the names of the chieftains they subjugated, the idols they set up, and the temples in which they enshrined the gods. All these kings were known by the title of Malla or Mallābanīnāth, i.e., the lords of Mallabhūm or Mallābani; and the family records show them as exercising full sovereignty within their domains and independent of all foreign powers. With the reign of the 49th Rājā, Dhār Hāmbīr, who is said to have flourished in 993 B.S. (1586 A.D.), we hear for the first time of the acknowledgment of the suzerainty of the Muhammadan Viceroys of Bengal, to whom this prince paid an annual tribute of Rs. 1,07,000.

REIGN OF BĪR HĀMBĪR

With the reign of his successor, Bīr Hāmbīr, we enter on more certain ground than that of tradition, for this ruler of a border principality became involved in the struggle between the Mughals and Afghāns, and is mentioned by the Muhammadan historians. The Afghāns had seized Orissa during the revolt of the Mughal troops, and, under the command of Kutlu Khān, had extended

their dominion over Midnapore and Bishnupur, leaving the river Dāmodar as the barrier between them and the Mughals (1582). * Kutlu Khān was, however, forced to fall back by the Mughal general Khān Azam, and Bīr Hāmbīr threw in his lot with the Mughals. He rendered them good service in 1591, when the Viceroy, Mān Singh, invaded Orissa. Kutlu Khān advanced to meet Mān Singh, sending forward a large force to Raipur; and a Mughal force under Jagat Singh, the son of the Viceroy, was detached to check this movement. The Afghāns offered to treat, but during the armistice treacherously delivered a night attack. Jagat Singh had been warned by Bīr Hāmbīr of his danger, but, having disregarded his advice, was taken by surprise and forced to abandon his camp. Bīr Hāmbīr rescued him in his flight and brought him safely to Bishnupur.† After this, Bīr Hāmbīr appears to have remained loyal to the Mughals, and suffered for his loyalty; for two years later, when the Afghāns again rose and he refused them any help, they ravaged his territory.‡

Tradition says that Bīr Hāmbīr was as pious as he was powerful, and was converted to Vaishnavism by Sṛīnivāsa. Two Vaishnava works, the *Prema-vilāsa of Nityānanda Dās* (alias Balarām Dās) and the *Bhakti-ratnākara* of Narahari Chakravarti, relate that Sṛīnivāsa and other *bhaktas* left Brindāban for Gaur with a number of Vaishnava manuscripts, but were robbed on the way by Bīr Hāmbīr. This news killed the old Krishnadās Kabirāj, author of the *Chaitanya-Charitāmrita*. But Sṛīnivāsa bearded the king in his den, and so moved him by reading the *Bhāgavata* that he became a convert to Vaishnavism and gave his preceptor rich endowments of land and money. Two Vaishnava songs are attributed to Bīr Hāmbīr, the originals of which are given in the *Bhakti-ratnākara*; and tradition says that he introduced the worship of Madan Mohan in Bishnupur. From these references it would appear that the reign of Bīr Hāmbīr fell between 1591 and 1616.

TRIBUTARY RAJAS

Bīr Hāmbīr is said to have been succeeded by Raghunath Singh, the first of the line to assume the Kshatriya title of Singh. The Rājās of Mallabhūm seem now to have entered on their palmiest days, if we may judge by the exquisite memorials left by him and his descendants; and it is probably to this period

* C. Stewart, *History of Bengal*. (1847), page 112.

† *Akbar-nāma*. Dowson's translation, Vol. VI, Page 86.

‡ Sir H. Elliot, *History of India*. Vol. VI.

that we should refer the story that Bishnupur was formerly the most renowned city in the world, more beautiful than the house of Indra in heaven. The beautifully carved temples erected by them shew that the kings ruling in Bānkurā were pious Hindus; but the family records also make it clear that, while they were busy building temples, these royal patrons of Hindu art and religion had lost much of their independence and had sunk to the position of tributary princes. Even the title of Singh was, it is said, conferred by the Nawāb of Murshidābād. The story is that Raghunāth neglected to pay his stipulated tribute and was carried away prisoner to Murshidābād. There one day he saw one of the Nawāb's horses, well known for its savage temper, being taken by 16 soldiers to be washed in the river. The Rājā scoffed at the idea of so many men being required for one horse, and the Nawāb thereupon challenged him to ride the horse himself. This he did, and with the greatest ease rode an incredible distance in a short time, a journey of 8 days; it is said, being finished within 9 hours. Pleased with his skill and courage, the Nawāb conferred on him the title of Singh, remitted the arrears of tribute, and allowed him to return to Bishnupur. The evidence of inscription shews that Raghunāth Singh built the temples of Shyāmrai, Jor Bānglā and Kālāchānd between 1643 and 1656.*

The Next prince was Bīr Singh, who is said to have built the present fort, the site of which was indicated by a sign from heaven; for when out hawking he let loose his hawk on a heron sitting on the branch of a tree, and saw the heron strike down the hawk. This seemed an auspicious sign, and he built the fort on the spot. He also had the seven big lakes or tanks, called Lālbāndh, Krishnabāndh, Gāntātbāndh, Jamunābāndh, Kālīndibāndh, Shyāmbāndh, and Pokābāndh excavated, and erected the temple of Lālji in 1658; while his queen Siromani or Chudāmani had the temples of Madan Gopāl and Muralī Mohan built in 1665. While beautifying the town in this way, Bīr Singh took care to keep the subordinate chiefs in order; for, hearing that Monirām Adhvarjya of Māliārā oppressed his people, he marched against him, and defeated him in a bloody battle. Another story about this king does not shew him in such a favourable light, for it is said that he ordered all his sons, eighteen in number, to be walled up alive. The youngest, Durjan

* The dates of these and other temples mentioned below are those deduced by Dr. Bloch from the inscriptions on the Bishnupur temples. The earliest temple is that known as Malleswar built in 1622 A.D. [*Report, Arch. Surv. Ind.*, 1903-04].

