British Occupation of Odisha (1803–1817)

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • October 6, 2026 • 58 min read

In the autumn of 1803, while the main armies of the Second Anglo-Maratha War were manoeuvring in the Deccan and the Doab, a comparatively small East India Company force of Madras sepoys and European troops marched north from Ganjam along the narrow coastal corridor between the Chilika lake and the Bay of Bengal. It occupied the temple town of Puri without firing a shot on 18 September, while a second detachment landing from the sea took Balasore on 22 September. After a slow march through a delta still flooded by the monsoon, the main force entered Cuttack on 10 October and stormed Barabati fort, the historic citadel of every ruler of coastal Odisha since the Gangas, in mid-October. A further detachment forced the Baramula Pass into the hill country on 2 November, scattering the last organised Maratha resistance. By the Treaty of Deogaon, signed in Berar on 17 December 1803, Raghuji Bhonsle II of Nagpur formally ceded “Cuttack and Balasore” to the Company. In barely three months, the coastal plain of Odisha, which the Bhonsles had governed since the treaty of 1751, passed to a power based in Calcutta, and the Company secured what successive Governors-General had sought for nearly forty years: an unbroken land corridor between the Bengal and Madras presidencies.

This article argues that the British occupation of Odisha should be understood not as a single military event but as a process with two distinct phases. The first, the military occupation of September to December 1803, was rapid and almost bloodless because it was prepared politically: the Company bought the Chilika crossing from a Maratha officer, assured the priests of Jagannatha that their temple and customs would be respected, and enlisted the raja of Khurda with a promise of money. The second phase, the administrative

and fiscal conquest of Odia society between 1803 and 1817, was slower, more intrusive and violently contested. The article reconstructs both. It explains the strategic, commercial and fiscal reasons the Company wanted the coast; reconstructs the campaign from Ganjam to the Baramula Pass and the diplomacy that accompanied it; and follows the consolidation that came after, including the engagements with the tributary chiefs of the Garhjat, the Khurda rising of 1804–05 and the execution of Jayi Rajguru in 1806, the creation of the Province of Cuttack under Regulation XII of 1805, and the Company's cautious but consequential assumption of control over the Jagannatha temple and the pilgrim tax.

The second half of the article turns to the economic and social consequences of the new order: the succession of short-term revenue settlements, the application of the Bengal sale law and the transfer of estates to outsiders, the replacement of cowrie payments by a demand for silver, the extension of the salt monopoly, the dominance of Bengali subordinate officials in courts and revenue offices, and the resumption of the service lands of the *paikas*. These, it is argued, created the coalition of grievances that erupted in the Paika rebellion of 1817. The article closes with an account of how Odia historians, from Bhabani Charan Ray to the writers of the Paika bicentenary, have challenged the colonial narrative of a benevolent "liberation" from Maratha misrule, and sets out the principal debates that continue to divide historians of the period.

Table of Contents

01 **1. Introduction and background** 5
- 1.1 Odisha as the Company’s missing link 5
- 1.2 Commercial and fiscal interests 6
- 1.3 Maratha Odisha on the eve of 1803 7
- 1.4 The Second Anglo-Maratha War 8

02 **2. Sources and historiography** 8
- 2.1 Company records 9
- 2.2 Odia and temple sources 10
- 2.3 Early British histories 11
- 2.4 Key documents examined 11
- 2.5 How the historiography developed 12

03 **3. The campaign of 1803** 13
- 3.1 The plan of campaign 14
- 3.2 From Ganjam to Puri: the Chilika crossing and the Khurda bargain 15
- 3.3 Balasore 17
- 3.4 The march on Cuttack and the fall of Barabati 17
- 3.5 The Baramula Pass and the hill country 18
- 3.6 The Treaty of Deogaon 18

04 **4. Consolidation, 1803–1805** 19
- 4.1 The first government: Commissioners and the Province of Cuttack 19
- 4.2 The Garhjat: from Maratha tributaries to Tributary Mahals 21
- 4.3 Khurda: the broken bargain and the rising of 1804–05 21
- 4.4 The Company and Jagannatha 23

05 **5. Revenue, economy and society, 1803–1817** 24
- 5.1 The short-term settlements 25
- 5.2 The sale law and the transfer of land 26
- 5.3 Language, officials and courts 26
- 5.4 Cowries and silver 27
- 5.5 Salt 27
- 5.6 The paikas 28
- 5.7 The road to 1817 28

06 **6. Case studies** 29
- Case study 1: The Chilika crossing and the price of a “bloodless” conquest 29
- Case study 2: Puri, 18 September 1803 30
- Case study 3: Barabati, October 1803 31
- Case study 4: Mukunda Deva II and Jayi Rajguru 31
- Case study 5: The estate sales of 1806–1807 32

07 **7. Odia historians on the British occupation** 32
- 7.1 Bhabani Charan Ray and the foundations of British rule 33
- 7.2 K. M. Patra, J. K. Samal and the Company’s administration 33
- 7.3 Harekrushna Mahtab and the nationalist frame 34
- 7.4 Khurda, Jayi Rajguru and the Paika literature 34
- 7.5 Main debates 35

08 **8. Assessment** 36

09 **9. Glossary** 37

10 **10. Frequently asked questions** 38

11 11. How to cite this article 39
12 12. References 39
12.1 Primary sources 39
12.2 Secondary sources 40
12.3 Works by Odia historians 40
12.4 Online resources 41
12.5 Related articles on History of Odisha 42

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Odisha as the Company’s missing link

By the middle of the 1760s the East India Company had become a territorial power on both sides of Odisha. To the north, the victories of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) had made it the effective master of Bengal and Bihar, and in August 1765 the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II granted it the *diwani*, the right to collect the revenues, of “Bengal, Bihar and Orissa”. To the south, the Company acquired the Northern Circars, the coastal districts of the Andhra country, and with them Ganjam, where a Resident, Cotsford, was appointed in 1766 and took up office in 1768. On paper the *diwani* grant seemed to give the Company Odisha as well. In practice the “Orissa” of the Mughal revenue system by then meant little more than the district of Midnapore, because the coastal plain from the Subarnarekha to the Chilika had been ceded to the Bhonsle Marathas of Nagpur by Alivardi Khan in 1751 (see The Maratha Rule in Odisha). The Company’s two eastern possessions were thus separated by a Maratha province several hundred kilometres long.

This gap was more than a cartographic inconvenience. Troops, treasure, official correspondence and merchants travelling between Calcutta and Madras had either to go by sea, a passage made dangerous by the monsoon and, in wartime, by French privateers and squadrons, or to cross Maratha territory with the permission, and often on the payment, of the Bhonsle government. The weakness of this position was exposed repeatedly in the Company’s southern wars. In 1781, during the Second Anglo-Mysore War, when Madras was threatened by Haidar Ali, Warren Hastings had to negotiate with the Bhonsle court before a Bengal force under Colonel Pearse could march overland through Odisha to reinforce the southern presidency. From the 1760s onward, Company officials repeatedly discussed proposals to purchase, lease or otherwise acquire the Maratha province, and the question of Cuttack recurs in the Company’s dealings with Nagpur in the last decades of the eighteenth century. None of these approaches succeeded, because the Bhonsles valued Odisha as a source of revenue and as a bargaining counter, and because before 1798 no Governor-

General was prepared to risk a general war with the Marathas for it.

1.2 Commercial and fiscal interests

The strategic argument for acquiring Odisha was reinforced by a set of commercial and fiscal interests that, taken together, made the province a prize worth having in its own right rather than merely a road between two others. The most important of these was salt. The coastal tracts of Odisha, especially in the Balasore and Cuttack districts, produced large quantities of salt by boiling sea water, and this salt was cheaper than the salt of the Company’s Bengal monopoly. Smuggled across the frontier, it undercut a monopoly that was one of the most lucrative sources of revenue in the Bengal presidency. Control of Odisha would allow the Company to close this leak and to extend its monopoly to a new and productive coast.

Interest	Why it mattered to the Company
Strategic corridor	A continuous land link between Bengal and Madras, removing dependence on Maratha goodwill and on the sea route
Salt	Cheap Odia salt undercut the Bengal salt monopoly; acquisition would close the frontier and extend the monopoly
Rice and cloth	The Mahanadi delta exported rice to Bengal in good years; Balasore and Cuttack produced cotton textiles for export
Ports	Balasore, where the English had traded since the 1630s, and the smaller ports of the delta
Land revenue	The revenue of the Mughalbandi, which had been flowing to Nagpur
Pilgrim traffic	Tens of thousands of pilgrims a year to Puri: a source of tax and a matter of great political sensitivity

Beyond salt, the Mahanadi delta was one of the rice bowls of eastern India, and in good years its surplus fed Bengal. Balasore had been a centre of European trade since the English, Dutch and others established factories there in the seventeenth century, and although its importance had declined, its port and its weaving villages still mattered. The

land revenue of the Mughalbandi, which under the Marathas had been remitted to Nagpur, would now flow to Calcutta. Finally, the pilgrim traffic to Puri, which brought tens of thousands of visitors a year from every part of India, was both a potential source of revenue and a matter of acute political sensitivity: whoever governed Puri would be judged, by Hindus across the subcontinent, by how they treated Jagannatha.

1.3 Maratha Odisha on the eve of 1803

By 1803 Maratha rule in Odisha had become thin and brittle. The province was governed from Cuttack by the *naib subahdar* Sadashiv Rao, who had held office since 1793, with a garrison at Barabati, a body of revenue officers in the Mughalbandi, and tribute relations with the chiefs of the Garhjat. The frequent changes of governor in the 1760s and 1770s, the reliance on short-term revenue farming and the remittance of surplus revenue to Nagpur had left the administration with few local roots. Nagpur itself, under Raghuji Bhonsle II, was increasingly absorbed in the politics of the Maratha confederacy, which had been thrown into crisis by the death of the Peshwa Madhavrao II in 1795 and by the rivalry between Daulat Rao Scindia and Yashwant Rao Holkar. The best Bhonsle troops were committed to the Deccan, and the garrison in Odisha could expect little reinforcement in an emergency.

The Maratha position was weakened further by the attitudes of the province’s other powers. Several Maratha officials in Odisha, uncertain of their pay and of their future, were open to approaches from the Company. The raja of Khurda, Mukunda Deva II, and his influential minister Jayi Rajguru resented the loss of four parganas and of the management of the Jagannatha temple to the Marathas during the reign of Birakishore Deva (see Formation of the Khurda Kingdom), and saw in a change of masters a chance to recover them. The chiefs of the Garhjat, who had paid tribute to Nagpur under compulsion and had at times fought Maratha expeditions, had no reason to risk their states in its defence. Maratha Odisha in 1803 was therefore a province that would fall to whoever could isolate its garrison and offer its other powers better terms.

1.4 The Second Anglo-Maratha War

The occasion for the conquest came not from Odisha but from western India. In October 1802 Yashwant Rao Holkar defeated the combined forces of the Peshwa and Scindia near Pune, and the Peshwa Baji Rao II fled to the coast. On 31 December 1802, at Bassein, he signed a treaty with the Company accepting a subsidiary alliance: a British force would be stationed in his territories, paid for by the cession of land, and his foreign relations would be conducted through the Company. For Richard Wellesley, Governor-General since 1798 and the most expansionist of the Company’s rulers, the Treaty of Bassein was the instrument by which the Maratha confederacy could be brought under British supremacy. For Scindia and Raghuji Bhonsle II, it was an intolerable subordination of the head of the confederacy to a foreign power. Negotiations failed, and in August 1803 the Company went to war with both.

Wellesley’s strategy was to strike at the confederates on every front simultaneously, so that they could neither concentrate their forces nor support one another. His brother, Major-General Arthur Wellesley, campaigned in the Deccan, winning the battles of Assaye (23 September) and Argaon (29 November) and storming the fortress of Gawilghur (15 December). In the north, General Gerard Lake took Aligarh and Delhi and destroyed Scindia’s army at Laswari. Smaller forces moved against the outlying Maratha possessions in Gujarat, Bundelkhand and Odisha. In this design the Cuttack expedition was a secondary theatre, but one with a permanent objective. Whatever the outcome of the great battles in the Deccan and Hindustan, Wellesley intended that the province of Cuttack should remain in the Company’s hands at the peace, closing at last the gap between Bengal and Madras.

2. Sources and historiography

The evidence for the British occupation of Odisha differs sharply from the evidence for the Maratha period that preceded it. For the Maratha province the historian must piece together Marathi revenue papers, Persian chronicles written in Bengal, temple records and the observations of occasional English travellers, none of which gives a full view. For the period after 1803 the problem is almost the reverse. The East India Company was a vast bureaucracy that recorded its decisions, its accounts and its correspondence in great detail,

and the records of the conquest and of the first decades of British administration survive in large and well-ordered series in the national and state archives at New Delhi, Kolkata and Bhubaneswar, and in the India Office Records in London. The difficulty is not scarcity but perspective. These records were written by the conquerors, for the conquerors, and they describe Odia society through the categories of Company administration: revenue, order, the regulations and the temple. The voices of the Khurda court, the Garhjat chiefs, the temple servants, the dispossessed zamindars and the *paikas* survive mainly in petitions preserved in Company files, in the temple chronicle, and in oral and literary traditions recorded much later. A critical history of the occupation must therefore read the Company's records against the grain, attending to what they reveal unintentionally as much as to what they assert.

2.1 Company records

The most authoritative statement of British aims is found in the **despatches and minutes of the Governor-General**. Wellesley's instructions for the Cuttack expedition, including his explicit order that the property of the Jagannatha temple was not to be treated as prize of war and that the priests were to be conciliated, were published in the nineteenth century in his collected *Despatches, Minutes and Correspondence*. They show how carefully the political side of the campaign was planned, and how clearly Wellesley understood that the occupation of Puri was a test of the Company's standing with Hindu opinion across India.

The **military reports** of the officers in the field, Harcourt's despatches from Ganjam, Puri and Cuttack, Captain Morgan's report on the occupation of Balasore and Major Forbes's account of the action at the Baramula Pass, are preserved in the Secret and Political Consultations of the Fort William government. They provide the chronology of the campaign, but they are written to show their authors in the best light, and they tend to minimise both the role of bribery and the extent of local resistance.

The correspondence of the **Commissioners for the affairs of Cuttack**, Harcourt and John Melville, and of the Collectors and Judge-Magistrates who succeeded them, is the richest source for the consolidation of British rule. It records the agreements made with zamindars

and tributary chiefs, the first revenue settlements, the Khurda rising of 1804–05, and the arrangements made for the temple. Much of it formed the basis of G. Toynbee's later narrative.

The **Bengal Regulations** provide the legal framework of the new order. Regulation XII of 1805 provided for the government of the province of Cuttack under the Bengal system and held out the promise of a permanent settlement; Regulation IV of 1806 dealt with the temple and the pilgrim tax; Regulation IV of 1809 transferred the superintendence of the temple to the raja of Khurda. Read alongside the correspondence, the regulations show both what the Company intended and how far its intentions diverged from local practice.

Finally, the **treaties and engagements** of the period, the Treaty of Deogaon with Raghuji Bhonsle II and the agreements (*kabuliyats* and *sanads*) with the tributary chiefs, are printed in C. U. Aitchison's *Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*. They define the formal relationship between the Company and the powers of Odisha, though they say little about how those relationships worked in practice.

2.2 Odia and temple sources

The most important indigenous source is the ***Madala Panji***, the chronicle of the Jagannatha temple at Puri, which records the Company's arrival at Puri, the changes in the management of the temple and the fortunes of the Khurda royal house from the temple's own point of view. Like all recensions of the chronicle, it must be used with care: it was compiled and revised over long periods, its dates are not always reliable, and its concern is with the deity and his servants rather than with political history. Nonetheless it preserves a perspective entirely absent from the Company's records.

The **petitions** of Mukunda Deva II, of the associates of Jayi Rajguru, of dispossessed zamindars and of temple servants, preserved in the Company's own files, are the main way to hear Odia voices of the period directly. They are, by their nature, partisan documents, written to persuade a powerful authority, but they reveal how the Odia elites understood the bargains of 1803 and the injustices they believed had followed.

Oral tradition and later literature on Jayi Rajguru, Buxi Jagabandhu and the *paikas*, much of it collected or composed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has shaped popular memory of the period profoundly. It is valuable as evidence of how the occupation was remembered, but it needs careful handling as evidence of what happened.