Singh, alone escaped, being kept in hiding by the servants. The end of the Rājā was a miserable one, for he committed suicide in horror and remorse in killing a Brāhman boy. He was succeeded by Durjan Singh, the builder of the Madan Mohan temple (1694); and after him the principality was held by Raghunāth Singh, who succeeded in overrunning the Chetebardā (or Chhotabardā) estate in Midnapore for the Muhammadans, who, it is said, had not been able to conquer it themselves and therefore sought the assistance of the Rājā.

RELATIONS WITH THE MUHAMMADANS

It seems clear from the family records that though the Bishnupur Rājā still continued to pay tribute, they were independent within their own kingdom and that the Muhammadans did not interfere with the internal administration. This claim is confirmed by the Muhammadan historians themselves, who say that when Murshid Kulī Khān, the Nawāb of Bengal, proceeded to introduce a more centralized form of government in 1707-08, only two persons were exempted from his despotic regulations—the chieftains of Bīrbhūm and Bānkurā. The latter, it is expressly stated, “owed his security to the nature of his territory, which was full of woods and adjoined the mountains of Jhārkhānd, whither, upon any invasion, he retired to places inaccessible to his pursuers and harassed them severely in their retreat.” The country was also unproductive, and the expenses of collection would have exceeded the amount of the revenue. “These two zamīndārs, therefore, having refused the summons to attend at the court of Murshidābād, were permitted to remain on their own estates on condition of regularly remitting their assessment through an agent stationed at Murshidābād.”* The status of the Rājā of Bishnupur was thus practically acknowledged as that of a tributary prince, exempted from personal attendance at the court at Murshidābād and represented there by a Resident.

MARATHIA RAIDS

The end of the 17th century left the Bishnupur Rājās at the summit of their fortunes. Their territory lay beyond the direct control of the Muhammadan power, and as frontier chiefs they were of so much importance as wardens of the marches, that the viceroys of Bengal treated them as allies rather than subjects. The first half of the 18th century witnessed the beginning of

* Stewart's *History of Bengal*.

the downfall of the house. Their power suffered from the aggressions of the Mahārājā of Burdwān, who seized the Fatehpur Mahāl, and from the invasions of the Marāthās, who laid waste their country. Nor were the Rājās who now ruled over Mallabhūm fit to cope with their difficulties. Gopāl Singh, who, we know from official records, held the Rāj between 1730 and 1745, was a pious prince, whose memory is held in veneration to this day by the people of Bishnupur. It was characteristic of this Rājā that he issued an edict that all the people of Mallabhūm should count their beads and repeat the name of god (*Harinām*) every evening at sunset; this evening prayer is still known as *Gopāl Singher begār*. But his religious zeal was not supported by military prowess. During his reign the Marāthās under Bhāskar Rāo appeared before the southern gate of Bishnupur, and after the troops had made a spirited sally, Gopāl Singh retreated inside the fort and ordered both soldiers and citizens to join in prayers to the god of his family to save the city. This prayer was heard, and, legend relates, the guns were fired without human assistance by the god Madan Mohan. The truth probably is that the Marāthā cavalry were unable to pierce the strong fortification and retired, leaving the Rājā's levies to plunder their abandoned camp.

Baffled in their attempt to seize the fort and pillage the treasury, the Marāthās harried the less protected parts of the country. Their ravages have been graphically described in the *Riyāzu-s-Salātin*: “Sacking the villages and towns of the surrounding tracts, and engaging in slaughter and captures, they set fire to granaries, and spared no vestige of fertility. And when the stores and granaries of Burdwān were exhausted, and the supply of imported grains was also completely cut off, to avert death by starvation, human beings ate plantain roots, whilst animals were fed on the leaves of trees. Even these gradually ceased to be available. For breakfast and supper, nothing except the disc of the sun and moon feasted their eyes. The whole tract from Akbarnagar (Rājmahāl) to Midnapore and Jaleswar (Jalasore) came into the possession of the Marāthās. Those murderous free-booters drowned in the rivers a large number of the people, after cutting off their ears, noses and hands. Tying sacks of dirt to the mouths of others, they mangled and burnt them with indescribable tortures.”*

This encounter with the Marāthās should probably be referred to the year 1742, when the first Marāthā invasion of Bengal

* *Riyāzu-s-Salātin*. Translation by Maulvī Abdus Salām, Calcutta, 1904.