2.3 Early British histories

The first histories of the conquest were written by Company officials and reflected the Company's view of itself. Andrew Stirling, Persian secretary to the government, wrote his *Account, Geographical, Statistical and Historical of Orissa Proper, or Cuttack* in 1822. It is a work of real learning, drawing on Odia, Persian and Sanskrit sources, but its treatment of the Maratha period as an age of anarchy and its presentation of 1803 as a deliverance set the tone for the next century. G. Toynbee's *A Sketch of the History of Orissa from 1803 to 1828* (1873), compiled from the records of the Commissioner's office, remains the most detailed narrative of the early administration and is indispensable for its chronology and for the documents it quotes. W. W. Hunter's two-volume *Orissa* (1872) placed the conquest within a sweeping account of the province's history, its famines, its pilgrimage and its supposed progress under British rule. All three are essential sources and all three must be read as products of the colonial state.

2.4 Key documents examined

Document	Date	What it tells us	Limits
Wellesley's orders on the Cuttack expedition	Summer–autumn 1803	War aims; the order that the temple's property was not to be treated as prize; instructions to conciliate the priests	Policy, not practice; written in Calcutta
Harcourt's despatches from Puri and Cuttack	Sept–Oct 1803	Route, the Khurda bargain, the occupation of Puri and the taking of Barabati	A commander's account; minimises friction and bribery

Treaty of Deogaon	17 Dec 1803	Cession of “Cuttack and Balasore” by Raghuji II; British Resident at Nagpur	Says nothing on internal arrangements in Odisha
Engagements with the Garhjat chiefs	1803–1804	Fixed tribute (*peshkash*), recognition of the chiefs, military obligations	Formulaic; disputes over boundaries and Maratha-era claims
Regulation XII of 1805	1805	Formal creation of the Province of Cuttack under Bengal law; the promise of a permanent settlement after a period of short leases	A legal frame; implementation differed
Regulation IV of 1806	1806	Pilgrim tax and the Company’s management of the temple	Contested at the time and later in Britain
Petitions of Mukunda Deva II	1804–1807	The Khurda case: the unpaid lakh, the four parganas, the temple	Self-serving after his defeat; preserved selectively
Toynbee, *Sketch of the History of Orissa*	1873	Detailed narrative from the Commissioner’s files	Official viewpoint; little on Odia society

2.5 How the historiography developed

The historiography of the British occupation has passed through three broad phases, each shaped by the political concerns of its time as much as by new evidence.

The first phase, **the official narrative**, runs from Wellesley’s despatches to Hunter’s *Orissa* . In this account the conquest was swift, almost bloodless and welcomed by a population exhausted by Maratha exactions. The Company appears as the restorer of order and the protector of Jagannatha, and the troubles that followed, the Khurda rising and the “disturbances” of 1817, are attributed to the ingratitude of the Khurda court, the turbulence of the *paikas* or the misconduct of individual subordinate officials rather than to the system itself.

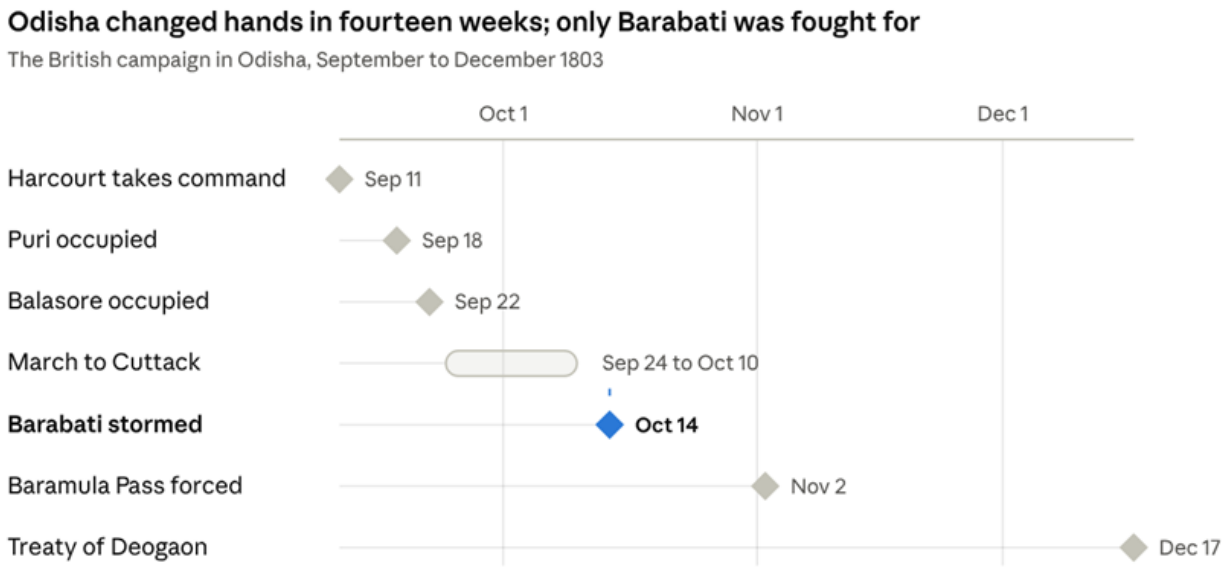
The second phase, **nationalist and regional revision**, began with the general histories of Odisha written in the 1920s and 1930s and reached maturity with Bhabani Charan Ray's *Foundations of British Orissa* (1960). Odia historians, reading the same Company records more critically, showed the importance of bribery and promises in the "bloodless" conquest, documented the broken bargain with Khurda, and demonstrated how severely the early revenue settlements and sale laws damaged the province. In this account, the contrast between Maratha "misrule" and British "improvement" largely dissolves.

The third phase, which may be called **the Paika turn**, has developed since the 1960s and gathered strength around the bicentenary of the Paika rebellion in 2017. Historians and public writers in Odisha have increasingly treated the whole period from 1803 to 1817 as the prelude to the rebellion, which many regard as one of the earliest organised wars of resistance to British rule in India. This has brought the Khurda rising, Jayi Rajguru and the social history of the *paikas* to the centre of the story. It has also generated vigorous debates about the reliability of the evidence, the weight to be given to oral tradition, and the appropriateness of describing a regional revolt in the language of national independence.

3. The campaign of 1803

The conquest of Odisha in 1803 took about three months and cost remarkably few lives. Its speed was celebrated at the time, and has often been cited since, as proof that Maratha rule in the province had collapsed under its own weight and that the population welcomed the British as liberators. A closer reading of the evidence suggests a different interpretation. The campaign was planned as carefully in the counting-house as on the parade ground. Before and during the advance, the Company prepared the ground with promises, assurances and payments to almost every party that might have offered resistance: Maratha officers commanding key positions, the priests of the Jagannatha temple, the raja of Khurda and the tributary chiefs of the hills. It fought in earnest only at the one place, Barabati fort, where the defenders could not be induced to stand aside. The ease of the conquest was therefore the product of a deliberate political strategy as much as of Maratha weakness, and the bargains on which it rested would shape the troubled history of the following years. The

drawing below sets out the sequence of events.



The 1803 campaign · seven milestones, 11 September to 17 December

Puri and Balasore fell within eleven days of Harcourt taking command; the only real fighting came a month later at Barabati, and the treaty that made the conquest legal was signed far away in Berar.

3.1 The plan of campaign

Wellesley’s plan for the Cuttack expedition reflected both the military realities of the coast and his understanding of its politics. Militarily, the province could be approached from two directions: overland from Ganjam in the south, through the narrow corridor between the Chilika lake and the sea, and by sea from Bengal in the north, where Balasore offered a landing place close to the Company’s existing territory in Midnapore. Politically, the success of the expedition depended on detaching from the Maratha cause the officials, priests and princes whose cooperation or neutrality would make the province untenable for Nagpur. The plan accordingly had three elements.

The first was **a main force from the south**. Madras troops, sepoys with a stiffening of European infantry and artillery, were assembled at Ganjam under Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell, with orders to march north along the coast, take Puri and advance on Cuttack.

The second was **a sea-borne force in the north**, a detachment under Captain Morgan that would land near Balasore, secure the northern part of the province and cut the Maratha line of communication towards Bengal. The third, and in many ways the most important, was **political preparation**. Agents were to win over or neutralise Maratha officers, reassure the priests of Jagannatha that their temple and customs would be respected, and secure the cooperation of the raja of Khurda and the chiefs of the Garhjat. To manage this side of the operation, a civil servant, John Melville, was attached to the expedition with authority to negotiate and to make the provisional civil arrangements that would follow the occupation.