took place. Defeated at Kātwā, Bhāskar Rāo retreated to the passes of Pānchet, but having lost his way in the hilly forest-clad tracts, he came back to the jungles of Bishnupur, and thence made good his retreat to Chandrakonā and emerged in the open country round Midnapore.† This was not the last appearance of the Marāthās at Bishnupur, for in 1760 they made it their headquarters during the invasion of Shāh Alam. Proclaiming that he intended to support the cause of the Emperor, Sheobhat, a Marāthā chief who appears to have been ever ready to take advantage of any troubles in Bengal, suddenly advanced to Midnapore, made himself master of the country and pushed forward a detachment to Bishnupur, from which he threatened Burdwan. The Emperor marched south towards Murshidābād, while Sheobhat came with the main body of Marāthās to Bishnupur. Meanwhile, the Nawāb, Mir Jafar Khān, having advanced towards Burdwān, effected a junction with a British force under Major Caillaud. The advance of the latter appears to have upset Shāh Alam's plans. Instead of forcing his way to Murshidābād, he drew off his troops, set fire to his camp, and retired with his Marāthā allies to Bishnupur, where the English, having no cavalry and receiving no support from that of the Nawāb, were unable to follow him. Thence the Emperor marched off with Sheobhat to Patna, after receiving the homage of the Rājā of Bishnupur. A small force was left at Bishnupur, but at the close of the year was cleared out by an English force.‡

The effect of the Marāthā raids has been graphically described by Sir William Hunter in the *Statistical Account of Burdwān*: "Year after year the inexhaustible Marāthā horse overflowed upon the border. Under the Muhammadan system, a family was secure in proportion as it was near the frontier and distant from Court; but now safety could be found only in the heart of the Province. The Marāthās fell with their heaviest weight upon the border principalities of Birbhūm and Bishnupur. Tribute, free quarters, forced services, exactions of a hundred sorts, reduced the once powerful frontier houses to poverty; and their tenantry fled from a country in which the peasant had become a mere machine for growing food for the soldier. Burdwān not only lay further inland, but its marshy and river-intersected surface afforded a less tempting field for cavalry, and a better shelter for the people. The Marāthās spent their energy in plundering the intervening frontier tracts of Birbhūm and Bishnupur, where

† *Sair ul Mutākharin*. Raymond's translation.

‡ *Broome's History of the Rise and Progress of the Bengal Army*.

the dry soil and fine undulating surface afforded precisely the riding ground which their cavalry loved. There they could harry the villages exhaustively, and in detail, by means of small parties."

INTERNAL FEUDS

The Rājā of Bishnupur at this time was Chaitanya Singh, who shares with Gopāl Singh the fond memories of the people; for he was also a pious ruler and made large grants to Brāhmins, so much so that, if a Brāhmin in the Rāj had no rent-free grant, it was open to question whether he was a true Brāhmin. But the religious and retiring disposition of Chaitanya Singh made him unfit to deal with the troubles which now arose. He was indifferent to his public duties, spent his time in religious discussion and meditation, and entrusted the direction of State affairs to his favourite minister, Kamal Biswas, better known by the proud title of Chhatrapati. This minister became the real ruler of Mallabhūm, and Damodar Singh, a cousin of the Rājā and the head of a junior branch of the house, took advantage of his unpopularity to advance claims to the Rāj. He repaired to the Nawāb's court at Murshidābād and succeeded in obtaining a strong force from Sirāj-ud-daula with which to establish his claims. This force met with an ignominious defeat at Sanghatgolā in the north of Mallabhūm, and Dāmodar Singh narrowly escaped with his life. On his return, he found Mir Jafar Khān set up in the place of his old patron Sirāj-ud-daula; but the new Nawāb was no less favourable to his cause and furnished him with a stronger force. He then advanced cautiously by stealthy marches and overcoming a feeble resistance on the way, surprised the Bishnupur fort at the dead of night. Chaitanya Singh made good his escape with the family idol of Madan Mohan and wandered from place to place till he reached Calcutta. There, it is said, he pawned the idol to Gokul Mitra of Bāgh Bazar in order to purchase the aid of Diwān Ganga Gobind Singh.* Through the intercession of the latter, he succeeded in being reinstated by the British.

* According to another account, Gokul Mitra bought the celebrated image of Madan Mohan from the Mahārājā of Bishnupur, paying him three lakhs of rupees, and built a temple for it, the tasteful and costly architecture of which has excited the admiration of experts in Hindu art. A host of men were employed in the service of this deity—worshippers to perform the daily service, florists to supply flowers and to string garlands, priests to recite the sacred books, songsters to sing hymns, and other men and women too numerous to mention. [*The National Magazine*, P. 393, October 1906].

EARLY BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

Bānkurā was ceded to the British with the rest of the Burdwān *chāklā* in 1760. The early days of their rule were troubled ones; and we find Mr. Grant in his *View of the Revenues of Bengal* (1788) referring to Bānkurā as "a district celebrated by modern speculative historians for the primitive inoffensive manners of its inhabitants under an Utopian system of internal administration, and distinguished in Bengal as a nest of thieves." The country was impoverished by the raids of the Marāthās, and in 1770 it was desolated by famine. A large portion of the population was swept away; lands fell out of cultivation; distress and destitution drove the people to acts of lawlessness and violence, in which disbanded soldiers lent a willing hand. The old Rājā of Bishnupur had no power to control these elements of disorder. He had been reduced from the position of a tributary prince to that of a mere zamīndār, and being unable to collect his rents and pay his revenue, had been thrown into prison. The state of affairs was as bad, if not worse, in Bīrbhūm to the north, and there was no officer on the spot to restore order, both tracts being governed from Murshidābād. In 1785 we find the Collector of Murshidābād begging for troops to be sent against the banditti who were overrunning this outlying portion of his district, and his representations had some effect. It was realized that anarchy prevailing demanded the presence of a strong officer; and in 1786 Mr. Foley was placed in charge of Bīrbhūm and Mr. Pye in charge of Bishnupur. Next year Lord Cornwallis determined to unite Bīrbhūm and Bishnupur into a compact British district; and in March 1787 a notification was issued in the *Calcutta Gāzette* to the effect that Mr. Pye was "confirmed Collector of Bishenpore in addition to the Beerbhoom heretofore superintended by G. R. Foley, Esq." His tenure of office was brief, for he left the district in April 1787; but even in this short time some towns in Bishnupur were sacked by banditti. His successor was Mr. Sherburne, during whose administration of a year and a half the headquarters of the united district were transferred from Bishnupur to Surī in Bīrbhūm. Short, however, as was his term of office, "the two frontier principalities had passed from the condition of military fiefs into that of a regular British district administered by a Collector and covenanted assistants, defended by the Company's troops,

studded with fortified factories, intersected by a new military road, and possessing daily communication with the seat of government in Calcutta."*

Early in November 1788 Mr. Sherburne was removed under suspicion of corrupt dealings, and after a short interregnum Mr. Christopher Keating assumed charge of the united district. Of his administration Sir William Hunter has left a picturesque account in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*. "Mr. Keating the first Collector whose records survive, had not enjoyed his appointment two months before he found himself compelled to call out the troops against a band of marauders five hundred strong, who had made a descent on a market town within two hours' ride from the English capital, and murdered or frightened away the inhabitants of between thirty and forty villages. A few weeks later (February 1789), the hillmen broke through the cordon of outposts *en masse*, and spread their depredations throughout the interior villages of the district. Panic and bloodshed reigned; the outposts were hastily recalled from the frontier passes; and on the 21st of February 1789, we find Mr. Keating levying a militia to act with the regulars against the banditti who were sacking the country towns 'in parties of three and four hundred men, well found in arms'...

"The disorders in Bishnupur would, in any less troubled time, have been called rebellion. The Rājā had been imprisoned for arrears of the land-tax; the head assistant to the Collector, Mr. Hesilrige, was in charge of his estates, and the inhabitants made common cause with the banditti to oppose the Government. In June 1789, a detachment was hurried out to support the civil power; eight days afterwards a reinforcement followed, too late however to save the chief manufacturing town in the district from being sacked in open day-light.† Next month Mr. Keating reported to Government that the marauders having crossed the Ajai in a large party armed with *talwārs* (swords) and matchlocks had established themselves in Bīrbhūm, and that their reduction would simply be a question of military force.

"The rainy season, however, came to the aid of the authorities. The plunderers laden with spoil, and leaving a sufficient force to hold Bishnupur as a basis for their operations in the next

* Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*.

† Ilāmbāzār on the Ajai in Bīrbhūm.

cold weather, retreated to their strongholds; and Mr. Keating took advantage of the lull to devise a more elaborate system for warding the frontier. He represented to Lord Cornwallis, then Governor-General, that the existing military force was insufficient to hold the district; that the contingents furnished by the hereditary wardens of the marches were undisciplined, faint-hearted, more disposed to act with the plunderers than against them; and that to secure peace to the lowlands, it was absolutely necessary to station a guard of picked soldiers from the regular army at each of the passes. A nucleus would thus be formed round which the irregular troops might gather. By return of post, came back an answer 'that the Commander-in-Chief has been requested to detach' a sufficient force which the Collector 'will station at the different *ghāts* (passes), through which the dacoits generally make their inroads in the low country.' In November, the six most important passes were occupied, a detachment was stationed in Bishnupur, another occupied the chief manufacturing town on the Ajai (the one that had been sacked the previous summer), to prevent the banditti from crossing the river. The Ajai divides the united district into two parts, Bishnupur on the south, Bīrbhūm on the north; and these measures, while they restored comparative quiet to the former, left the latter defenceless.

"Mr. Keating's position was a difficult one. He had to guard Bishnupur on the south of the Ajai, Bīrbhūm on the north, and above all, the passes along the western frontier. Bīrbhūm, as the headquarters of the English power, was of the first importance; but if he called in the troops from Bishnupur, the calamities of the preceding year would be repeated; and if he withdrew the outposts from the western passes, the entire district, north and south, would be at the mercy of the hillmen. He decided that it was better to let the marauders riot for a time on the south of the Ajai, than to open up his entire frontier. An express summoned the detachments from Bishnupur by forced marches to the rescue of Bīrbhūm; but no sooner had they crossed the river than tidings came that Bishnupur was itself in the hands of 'insurgents assembled in number nearly one thousand.'