Before the force could move, Campbell fell seriously ill. On 11 September 1803 command passed to Lieutenant-Colonel George Harcourt, of His Majesty’s 12th Regiment, who together with Melville was later appointed one of the two Commissioners for the affairs of the province. Harcourt’s appointment combined military and political authority in a single hand, an arrangement that suited a campaign in which negotiation would matter as much as fighting.

3.2 From Ganjam to Puri: the Chilika crossing and the Khurda bargain

The road north from Ganjam ran along a narrow strip of land between the Chilika lake and the Bay of Bengal. This was a natural defensive line: a small force holding the crossing could have delayed an invading army for weeks while the monsoon flooded the country behind it. The Company did not attempt to force it. Instead, the Maratha *faujdar* responsible for the crossing, Fateh Muhammad, was paid to allow the British to pass, and Harcourt’s column crossed near Manikpatna without a fight. Odia accounts name several other Maratha officials who were approached or paid during the campaign, among them Bhanuji Pandit, Haribansa Ray, Balaji Kuanr and Moro Pandit. The extent of these payments cannot be fully reconstructed from the surviving records, which were not written to dwell on them, but their effect is clear: at the points where resistance would have been most effective, it did not materialise.

The most consequential of the Company’s bargains was made with Khurda. The kingdom lay across the route from the Chilika to Puri, and its paikas, operating in difficult country of hills and jungle, could have made the advance slow and costly. Mukunda Deva II, still a young man, and his minister Jayakrishna Rajguru, known as Jayi Rajguru, who effectively directed the affairs of the kingdom, agreed to allow Harcourt’s force to pass through Khurda territory and to assist it with supplies and guides. In return Harcourt promised the raja one lakh of rupees. The raja also expected, as the natural reward of his alliance, the return of the four parganas of Rahang, Sirai, Chabiskud and Limbai that the Marathas had taken from his grandfather, and the restoration of the Gajapati’s authority over the Jagannatha temple. Whether these further expectations were ever formally promised, or merely encouraged by British silence, is one of the disputed questions of the period; the Company later denied any such commitment, while the Khurda court regarded them as part of the bargain. What is not disputed is that the promise of money was made and that the raja’s cooperation was a material factor in the ease of the advance.

At Puri, Wellesley’s instructions were explicit and emphatic. The property, treasure and valuables of the temple were not to be treated as prize of war; the priests were to be assured that the customs and rites of the temple would be respected; and the troops were to be kept away from the temple precincts and from any interference with worship. A deputation of temple Brahmins came out to meet the British, and **Puri was occupied without resistance on 18 September 1803**. The care with which the Company approached the temple was not merely a matter of diplomatic courtesy. Wellesley and his officers understood that a single act of sacrilege at the most famous shrine of eastern India could turn the population of the province, and Hindu opinion far beyond it, against the Company. They also intended, from the beginning, to take over the revenues that the Marathas had drawn from the pilgrim traffic, and that required the goodwill of the priests and the uninterrupted continuation of the great festivals.

3.3 Balasore

In the north, Captain Morgan’s detachment landed near Balasore. The Maratha officers there, cut off from Cuttack and facing a force that could be reinforced from Bengal, made no serious attempt at defence. They abandoned the town on 21 September, and **Balasore was occupied on 22 September 1803**. The northern districts of the province, long tied commercially to Bengal through the trade in salt, rice and cloth and through the presence of European merchants, offered little resistance. The fall of Balasore isolated the Maratha administration at Cuttack from the north and gave the Company a second base from which to extend its control over the coastal plain.

3.4 The march on Cuttack and the fall of Barabati

Harcourt left Puri for Cuttack on 24 September. The march through the Mahanadi delta at the end of the rains was slow and difficult. The rivers that cross the coastal plain were in flood, the roads were waterlogged, the movement of guns and supplies was laborious, and the column was harassed by Maratha horsemen. It took more than a fortnight to cover the distance. The force reached Cuttack and took control of the town on 10 October.

Barabati fort, the historic stronghold on the bank of the Mahanadi that had been the seat of power of every ruler of coastal Odisha since the Gangas, was the only place where the Marathas chose to make a stand. Its walls and moat could not be bribed open, and its garrison, unlike the officers at the Chilika crossing and Balasore, had not been induced to abandon it. Harcourt brought up his batteries and opened fire on the fort. A breach was made, and the fort was **stormed on 14 October 1803**. Some accounts, including Mahanta’s, date the opening of the bombardment to 14 October and the capture to a short time afterwards; all agree that the fort fell within days of the British arrival and that casualties on both sides were light. The Maratha garrison and the remnants of the provincial administration fled inland towards the hills, and with the fall of Barabati the Maratha government of Odisha ceased to exist.

3.5 The Baramula Pass and the hill country

The Maratha forces retreating from Cuttack fell back on the Baramula Pass, which led from the delta through the hills of the Garhjat towards the Bhonsle territories in the interior and on to Nagpur. A detachment under **Major Forbes forced the pass on 2 November 1803**, scattering the last organised Maratha resistance in the province. The action at Baramula opened the hill country to British influence. The chiefs of the Garhjat, who had watched the progress of the campaign and had no wish to be on the losing side, began to send agents to Cuttack to make terms with the new power.

Further west, the Bhonsle territory of Sambalpur was occupied by a force under Major Broughton in early 1804. Sambalpur, however, followed a different path from the coastal province: it was restored to the Bhonsles in 1806, came under British control again after the Third Anglo-Maratha War of 1817–18, and was finally annexed in 1849. The western uplands of Odisha thus remained outside the Province of Cuttack and were administered for most of the nineteenth century from the Central Provinces, a separation that would later become a grievance of the Odia movement.

3.6 The Treaty of Deogaon

The fate of Odisha was finally decided not at Cuttack but in Berar. After Arthur Wellesley’s victory over the combined forces of Raghuji Bhonsle II and Scindia at Argaon on 29 November and the storming of the great Bhonsle fortress of Gawilghur on 15 December, Raghuji could no longer continue the war. By the **Treaty of Deogaon, signed on 17 December 1803**, he ceded to the Company the province of Cuttack, including Balasore; renounced his claims over the tributary chiefs who had entered into engagements with the British; ceded his territories west of the Wardha river, which were transferred to the Nizam of Hyderabad; and agreed to receive a British Resident at his court in Nagpur.

The treaty transformed the legal character of the British presence in Odisha. What had been a military occupation in time of war became a permanent territorial acquisition recognised by the former sovereign. It also confirmed the Company’s direct relationship with the Garhjat chiefs, who were now released from their obligations to Nagpur. For the Bhonsles,

the loss of Odisha marked the end of half a century of rule over the coast; for the Company, it closed at last the gap between Bengal and Madras that had troubled it since the 1760s.

4. Consolidation, 1803–1805

Taking Odisha had been quick; holding and governing it proved a longer and more complicated undertaking. In the two years after the fall of Barabati the Company had to decide how to administer a province whose institutions, tenures and language it scarcely understood; how to settle its relations with the tributary chiefs of the hills, who had been released from their obligations to Nagpur; how to deal with an ally at Khurda who believed himself cheated; and what a Christian trading company, answerable to a Protestant Parliament and increasingly watched by evangelical critics, should do with the most celebrated Hindu temple in eastern India. The answers it gave in these years set the framework within which Odisha would be governed for much of the nineteenth century.

4.1 The first government: Commissioners and the Province of Cuttack

Immediately after the conquest the province was placed under two **Commissioners for the affairs of Cuttack**, George Harcourt and John Melville. Theirs was an emergency regime that combined military, revenue and judicial authority in the same hands. Their immediate tasks were to keep order in a province whose former government had fled, to collect the revenue that had formerly been remitted to Nagpur, to settle with the zamindars and chiefs, and to report to Calcutta on the institutions they found. In the early months they relied heavily on the existing machinery: Maratha revenue officers and the hereditary intermediaries of the Mughalbandi, the *chaudhuris*, *qanungos* and zamindars, were largely kept in place, and the revenue papers of the Maratha administration became the basis for the first British assessments.

This provisional arrangement was gradually replaced by a regular government on the Bengal model. The main stages are summarised below.