"The rebellion spread into adjoining jurisdictions, and the Collectors on the south bitterly reproached Mr. Keating with

having sacrificed the peace of many districts for the sake of maintaining intact the outposts along the frontier of his own. The more strictly these passes were guarded, the greater the number of marauders who flocked by a circuitous route into the unprotected country on the south of the Ajai. Their outrages passed all bounds; the approaching rains, by suspending military operations, threatened to leave them in possession of Bishnupur for several months; till at last the peasantry, wishing for death rather than life, rose against the oppressors whom they had a year ago welcomed as allies, and the evil began to work its own cure. The marauders of Bishnupur underwent the fate of the Abyssinian slave troops in Bengal three hundred years before, being shut out of the walled cities, decoyed into the woods by twos and threes, set upon by bands of infuriated peasants, and ignobly beaten to death by clubs. In mid-summer 1790, Mr. Keating ordered the senior captain 'to station a military guard with an officer at Bishenpore, whose sole business I propose to be that of receiving all thieves and dacoits that shall be sent in'."

At this time, we learn from Mr. Grant's *Analysis of the Finances of Bengal* (written in 1787), the people of Bishnupur were known as *Chuars* or robbers, but were believed to have lived in a state of pristine innocence. He describes them as being "chiefly of the tribe of Chuars or robbers, of a swarthy black, like the neighbouring mountaineers on the north and west supposed to be the aborigines of the country; and though now for the most part received as converts to the blood-abhorring established system of Hindoo faith, are classed among those who continue to follow the savage custom of offering human sacrifices to their Bowanny or female deity named Kally. Mr. Holwell, and after him, the Abbé Reynal, drew so flattering a picture of the simplicity, pure manners, regular and equitable government which prevailed among the inhabitants of this little canton until within these few years past, that the latter writer could not but entertain doubts himself of the existence of a state which seemed to realize the fable of the golden age. Nor are we to be surprised that the Chuars of Bishenpour, under the influence of so mild a religion as the Bramin, should respect the rules of hospitality among themselves, observe good faith with strangers, who solicit and pay for personal protection in

passing through their country, or show the most profound veneration for their despotic chief, by yielding implicit obedience to his civil ordinances. For it is only in respect to the inhabitants of neighbouring States, or as acting from a principle of necessity to gratify natural wants, always so slender in Hindostan, that such people can truly merit the epithets of savage or robber, with which they have been and are still usually distinguished."

With this happy state of affairs Mr. Grant compared in bitter terms "the tyranny of forcing men in habits of slavery to receive the partial blessings of freedom, though to them the greatest curse, as necessarily degenerating in an ungrateful soil to the wildest licentiousness and anarchy." His views on the native revenue collectors were equally strong; for, he wrote in his account of Bishnupur, "the true, effective, absolute sway over the persons and property of the people at large is committed, against all the principles of humanity, reason, law, policy and justice, to the charge of a small junto of native collectors, mistaken for princes and hereditary proprietors of lands, the most barbarously ignorant and depraved of their species, being as tyrannically oppressive to their inferiors, forming the great mass of useful subjects to the State, as they are themselves abject slaves to superior authority, especially when employed in the basest schemes of corruption or merciless depredation on the private property of individuals, unprotected and incapable of making any hostile resistance." It would appear that Mr. Grant preferred the old Hindu system of administration by means of hereditary leaders of the people, for elsewhere he wrote regarding the Rājā of Bishnupur: "In truth, the possessor of this little district had pretensions of heritable jurisdiction or territorial rights, with the exception of two or three other individuals in the same predicament, infinitely superior to any in Bengal, and known by the ordinary appellation of zemindar. It seems only unfortunate, though I do not deny the expediency of the measure, that the strong hand of British power hath almost exclusively been exerted in reducing to the common level those who could pride themselves on some real pre-eminence of birth or independence, while such as had none to boast of have been negligently suffered presumptuously to raise their heads above the standard of regal control and beyond law, right, equity, or policy."*

* *Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company.*

The Rājā of Bishnupur, reduced to the state of an ordinary zamindār, was soon to lose what vestiges of former greatness he still retained. Already impoverished by the Marāthā raids, the resources of the family were still further reduced by the famine of 1770, during which more than half of its estates relapsed into jungle. The earlier years of British administration intensified rather than relieved its difficulties. The Rājās insisted upon maintaining a military force which was no longer required under English rule, and for the support of which their revenues were altogether inadequate. The new system protected them from Marāthā raids and Muhammadan oppression, but, on the other hand, it sternly put down their own irregular exactions from the peasantry, enforced the punctual payment of land revenue, and realised arrears by sale of the hereditary estates. The Bishnupur family never recovered from the indigence to which it had been reduced by the famine of 1770, and its ruin was completed by family disputes, costly litigation, and a crushing revenue. As stated above, Dāmodar Singh had driven out Chaitanya Singh and possessed himself of the estate, but a military force sent by Government restored the fugitive. Afterwards, Dāmodar Singh was declared to be entitled to half of the Rāj by the decision of an officer resident at Murshidābād; but the Rājā appealed to the Governor-General, and in 1787 had a decree given in his favour, confirming him in possession and declaring Dāmodar Singh to be entitled only to maintenance. This decree was dated 1787, but in 1791 a new decision was notified by which the estate was again divided between the contending parties. Ruinous litigation ensued, and eventually a compromise was effected by which the Rājā secured the bulk of the property.*

But, in the meantime, the Rājā had still further involved himself by engaging at the decennial settlement for the payment of a revenue of 4 lakhs of sicca rupees, a sum which he was utterly unable to pay. Between 1730 and 1745 the Rājā had paid to the Muhammadan Government a revenue of Rs. 1,29,803 and this was reduced in consideration of the Marāthā devastations to Rs. 1,11,803. In 1759 it had been raised again to its former

* According to Sir William Hunter, the Judge who decided one of these suits was "an ingenuous stripling of nineteen, with whom 'equity and good conscience' were supposed to make up for the want of a legal training and a total ignorance of the law." (*Annals of Rural Bengal*).

standard, and in 1767 had been increased to Rs. 1,61,044. We next find that in 1772 "under the auspices of a British Supervisor, the constitutional mode of settlement, by a regular *hastabud*, seems to have been adopted with considerable advantage in point of income, notwithstanding the ravages of the famine; and in 1773, the highest complete valuation of the whole territory, capable of realization, appears to have been ascertained thus progressively, and then fixed in gross at sicca rupees 4,51,750."*

Before the decennial settlement of 1790, a special commission enquired into the assets of the country, the result, according to the Collector of Burdwān, being that "many advantages enjoyed, it is said, from time immemorial, either as appendages to the state of the ancient Rājās or connived at by the Muhammadan Government, were abolished, or resumed as inconsistent with the definition established of proprietary right; and the gross assets of the country being rated at about sicca rupees 4,60,259, the proprietors were adjudged entitled to one-eleventh part only of the net estimated collections. But under the *khās* collections of that year, the country yielded much less than the estimated produce, viz., only sicca rupees 4,09,000. At this juncture, Chaitanya Singh being called upon or make his decennial settlement, engaged for a net *jamā* of sicca rupees 4,00,000, being fearful that his adversary Dāmodar Singh might supersede him with an offer of that amount; but falling in arrears at the end of the year, more than half the zamindari was sold to realize the balance, and thereby his adversary, who in the interim had been declared entitled to half the estate, was equally involved."†

The costly litigation in which they were engaged completed the ruin of the family, and eventually in 1806 the estate was sold for arrears of land revenue and bought up by the Maharājā of Burdwān. Their estates thus lost, the family were dependent upon small pensions granted by Government and upon what little *debottar* property they had. Their descendants, who live at Bishnupur, Jāmkundi, Indās and Kuchiākol, are now in reduced circumstances; but they retain a strong hold on the affections of the people, and it is not forgotten that their ancestors were the rulers of the land.‡

* Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company.

† Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company.

‡ See also the article on Bishnupur in Chapter XIV.

Bānkurā continued to form one district with Birbhūm until 1793, when it was transferred to the Burdwān Collectorate. An idea of the duties devolving on the District Officer may be gathered from Sir William Hunter's account in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*. "Mr. Christopher Keating, as Collector, Magistrate, and Civil Judge, ruled with an absolute sway over 7,500 square miles, and made his policy felt by the hill tribes many a day's march beyond his frontier. The district naturally divided itself into two parts—the Rājā or Birbhūm's territory on the north of the Ajai and the Rājā of Bishnupur's on the south. Mr. Keating directed the movements of the troops, received the rent of the cultivators, decided civil suits, purveyed for military detachments passing through his district, inflicted punishment on petty offenders, sent heinous ones in chains to the Muhammadan law officer, and acted as cashier to a great commercial company. It would be unreasonable to look for perfect finish in walls whose builders held the plummet in one hand and the sword in the other; and if the administration of such men as Mr. Keating was effective on the whole, it is as much as an after generation, which works at greater leisure and with more complete machinery, has a right to expect."

THE CHUAR REBELLION

In the last two years of the 18th century the south-west of the district, which is now comprised in the Raipur thana, was in a very disturbed state in consequence of what is known as the *Chuar* rebellion. In May 1798 it was found necessary to send a party of sepoy to keep the peace in this tract. Next month a body of 1,500 *Chuars* made their appearance at Raipur, set fire to the bazar and *kachahri*, and overran the place. Reinforcements were sent up under a native commissioned officer, but were beaten back by the banditti; and a company of sepoy was then detached under an European officer. But the zamindārs would neither supply them with provisions nor give information regarding the *Chuars*, to whom they gave shelter in their mud forts. Not unnaturally, complaints were made that the sepoy sent to repel the *Chuars* plundered the ryots; and after some time the force returned to Midnapore. The principal leader of the rebels appears to have been one Durjan Singh, the ex-zamindār of Raipur, who had at one time a following

of 1,500 men, with whom he raided the country, effectually preventing the purchaser from gaining possession of the estate. He was apparently once captured after he had attacked, plundered and burnt some 30 villages; but when he was put on trial, he had to be released because no one dared to appear against him. He resumed his marauding career and was a prominent figure in the disturbances of 1799.