Year	Step
1803–04	Rule by the two Commissioners; Maratha revenue officers largely kept in place
1804	The “Province of Cuttack” divided into a northern division (headquarters Balasore) and a southern division (headquarters Puri), under a Collector and a Judge-Magistrate
1805	**Regulation XII of 1805** formally provides for the government of the province under the Bengal Regulations, with a promise of a permanent settlement after a series of short settlements
1816	Headquarters moved from Puri to Cuttack
1818	Cuttack becomes the seat of the Commissioner, a Revenue Board and a Provincial Court of Appeal
1828	The province divided into the districts of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri

The decision to govern Odisha under the **Bengal Regulations** was perhaps the single most consequential choice of the early British period. It meant that the courts of Bengal, its laws of revenue, sale and inheritance, its procedures and its subordinate officials were introduced more or less wholesale into a province whose land tenures had been shaped by Gajapati, Mughal and Maratha practice, whose small currency was the cowrie, and whose people spoke Odia. The administrators who made this decision were not unaware of the differences, but uniformity was administratively convenient, and the Bengal system, with its Permanent Settlement of 1793, was regarded in Calcutta as the most advanced in India. Much of the distress of the following fifteen years, and much of the anger that fed the rising of 1817, flowed from the application of rules made for Bengal to a society that was not Bengal.

The choice of Puri rather than Cuttack as the headquarters of the southern division, and for a time of the province, is also revealing. It reflected the Company’s preoccupation with the temple and the pilgrim traffic, and its wish to keep the most politically sensitive place in the province under the eye of its senior officers. Only in 1816 was the headquarters moved to Cuttack, the historic capital, which in 1818 became the seat of the Commissioner, the Revenue Board and the Provincial Court of Appeal.

4.2 The Garhjat: from Maratha tributaries to Tributary Mahals

As the Maratha administration collapsed, the chiefs of the hill and forest states that had paid tribute to Nagpur hastened to make terms with the new power. Among those who acknowledged British supremacy in 1803–04 were the chiefs of Kujang, Kanika, Aul, Mayurbhanj, Angul, Hindol, Darpan, Sukinda and Madhupur, as well as Khurda. The engagements the Company concluded with them followed, in essentials, the pattern of their relations with the Marathas. Each chief retained his state and his internal authority over his subjects; each agreed to pay a fixed annual tribute (*peshkash*) and promised loyalty to the Company and assistance in war.

Over time these states came to be treated as a distinct category, the **Tributary Mahals**, outside the ordinary Bengal Regulations and the jurisdiction of the regular courts, and supervised by a British officer who acted as their political superintendent. The arrangement suited the Company well. It was cheap, requiring neither garrisons nor revenue establishments in difficult hill country; it surrounded the coastal province with a ring of dependent rulers whose interests were bound to the new order; and it left the management of forest and tribal populations, which the Company neither understood nor wished to administer, in the hands of chiefs who did. But the engagements also froze many unresolved questions inherited from the Maratha period, about boundaries, about the status of certain coastal *killas* and about the extent of each chief’s authority, and these were to produce disputes, and in some cases armed conflict, in later decades. The separate world of the Garhjat states, created in these years, would survive until their merger with Odisha in 1948.

4.3 Khurda: the broken bargain and the rising of 1804–05

Of all the parties to the arrangements of 1803, Khurda had the greatest reason for disappointment, and its disappointment had the most serious consequences. The raja’s grievances were threefold.

- **The money.** Of the lakh of rupees promised by Harcourt in return for the passage of the British force, the raja received about Rs 70,000 in two instalments. Payment of the remaining Rs 30,000 was deferred indefinitely.

- **The parganas.** The raja’s request for the return of the four parganas of Rahang, Sirai, Chabiskud and Limbai, which the Marathas had taken from Khurda in the time of Birakishore Deva, was refused. The Company treated the parganas as part of the Maratha province it had conquered, not as Khurda territory to be restored.
- **The temple.** Instead of returning the management of the Jagannatha temple to the Gajapati, the Company assumed the role that the Marathas had played, placing the temple’s finances and administration under its own officers.

Mukunda Deva II was young, and the real direction of affairs at Khurda lay with his minister, **Jayi Rajguru** (Jayakrishna Rajguru, born 1739), a learned Brahmin who had served the Khurda court for many years. To Jayi Rajguru the conduct of the Company appeared a betrayal of the alliance that had made its conquest possible, and he resolved to resist. In 1804 he mobilised the *paikas*, the hereditary militia of the Khurda country who held their lands in return for military service, and opened hostilities against the Company. Paikas attacked the British post at Pipili, on the road between Puri and Cuttack, in the autumn of 1804. The Company responded with force. A British detachment defeated the Khurda forces near Pipili (on 22 November 1804, according to Mahanta’s account) and advanced into the kingdom; the fort of Khurda was captured in December. The raja fled south and was taken at Banpur on 3 January 1805. The raja of Kujang, Chandradhwaja Sendh, who had supported the rising, was arrested in May 1805.

The settlement that followed was severe and designed to ensure that Khurda could never again threaten the Company. The kingdom’s territory was annexed and placed under direct Company management as a *khas mahal*, its revenues collected by the Company’s own officers. Mukunda Deva II was imprisoned at Midnapore. Later he was released, apparently after petitioning the Company and laying the blame for the rising on his minister, and allowed to live at Puri on an allowance, keeping his royal title but no kingdom. **Jayi Rajguru was tried and executed at Baghitota, Midnapore, on 6 December 1806.** According to Odia tradition he was put to death in a particularly brutal manner. His execution made him the first great martyr of Odia resistance to British rule; in the memory of later generations the Khurda rising became the prologue to the Paika rebellion of 1817, and Jayi Rajguru the

precursor of Buxi Jagabandhu.

4.4 The Company and Jagannatha

The temple at Puri presented the Company with a dilemma that it never fully resolved. On the one hand, it wished to retain the goodwill of its Hindu subjects, to avoid any appearance of hostility to their religion, and to continue drawing the revenue that the Marathas had derived from the pilgrim traffic. On the other hand, it was a Christian body, answerable to a British public in which evangelical opinion was gaining influence, and any official involvement with what evangelicals called “idolatry” was increasingly regarded in Britain as a scandal. The Company’s policy towards the temple in these years was an attempt to reconcile these pressures, and its successive changes reflect the difficulty of doing so.

Year	Policy
1803	Wellesley orders that the temple’s property is not to be treated as prize and that customs are to be respected; the Company takes over the Maratha system of management
1806	**Regulation IV of 1806**: the pilgrim tax is regulated, and superintendence of the temple is given to an assembly of three pandits, to keep Company officers at a distance from the rites
1809	**Regulation IV of 1809**: the pandit assembly is dissolved and the raja of Khurda (afterwards called the raja of Puri) becomes hereditary superintendent under Company oversight
1840	The pilgrim tax is abolished and the government gives up its direct connection with the temple

In the first years the Company simply continued the Maratha arrangements, managing the temple’s daily affairs through its traditional officers and balancing receipts and expenditure each year. Regulation IV of 1806 formalised the collection of a tax on pilgrims and, in an attempt to distance Company officials from the conduct of worship, entrusted the superintendence of the temple to an assembly of three pandits. This experiment did not last. Regulation IV of 1809 dissolved the assembly and vested the superintendence in the raja of Khurda, now living at Puri, as hereditary superintendent under the oversight of the Company’s officers.

The compromise of 1809 had a double significance. It restored to Mukunda Deva II a part of what he had lost: not his kingdom, but the ritual and managerial headship of the temple that had been the foundation of the Gajapati's prestige since the time of the Gangas. In doing so it bound the Khurda royal house, so recently in arms against the Company, to the new order. At the same time it placed the British government in the position of collecting a tax on pilgrims, paying the temple's establishment and appointing its superintendent. This involvement was attacked from two sides. Evangelical critics in Britain, notably the chaplain Claudius Buchanan, who visited Puri in 1806 and described the Ratha Yatra in lurid terms in his *Christian Researches in Asia*, condemned it as the patronage of idolatry by a Christian government; Hindus, for their part, resented the state's control over the affairs of the deity. The pilgrim tax was finally abolished in 1840, but the precedent of state involvement in the administration of the temple, established in these years, shaped its management long after the end of Company rule.