In that year we find that *parganas* Ambikānagar and Supur were also overrun by the *Chuars*, and the Collector reported that the country could not be effectually protected from their incursions till a complete change was made in the police system. The *dārogās* with a few attendants could not make any resistance against the *sardārs* or leaders of the *Chuars*, who lived in remote and almost inaccessible places, and were sure to make their appearance whenever the country in their neighbourhood was unprotected, and to commit all sorts of depredations. All they could possibly do was to send intelligence to the Magistrate, and a detachment of sepoy was then generally deputed, with whom the *Chuars* never ventured to engage. The result was that in the course of a fortnight the troops were recalled, leaving the country worse than before.*

JUNGLE MAHĀLS

At this time Bānkurā appears to have been known as part of the Jungle Mahāls, a vague term applied in the 18th century to the British possessions and some dependent chiefdoms lying between Bīrbhūm, Bānkurā, Midnapore and the hilly country of Chotā Nāgpur. As the system of administration was not precise, inconvenience was caused by the vagueness of the jurisdiction in these tracts; and in 1805 a regulation (Regulation XVIII of 1805) was passed, by which the districts called the Jungle Mahāls, situated in the *zilās* of Bīrbhūm, Burdwān and Midnapore, were separated from the jurisdiction of the Magistrates of those *zilās*, and placed under the jurisdiction of an officer called the Magistrate of the Jungle Mahāls. The district thus formed was composed of 23 *parganas* and *Mahāls*, of which fifteen, including Pānchet, were transferred from Bīrbhūm; three were transferred from Burdwān, viz., Senpahāri,

* This account has been compiled from *The Chuar Rebellion of 1799*, by Mr. J. C. Price (Calcutta, 1874).

Shergarh and Bishnupur, excepting the police circle of Kotalpur, and the contiguous *pargana* of Bālsī, which remained under the jurisdiction of the Magistrate of Burdwān; and five were transferred from Midnapore, viz., Chhātnā, Barābhūm, Mānbhūm, Supur, Ambikānagar, Simlāpāl and Bhālāidihā. It was further provided that the half-yearly jail deliveries for the Jungle Mahāls should be holden by one of the Judges of the Court of Circuit for the Division of Calcutta, and that the Jungle Mahāls should continue subject in all matters of civil cognizance to the courts of *Dīwāni Adālat* for the respective *zilās* to which they had hitherto been attached.

Some interesting details of the district as thus constituted are given in a register of "The established offices, places and employments appertaining to the Civil Departments under the Bengal Government on the part of the Hon'ble the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies" for 1813. The Judge and Magistrate of the Jungle Mahāls *zilā* was Alexander Bruere Todd, drawing pay of Rs.2,333, who was assisted by a Registrar, Thomas Pakenham, on Rs.500 and an Assistant Surgeon on Rs.300. The headquarters were at Bānkurā, and there were seven thānas transferred from Burdwān and two from Midnapore, viz., Chhātnā and Bara Sārengā. The annual cost of judicial establishment was Rs.7,347, including police and contingencies; and we find entries of Rs.11,160 payable to the zamīndār of Bishnupur and his family, and of Rs.476 paid as allowances to 19 zamīndārs employed to act as police officers in Pānchet (described as lately under the Bīrbhūm Magistrate). The revenue administration of the district was supervised by the Burdwān Collector, but was under the direct control of Mr. Pakenham, who is described as *ex-officio* Assistant stationed at Bānkurā, drawing pay of Rs.200 a month.

In the same register we find entries showing that Bānkurā played an important part in the commercial department of the East India Company. Sonāmukhī was a head factory with 31 subordinate *aurungs*, among which were Surul and Ilāmbāzār in Bīrbhūm and Patrasāyar in this district. There were also sugar establishments at Sonāmukhī, Bishnupur and Patrasāyar, besides a large sugar factory at Surul. All these commercial establishments were under the control of John Cheap, who is entered as Resident of the head factory of Sonāmukhī, the date

of his appointment being shown as December 1797, while his salary is shown as Rs. 500, besides house rent of Rs. 120 and commission, which in 1812-13 amounted to Rs. 2,493. This appears to be the John Cheap known as "Cheap the Magnificent", whom Sir William Hunter has done so much to immortalize in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*. "The whole industrial classes were in his pay, and in his person Government appeared in its most benign aspect. A long unpaid retinue followed him from one factory to another, and as the procession defiled throughout the hamlets, mothers held aloft their children to catch a sight of his palanquin, while the elders bowed low before the providence from whom they derived their daily bread. Happy was the infant on whom his shadow fell!" Trade apparently flourished, and the change from the lawless state of affairs which prevailed a generation before is apparent from the fact that in an article on the Jungle Mahāls in Hamilton's *Hindustan* (1820) it is stated that "the name of this district implies a waste territory in a backward stage of civilization, yet it appears from the report of the Circuit Judge in 1815 that no instances of gang robbery had occurred during the six previous months."

RISING OF 1832

Bānkurā continued to form part of the Jungle Mahāls till 1833, when it was separated on account of the disturbances which took place in 1832 in the west of the district. These disturbances were caused by an outbreak of the Bhumijes of the Jungle Mahāls, who enjoyed the nickname of *Chuars* or robbers and had long been the terror of the surrounding districts. They were ready to rise at the slightest provocation, whether to support a turbulent chief ambitious of obtaining power to which he was not entitled, or to oppose Government in a policy of which they disapproved. The rising of 1832 was due to a disputed succession in Barābhūm, an estate claimed by Gangā Nārāyan. Aggrieved at the decision of the courts, Gangā Nārāyan raised the standard of rebellion, and the Bhumijes of Barābhūm and the adjoining estates rose in support of him. The officials and police fell back to Burdwān, and for some time Gangā Nārāyan had the whole country at his mercy, sacking every place worth plundering. At last a strong force was collected, and military operations against the insurgents commenced. They were soon driven to take refuge in the hills,

but, being pressed there also, Gangā Nārāyan fled to Singhbhūm, where he died. This rising is still known locally as the *Gangā Nārāyani Hāngāma*.

As a result of these disturbances, a change of administration was determined upon; and by Regulation XIII of 1833 the district of the Jungle Mahāls was broken up. The court of the *Diwāni Adālat* of the Jungle Mahāls was abolished, the estates of Senpahāri, Shergarh and Bishnupur were transferred to Burdwān, and remainder, with the estate of Dhalbhūm, which was detached from Midnapore, were formed into the present district of Mānbhūm. At the same time, the country was withdrawn from the regular system of administration and placed under an officer called the Principal Assistant to the Agent to the Governor-General for the South-West Frontier. The effect of this measure was that practically the whole of the west of the present district of Bānkurā was included within Mānbhūm; and a map of 1844 shews the eastern boundary of the South-West frontier Agency as extending close to Bānkurā town. The remainder of the district as now constituted was formed into a district, known as West Burdwān, in 1835-36. The latter had its headquarters at Bānkurā, and extended as far east as Kotalpur, while to the west, Chhātānā, Supur, and Ambikānagar formed part of the South-West Frontier Agency.

MUTINY OF 1857

The subsequent history of Bānkurā presents little of interest. During the Mutiny the district remained tranquil and free from disturbance. There was for some time much apprehension regarding the Sheikhawati Battalion, of which a detachment was stationed at Bānkurā, an uneasiness increased by the vicinity of Chotā Nāgpur, where the main body was, and by a fear of an outbreak amongst the *Chuars* and *Sāntāls* inhabiting the country about Bānkurā. The distrust of the Battalion appears, however, to have passed away gradually; and in October, when there was again some fear of an outbreak among the *Sāntāls*, a wing was gladly welcomed at Bānkurā and served to allay the anxiety that was felt. Towards the end of October confidence was so far restored that the Magistrate at Bānkurā proposed to dismiss an extra establishment of *barkandāzes* which he had been allowed to entertain.

FORMATION OF DISTRICT

The only other matter calling for mention is the formation of the district. At the time of the Mutiny, Bānkurā included only the eastern half of the present district. The town of Bānkurā was on its extreme western boundary, and the western half, including nearly all the country to the west of the Bānkurā-Rāniganj road and the Bānkurā-Khatrā road, belonged to Mānbhūm. Subsequently, numerous changes in the jurisdiction of the district took place, which need not be particularized; and it will be sufficient to state that in 1872 the *parganas* of Sonāmukhi, Indās, Kotalpur, Shergarh and Senpahāri on the east, were transferred to Burdwān, while on the west the police circle of Chhātnā was separated from Mānbhūm and added to Bānkurā. In 1877, when the *Statistical Account of Bengal* was published, the district, as then constituted, contained an area of only 1,346 square miles; but in October 1879, the thanas of Khātrā and Raipur and the Simlāpāl outpost, corresponding with *parganas* Supur, Ambikānagar, Raipur, Syāmsundarpur, Phulkusmā, Simlāpāl and Bhālāidihā, were transferred from the Mānbhūm district, and thanas Sonāmukhi, Kotalpur and Indās were re-transferred from the Burdwān district. The district thus acquired its present dimensions. The District Judgeship, however, was still known as West Burdwān, and it was not till 1881 that it was given the name of Bānkurā.

BISHNUPUR OR MALLA ERA

"From an historical point of view," writes Dr. Bloch, "perhaps the most curious fact in connection with the Malla Rājās of Bishnupur is that they used a separate era of their own, called Malla *Saka* in the inscriptions. I have not found any information about this era either in Prinsep's Useful Tables or in Cunningham's Book of Indian Eras. In one only of the temple inscriptions the equivalent of Malla *saka* 1064 is given as *saka* 1680, and thus the difference between the Malla era and the Bengali *sāl* appears to be exactly 100 years. I suspect that the Malla year in other respects entirely followed the *lāsli* year of Bengal, and the Rājās of Bishnupur, out of vain glory, merely reduced the Bengali year by one hundred in order to establish a special era of their own. But this conjecture remains to be verified."*

According to local reports, the Malla era, which also went by the name of Mallabdāh and is locally known as the Bishnupur era, dates back to the establishment of the Rāj by Adi Malla, and the difference between it and the Bengali era is 101 years, i.e., the first year of the Malla era is 101 of the Bengali era. It is employed in all the twelve temple inscriptions that still remain at Bishnupur, and also in the title deeds of the Rāj preserved in the Government offices at Bānkurā.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The most interesting remains found in the district are at Bishnupur, where there are a number of temples representing the most complete set of specimens of the peculiar Bengali style of temple architecture. There are other temples of archaeological interest at Bāhulārā, Ekteswar and Sonātāpol, and remains of old forts are found at Karāsurgarh, Asurgarh and Syāmsundargarh.

* Report. Archaeological Survey, Bengal Circle, 1903-04.