5. Revenue, economy and society, 1803–1817

The military conquest of 1803 left the structure of Odia society largely untouched: the villages, the landholding families, the temple and its servants, the paikas and the chiefs remained where they had been, and for most people the change of masters at Cuttack made little immediate difference. The administrative and fiscal conquest that followed was a different matter. Within fifteen years the Company's revenue settlements, its sale laws, its salt monopoly, its insistence on silver and its reliance on outside officials had displaced a large part of the old landholding class, impoverished the paikas, raised the price of a daily necessity and increased the real burden of revenue on the cultivator. None of these measures was designed to ruin the province; most were applications of policies that the Company regarded as sound in Bengal. Their combined effect in Odisha, however, was to create a broad coalition of grievances, cutting across class and region, which broke out in open rebellion in 1817.

5.1 The short-term settlements

The Company inherited from the Marathas both their revenue papers and their habit of short leases. In principle, its intention was to give Odisha a permanent settlement on the Bengal model, fixing the revenue demand on each estate in perpetuity and thereby, it was believed, encouraging zamindars to invest in the improvement of their lands. Regulation XII of 1805 explicitly promised such a settlement after a period of experimental short settlements, during which the government would acquire the knowledge of the province's resources needed to fix the demand fairly. In practice the province was assessed again and again, and the promise of permanence was never fulfilled.

Settlement	Term	Character
First settlement	1804–05 (one year)	Based on Maratha accounts; demand raised to test capacity
Second settlement	1805–06 to 1807–08 (three years)	Assessments raised again; arrears mount
Later settlements	From 1808, further short terms	Permanent settlement postponed, then rejected
Decision of 1811–12	—	The Court of Directors declines to extend the Permanent Settlement to conquered provinces such as Odisha

The defects of this system were serious. Each settlement was made by officers with limited knowledge of the land, its productivity and its tenures, working largely from Maratha papers whose figures they could not verify. Each settlement offered strong incentives to raise the demand, both to increase the Company's revenue and to test how much the province could bear. Zamindars who accepted high assessments in the expectation that they would soon be fixed in perpetuity found themselves burdened with demands they could not meet; others, uncertain of their tenure from one settlement to the next, had no incentive to invest in their estates. The decision of the Court of Directors in 1811–12 not to extend the Permanent Settlement to conquered and ceded provinces removed the prospect of permanence altogether, leaving Odisha with the disadvantages of the Bengal system and none of its supposed benefits.

5.2 The sale law and the transfer of land

Under the Bengal Regulations, an estate whose revenue fell into arrears could be sold at public auction to recover the debt. In Bengal this rule, harsh as it was, operated in a society long accustomed to the Company's courts and procedures. In Odisha its effects were devastating. Many of the province's zamindars belonged to families that had held their estates for generations under Mughal and Maratha rule, and they were unfamiliar with the Company's procedures, its deadlines and the language in which it conducted its business. When over-assessment produced arrears, their estates were put up for sale. In 1807 alone, according to the figures cited in Mahanta's account, 266 estates with a total revenue (*jama*) of more than three lakh rupees were sold.

The beneficiaries of these sales were frequently outsiders. Sales were often conducted far from the estates, in procedures that favoured those with access to the Collector's office and the courts, and the buyers were in many cases Bengali officials, clerks, merchants and moneylenders who understood the system and had the cash to take advantage of it. Some of the purchasers were the very subordinate officers through whose hands the revenue business passed. The result was a large-scale transfer of land from old Odia families to new, often absentee, owners. Many of the dispossessed were reduced to dependence on estates they had once held, and their resentment, directed both at the Company and at the newcomers who had profited from their ruin, became one of the most important sources of support for the rising of 1817.

5.3 Language, officials and courts

The new administration was staffed at the top by a small number of British officers and below them by a much larger body of *amla*, clerks and subordinate officials, most of whom were Bengalis familiar with the procedures of the Bengal courts and revenue offices and with the languages in which their records were kept. Odia had little place in the courts and offices of the new government. For ordinary Odias, this meant that almost every dealing with the state, whether over revenue, land, police or justice, passed through the hands of intermediaries who were outsiders, who often spoke a different language and who were in a

position to profit from their ignorance of the system. The perception that the province was governed for the benefit of Bengali officials as much as of the Company became deeply rooted, and the question of the status of the Odia language in administration, raised implicitly in these years, would become an explicit political issue in the language controversies of the second half of the nineteenth century.

5.4 Cowries and silver

Under the Marathas, much of the land revenue of the Mughalbandi had been assessed and paid in cowries, the shells that served as small currency in a rural economy where silver was scarce. The cowrie system suited a society in which most transactions were small and most cultivators rarely handled silver coin. The Company, which kept its accounts and remitted its revenues in silver rupees, insisted on payment in silver. Cultivators and zamindars now had to convert their cowries into rupees at rates set by the market, in transactions that were frequently controlled by moneychangers and officials who took their own share. When the value of cowries fell against silver, as it did in these years, the real burden of the revenue rose sharply even though the nominal demand in rupees remained unchanged. To many Odias the change of currency appeared as a hidden increase in taxation, and its effects were felt far down the social scale.

5.5 Salt

Salt manufactured on the Odia coast had long been cheap and widely available, and its manufacture and trade supported a significant population of salt makers and traders. The Company, which held a profitable monopoly of salt in Bengal, extended its control to Odisha. Private manufacture and trade were restricted; salt was produced for the government by contracted workers, the *malangis*, under the supervision of the Company’s salt agents; and the price to consumers was raised to the level that sustained the monopoly. Control was tightened further around 1814. For the poor, for whom salt was an indispensable daily necessity with no substitute, the monopoly was perhaps the most direct and tangible way in which British rule affected their lives. The salt makers, for their part, lost the independence they had enjoyed under earlier regimes and became, in effect, labourers for the Company at

rates it determined.

5.6 The paikas

The *paikas* of Khurda were hereditary militiamen who held rent-free service lands (*jagirs*) in return for military duty to the raja. They had been the backbone of Khurda's military power for more than two centuries, and their status, their lands and their sense of identity were bound up with that service. After the annexation of Khurda in 1804–05, the Company had no use for a militia whose loyalty was to the raja rather than to itself, and which had just been in arms against it. The service lands of the paikas were resumed and brought under assessment, and many paikas were reduced to the status of ordinary tenants or labourers, paying revenue on lands they had held free for generations. The most prominent of those affected was **Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar**, hereditary commander (*bakshi*) of the forces of Khurda, whose ancestral estate of Killa Rorang was taken over by the Company in 1814, reducing him to poverty. His personal grievance would give the discontent of the paikas a leader.

5.7 The road to 1817

The grievances described in this section affected different groups in different ways, but by 1817 they had converged.

Grievance	Who it hit
Broken bargain with Khurda, annexation and the execution of Jayi Rajguru	The royal house, its servants and the paikas
Resumption of paika service lands	The paikas of Khurda and neighbouring states
Short settlements, over-assessment and estate sales	Old zamindars, village headmen and cultivators
Payment in silver instead of cowries	Cultivators and small landholders
Salt monopoly	Salt makers and every consumer

Bengali officials and police	All who had to deal with the courts and revenue offices

In March 1817 these grievances came together in open rebellion. Buxi Jagabandhu led the paikas of Khurda, joined by Khonds from Ghumsur and by large numbers of peasants and landholders, in the **Paika rebellion**, which drove the Company's officers from much of Khurda and Puri for several months and required substantial military force to suppress. The rebellion is the subject of a separate article. Its significance for the present discussion is that it demonstrates that the British occupation of 1803 was not completed in 1803. The conquest of Odia society, as distinct from the occupation of its territory, was contested for fourteen years, and it was settled only after the rebellion had been suppressed and the Company, confronted with the evidence of its own misgovernment, had been obliged to reform the revenue system it had imposed.

6. Case studies

The following case studies examine five episodes of the occupation in closer detail. Each illustrates a broader feature of the process by which Odisha passed under British rule, and each has been the subject of differing interpretations.

Case study 1: The Chilika crossing and the price of a "bloodless" conquest

The strip of land between the Chilika lake and the sea near Manikpatna was the natural gateway to coastal Odisha from the south. Hemmed in by water on both sides, it could have been held by a small force against a much larger one, and at the height of the monsoon a delay of even a few weeks might have forced the invaders to fall back on Ganjam. The Company did not test this position. The Maratha *faujdar* in charge of the crossing, Fateh Muhammad, was paid to let Harcourt's column pass, and it crossed without a shot being fired. Similar payments and promises, the full extent of which the surviving records do not disclose, were made to other Maratha officials along the route of the advance.

Significance. The episode shows that the speed and low cost of the conquest, which British writers presented as evidence that the population welcomed the Company as a liberator, were bought as much as won. The men who were in a position to offer effective resistance were, in several cases, paid not to do so. The episode also reveals the fragility of the Company's position in the province. An occupation built on bargains depended on the bargains being honoured. Where they were, as with the officials who were paid and then disappeared from the record, the arrangements held. Where they were not, as at Khurda, the consequence was armed resistance within a year.

Case study 2: Puri, 18 September 1803

The Company entered Puri as a cautious and deliberately respectful guest. Wellesley's orders forbade any treatment of the temple's property as prize of war, troops were kept out of the temple precincts, and the priests were assured that the rites and customs of the deity would continue undisturbed. A deputation of temple Brahmins received the British, and the town was occupied without resistance. In the months that followed, the Company took over the management arrangements that the Marathas had established, and continued to collect the dues that pilgrims had paid under Maratha rule.

Significance. The occupation of Puri shows how clearly the Company understood that religion was the most sensitive point in its new province. Its restraint stands in sharp contrast to the episodes of the Afghan and Mughal periods, when the temple was attacked, the images of the deities were removed and hidden, and worship was interrupted (see The Mughal Rule in Odisha). But the Company's restraint was accompanied by a clear ambition. It intended to inherit both the revenue that the Marathas had drawn from the pilgrim traffic and the authority that they had exercised over the temple's administration, and by 1806 it had done both. The respect shown at Puri in 1803 was therefore the first step in a long and controversial involvement of the colonial state in the affairs of Jagannatha.

Case study 3: Barabati, October 1803

Barabati was the one place where the Marathas chose to fight, and the only real siege of the campaign. Harcourt’s batteries breached its walls and the fort was stormed within days of the British arrival at Cuttack, with light casualties on both sides. In the years that followed, Barabati served for a time as a prison, where prisoners taken in the Khurda rising were held, and was then abandoned. Its walls and buildings were then allowed to decay.

Significance. The fall of Barabati closed a cycle that had run through the entire medieval history of Odisha. From the Gangas and the Gajapatis through the Afghans, the Mughals and the Marathas, whoever held this fortress on the Mahanadi held the coastal plain, and every change of regime had been decided by its capture. The British, who governed the province through courts, revenue offices and regulations rather than through a fortified capital, had no further use for it, and they allowed it to fall into ruin. The fate of Barabati thus marks, in physical form, the transition from a political order based on the fortress and the army to one based on the office, the record and the law.

Case study 4: Mukunda Deva II and Jayi Rajguru

In 1803 Khurda chose the British over the Marathas, expecting money, the recovery of the four parganas and the restoration of the Gajapati’s authority over the temple. It received part of the money and nothing else. When Jayi Rajguru raised the paikas in 1804, the Company crushed the rising within a few months, annexed the kingdom, imprisoned the raja at Midnapore and, in December 1806, executed his minister. Yet only three years later, by Regulation IV of 1809, the same raja was appointed hereditary superintendent of the Jagannatha temple.

Significance. The treatment of Khurda reveals the two-sided character of Company policy towards the old Odia kingship. On the one hand, the Company was determined to destroy Khurda as a political and military power: its territory was annexed, its militia disbanded and its most capable leader put to death. On the other hand, the Company recognised the ritual prestige of the Gajapati and found it useful to preserve the raja as a figure through whom the temple could be managed and Hindu opinion conciliated. The combination of

punishment and co-option was characteristic of British policy towards Indian princes in this period. In Odisha, the execution of Jayi Rajguru and the humiliation of the raja created a memory of betrayal that fed directly into the Paika rebellion of 1817, while the settlement of 1809 gave the royal house a stake in the new order that it would not again put at risk.

Case study 5: The estate sales of 1806–1807

Within four years of the conquest, the combination of short-term settlements, rising assessments and the Bengal sale law was transferring land on a remarkable scale. In 1807 alone, 266 estates with a combined revenue of over three lakh rupees were sold for arrears, many of them to Bengali purchasers with connections to the revenue offices and courts.

Significance. The estate sales show that the administrative conquest of Odisha was more disruptive than the military one. Rules framed for Bengal, and applied with little adaptation to a province with different tenures, a cowrie currency and a different language of administration, displaced a long-established Odia landholding class in favour of newcomers. The sale law did not by itself cause the Paika rebellion, whose immediate leadership came from the paikas of Khurda. But it explains why the rebellion attracted support far beyond Khurda, among zamindars, village headmen and cultivators who had their own reasons to resent the new regime, and why the Company’s response to the rebellion included a serious reconsideration of its revenue policy in the province.

7. Odia historians on the British occupation

For Odia historians the British occupation has never been a neutral episode in a distant past. It marks the moment at which Odisha, whose Odia-speaking territories were already divided between Maratha, Madras and Bengal jurisdictions, became a peripheral and often neglected part of the Bengal presidency, a status from which it emerged only with the creation of the separate province of Orissa in 1936. The history of the occupation has therefore been bound up with questions of regional identity, of the causes of Odisha’s relative poverty and administrative fragmentation in the colonial period, and of the place of Odia resistance in the larger story of the Indian national movement. Odia historiography of

the period has addressed two connected sets of questions: how the conquest actually happened, as distinct from how the Company described it, and what the new regime did to Odia society in the years before the rising of 1817.

7.1 Bhabani Charan Ray and the foundations of British rule

The starting point for modern scholarship is Bhabani Charan Ray's *Foundations of British Orissa* (1960), the companion volume to his study of the Maratha period. Ray worked systematically through the Company's records, in particular the correspondence of the Commissioners, Collectors and Judges and the proceedings of the Board of Revenue, and reconstructed the first decades of British administration in a detail that no earlier historian had attempted. His central argument was that the import of the Bengal system into Odisha, with its short settlements, its sale laws, its reliance on Bengali subordinate officials and its demand for silver, did serious and lasting damage to the province. In doing so, Ray undermined the contrast between Maratha "misrule" and British "improvement" that had been the organising theme of the colonial histories. In many respects, he argued, the early Company regime was harsher and more disruptive than the Maratha administration it replaced, because it was more efficient in extracting revenue and less tolerant of the customary arrangements on which Odia society depended.

7.2 K. M. Patra, J. K. Samal and the Company's administration

K. M. Patra's *Orissa under the East India Company* (1971) and the work of J. K. Samal on the history of modern Orissa extended this analysis across the whole period of Company rule. Patra examined in detail the successive revenue settlements from 1804 onward, the operation of the salt monopoly, the consequences of the change from cowrie to silver, and the reforms that followed the rebellion of 1817, including the longer settlements of the 1830s. Samal placed the occupation within the longer history of Odisha's administrative fragmentation and of the social and political movements that eventually led to the creation of a separate province. Together, their work established the early Company period as a distinct phase in the history of Odisha, with its own structures and its own pattern of conflict, rather than merely a prelude to the better-documented later nineteenth century.

7.3 Harekrushna Mahtab and the nationalist frame

Harekrushna Mahtab, historian, leader of the freedom movement in Odisha and later Chief Minister of the state, gave the period its most influential public interpretation. In his *History of Orissa*, and in the volumes on the history of the freedom movement in Orissa produced under his direction, the Khurda rising of 1804–05 and the Paika rebellion of 1817 appear as the opening chapters of a continuous story of Odia resistance to British rule that culminated in independence. This framing gave the events of 1803–1817 a significance that extended well beyond their regional context, and it has shaped the way the period is presented in school textbooks, public commemorations and popular memory in Odisha. It has also, as later historians have pointed out, sometimes encouraged a reading of the evidence in which the motives of the Khurda court and the paikas are assimilated too readily to those of the later national movement.

7.4 Khurda, Jayi Rajguru and the Paika literature

A further body of scholarship has concentrated on Khurda and on the social history of the paikas. Kedarnath Mahapatra’s *Khurda Itihasa*, a history of the Bhoi kingdom written in Odia, reconstructed the Khurda side of the story from local sources as well as from Company records. Since the 1960s, and especially in the years around the bicentenary of the Paika rebellion in 2017, a large literature in Odia and English has recovered the career of Jayi Rajguru, the organisation and social world of the paikas, and the life of Buxi Jagabandhu. This literature has done much to restore Odia actors to the centre of a story that the colonial records tell largely from the Company’s side. It has also prompted debate about the use of oral tradition, the reliability of some popular accounts, and the claim, advanced in public discussion around 2017, that the Paika rebellion should be recognised as India’s “first war of independence”.

Brajabandhu Mahanta’s articles on historyofodisha.in, “British Conquest of Odisha”, “Khurda Rebellion (1804–05) and Jayi Rajguru” and “British Administration in Odisha”, bring together the findings of this scholarship in a connected narrative for students and general readers, and are the source of many of the dates used in this article.

7.5 Main debates

The interpretation of the occupation remains contested. The principal debates, and the state of the evidence on each, are summarised below. In most cases the disagreement is less about the facts, which are reasonably well established from the Company's own records, than about their meaning and the weight to be given to them.

Debate	One view	The other view	Where the evidence stands
Liberation or conquest?	The British rescued Odisha from Maratha misrule (Stirling, Hunter)	A foreign power replaced another, by force and bribery (Ray and later Odia historians)	The records show bribery, broken promises and, within four years, a harsher revenue regime; the "liberation" view rests on the conquerors' own reports
A bloodless conquest?	Odisha fell almost without fighting	Resistance was bought off, and real fighting came in 1804–05 and 1817	The 1803 campaign was indeed light on casualties; the conquest of Odia society was not
Khurda in 1803: miscalculation or betrayal?	Mukunda Deva II and Jayi Rajguru misjudged the British	The Company broke a clear bargain	The lakh and its partial payment are well attested; the promise of the parganas is disputed
Jayi Rajguru: patriot or courtier?	The first martyr of Odia resistance to colonial rule	A royal minister defending his king's interests	Both: his aims were those of the Khurda court, but his resistance and death became a symbol of wider resistance
Temple policy: protection or patronage?	The Company protected Jagannatha and respected Hindu custom	It exploited the pilgrim trade and controlled the temple through its own appointee	The policy did both; British evangelicals attacked it as patronage of idolatry, Hindus as interference

1817: first war of independence?	The Paika rebellion was the first organised war against British rule in India	It was a regional revolt with local causes	A live public debate; the causes laid out in section 5 are well documented, while the label is a matter of interpretation

8. Assessment

The British occupation of Odisha is best understood as two conquests rather than one. The first, carried out in the autumn of 1803, was swift, cheap and almost bloodless. Its success owed something to the weakness of a Maratha administration that had shallow roots in the province and could expect no help from a government fighting for its survival in the Deccan. But it owed at least as much to the political preparation that accompanied the advance. The Company bought the crossing of the Chilika from the Maratha officer who commanded it, assured the priests of Jagannatha that their temple and customs would be respected, enlisted the raja of Khurda with a promise of money and the expectation of more, and offered the Garhjat chiefs terms no worse than those they had accepted from Nagpur. Only at Barabati did anyone fight, and the treaty that gave the conquest its legal form was signed far away, in Berar, as the consequence of battles fought in the Deccan.

The second conquest, of Odia society rather than Odia territory, took fourteen years and was violently contested. The Company broke its bargain with Khurda, crushed the rising of 1804–05, annexed the kingdom and executed its most capable leader. It imported the Bengal Regulations wholesale, with their short-term settlements, their sale law and their dependence on Bengali subordinate officials, into a province whose tenures, currency and language were different. It demanded silver where the province had paid in cowries, and it took control of the manufacture and sale of salt. The results were the dispossession of a large part of the old landholding class, the impoverishment of the paikas, an increase in the real burden of revenue on the cultivator and a rise in the price of a daily necessity for every household. By 1817 these grievances, joined to the memory of Jayi Rajguru, had produced a general rising that the Company could suppress only with considerable force.

The period also established patterns that endured long after it. The Company’s compromise over the Jagannatha temple made the state an actor in the affairs of the deity for generations, and the questions of control, revenue and religious neutrality raised in 1806–1809 recurred throughout the colonial period and after independence. The engagements with the Garhjat chiefs created the separate political world of the Tributary Mahals, which survived until their merger with Odisha in 1948. And the attachment of coastal Odisha to Bengal, while Ganjam remained under Madras and Sambalpur was administered from the Central Provinces, began the administrative fragmentation of the Odia-speaking territories that the Odia movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would set out to reverse, culminating in the creation of the separate province of Orissa in 1936.

The fairest verdict on the occupation is that 1803 was neither a rescue from anarchy, as the colonial historians claimed, nor simply the replacement of one foreign master by another. It marked the arrival of a new kind of state: bureaucratic, monetised, governed by written law and by procedures devised elsewhere, and far more capable of reaching into the lives of its subjects than any of its predecessors. In its first years this state was also more intrusive and, for many Odias, more burdensome than the Maratha regime it replaced. Its costs fell most heavily on the people it claimed to have delivered, and the resistance it provoked, from Jayi Rajguru to Buxi Jagabandhu, became one of the foundations of modern Odia historical memory.

9. Glossary

Term	Meaning
Amla	Clerks and subordinate officials of a court or revenue office
Bakshi	Commander or paymaster of an army; the title of Buxi Jagabandhu
Bengal Regulations	The body of laws made by the Bengal government, extended to Odisha in 1805
Commissioner	Senior officer combining revenue, judicial and political authority over a province or division

Faujdar	Military officer in charge of a district
Jagir	Land held rent-free in return for service
Jama	The revenue assessed on an estate
Kabuliyat	Written agreement accepting terms, given by a landholder or chief
Khas mahal	Land managed directly by the government
Kauri	Cowrie shell, used as small currency and for revenue payment
Malangi	Salt maker on the Odisha coast
Paika	Hereditary foot soldier of Khurda and neighbouring states, holding service land
Peshkash	Fixed tribute paid by a subordinate chief
Permanent Settlement	Fixing of land revenue in perpetuity, made in Bengal in 1793 but not extended to Odisha
Sanad	Grant or charter issued by a ruler
Tributary Mahals	The Garhjat states under British supremacy, paying tribute and outside the ordinary regulations

10. Frequently asked questions

1. When did the British occupy Odisha? The main campaign ran from September to November 1803: Puri was occupied on 18 September, Balasore on 22 September, Barabati was stormed in mid-October and the Baramula Pass forced on 2 November. Raghuji Bhonsle II ceded Cuttack and Balasore by the Treaty of Deogaon on 17 December 1803.

2. Why did the British want Odisha? Mainly for a land link between Bengal and Madras, and also for Odisha’s salt, rice, ports, land revenue and pilgrim trade. The Second Anglo-Maratha War gave them the opportunity.

3. Who led the British forces? Lieutenant-Colonel George Harcourt commanded the main force after Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell fell ill; John Melville, a civil servant, handled negotiations. Captain Morgan took Balasore and Major Forbes forced the Baramula Pass. The campaign was directed by the Governor-General, Marquess Wellesley.

4. What was the role of the raja of Khurda? Mukunda Deva II and his minister Jayi Rajguru let the British pass through Khurda in return for a promise of one lakh rupees. Only part was paid, and the four parganas and the temple were not restored. Khurda rose in 1804; the rising was crushed, the raja imprisoned and Jayi Rajguru executed in 1806.

5. What happened to the Jagannatha temple? The Company protected the temple in 1803 and took over the Maratha system of management and the pilgrim tax. Regulation IV of 1806 put superintendence in the hands of three pandits; from 1809 the raja of Khurda became hereditary superintendent under Company oversight. The pilgrim tax was abolished in 1840.

6. How was Odisha governed after 1803? First by two Commissioners, then as the Province of Cuttack under the Bengal Regulations by Regulation XII of 1805, with northern and southern divisions. Cuttack became the seat of the Commissioner in 1818, and the province was divided into Balasore, Cuttack and Puri districts in 1828.

7. How is the British occupation connected to the Paika rebellion of 1817? The occupation created its causes: the broken bargain with Khurda, the execution of Jayi Rajguru, the resumption of paika lands, over-assessment and estate sales, payment in silver and the salt monopoly. In 1817 Buxi Jagabandhu led the paikas and their allies in revolt.

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- Formation of the Khurda Kingdom
- The Mughal Rule in Odisha
- Medieval Odisha (period guide)
- Paika Rebellion of 1817 (forthcoming)

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