

CHAUHANS RULE IN SAMBALPUR IN PRECOLONIAL ODISHA (1570-1781 A.D.)

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Abstract:

Sambalpur is the hub of Chauhan rulers after Sarbhapuriyas, Panduvamsi, Samavamsi Kalachuris and Gangas. During the middle of the 14th century, Ramai Dev laid the foundation of the Chauhan rule in Western Odisha especially in Patnagarh and Balaram Deva established Chauhans rule in Sambalpur in 1570 A.D. during the reign of his elder brother Narasimha Deva of Patnagarh. Narasimha Deva entrusted the administration of Sambalpur region to his brother, Balaram Deva owing to military necessity because the western frontier of the Chauhan kingdom was then in danger of invasion by the Kalachuri ruler Kalyan Sahai of Ratnapur. Besides, Balarama Deva, Baliarsingh Deva was another most important Chauhans ruler of Sambalpur. During their reign, the territory of Sambalpur kingdom was extended far and wide and it touched almost boundaries of neighbouring states of western Orissa. Apart from the kings, Dewans like Dakshin Ray and Akbar Ray very much influenced the Chauhan rulers and played a prominent role during the Chauhans reign. Besides territorial aggrandizement, the Chauhan rulers were patronaged art, architecture and literature. However, the Chauhan rule came to a close in April, 1800, when Sambalpur was occupied by the Marathas. Sambalpur was occupied by the British on 2nd January, 1804.

Keywords: Chauhans, Sambalpur, Balaramdeva, Baliarsingh, Akbar Ray

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1. Introduction:

Sambalpur, the westernmost district of Orissa has been named after the headquarters town Sambalpur. It is a hub of western Orissa because of its geographical location. In hoary past it is known as Hirakhanda or land of diamond. The district is within $20^{\circ} 43'$ and $20^{\circ} 11'$ North Latitude and between $80^{\circ} 39'$ and $85^{\circ} 13'$ East Longitude. It lies on the bank of Mahanadi. The district consists of wide expanse of fairly open country fringed by forest clad hills as well as a series of low hill ranges of extremely irregular shape. The Barapahar (literally 12 hills) is the main hill ranges in the Bargarh sub - division covering an area of 777 sq.kms and attaining a height of 2,267 ft. Besides, the Gandhamardana range rises from 2,000 to 3,000 ft. Other principal ranges are Jharghati and Maulabhanjai.



The present district of Sambalpur was in ancient time a part of Kosala which roughly comprised the modern districts of Raipur and Bilashpur in Madhya Pradesh and the districts of Sambalpur, Bolangir and Sundergarh of Orissa. Now the district is surrounded by Deogarh district in the east, Bargarh in the west, Jharsuguda and Sundargarh district in the north and Subarnpur(Sonepur) and Angul districts in the South.

The district has three distinctive physiographic units such as, Hilly Terrain of Bamra and Kuchinda in the north, plateau and ridges of Rairakhol in the south-east and valley and plains of Sambalpur Sub-division in the south east.

2. Origin of Sambalpur:

There were various legends, folklore and popular sayings regarding the origin of Sambalpur. Those are briefly mentioned below:

According to Mr. L.S.S.O. Malley, the town derived its name from the presiding goddess Samalai, whose stone image was traced by Balaram Deva, the first Chauhan king of Sambalpur¹ (Malley:1909) Apart from that, he narrates an episode that one day while hunting Balaram Deva, he struck an arrow to a hare. After long chasing, the hare crossed the river. Other side of the river, the striking timid animal showed extraordinary courage and repulsed to a dog. Balaram Deva assumed that there must be some supernatural virtue in the land. So he was very interested on that part of land and. After getting share of that land made his capital there and built a town and installed his family tutelary Goddess. The place where her image installed was an island(kud), on which stood a silk cotton tree(semul) and hence was called Semulkud, while the Goddess was given the name of Samalai. That's why, the place was derived her named as Sambalpur or Samalpur .² (Ibid-217)

The Greek Geographer Ptolemy (middle of 2nd Century A.D.) in his classical work 'Geographike', refers to a town named Sambalaka situated on the left bank of the river 'Manada'. Sambalak and Manada perhaps have been identified with modern Sambalpur and the river Mahanadi respectively. Gibbon in his book '*On the Decline of Roman Empire*', states that Rome in her imperial days was being supplied with diamonds from the mines of Sumelpur in Bengal. Sumelpur in Bengal is the modern Sambalpur in western Orissa. In medieval Tibetan literature, we find description of the territory of Sambhal in Uddiyana. The Sambhal is probably the modern Sambalpur.³ (Nath, Das & Levey:1937)

From the records of Hiuen Tsang and the writings of the celebrated King Indrabhuti (oldest known king of Sambalpur), the founder of Vajrayana Buddhism and the Lama Cult in Sambalpur

has earned a place in the cultural history of India. He propounded Vajrayan Buddhism in the 8th century A.D. King Indrabhuti was one of the 84 traditional Siddhas of India.⁴ (Ibid).

3. Sambalpur under Dynastic rules:

During the 5th and 6th century A.D. Kosala was under the Sarabhapuriya dynasty. The town Sarabhapura which was its headquarters is identified by some scholars with modern Surabhgarh in Sundergarh district and by some with modern Sambalpur.⁵ (Ibid-4) After the Sarabhapuriya, the kingdom passed to the hands of Panduvamsi king Tivaradeva sometime in the 7th century A.D.

He was an ambitious monarch and maintained Kosala portion of his empire intact. The present district of Sambalpur was very likely part of that empire. Towards the last decade of 9th century, king Janmejaya I Mahabhavagupta (882 to 922 A.D.) consolidated the eastern part of Kosala comprising modern Sambalpur and Bolangir districts under his scepter and from this time onwards the dynasty is popularly known as the Somavamsi. The territory was further extended to the east and south and a powerful Kingdom was carved out. He declared himself as the lord of Trikalinga. During the last part of Somavamsi rule, Sambalpur was occupied by the Kalachuris of Ratnapur.

In the beginning of 13th century, the Ganga - Kalachuri conflict started and continued for about a century. Finally, it was decided in favour of the Gangas. From that time onwards, Sambalpur region remained under a Ganga Governor. The middle of 14th century A.D. was a critical period of the Ganga rule in Orissa. It had to face series of invasions from the neighbouring kingdom and left with chaos and confusion. In this circumstance, Ramai Deva, one Chauhan Rajput, laid the foundation of the Chauhan rule in Western Orissa in 1360 A.D. and founded the Chauhan rule in Patnagarh.

In the first half of the 16th century, the Gajapati king Prataprudra Deva died and the civil war started between his sons Ramachandra Deva and Purusottam Deva and his minister Govind Vidyadhar for the crown of Utkala ⁶(Sahu, Mishra & Sahu :1980). Thus, the Gajapati of coastal Orissa had no time to look after in the political affair of the Chauhans of Patnagarh although it was considered part of their domain. Taking advantage of that Narasingha Deva (1540-1547), the son of Hiradhar Deva declared himself independent with the help of his brother Balaram Deva (1570-1577).⁷ (Das:1962) and ruled over Patna. Narasingha Deva (1568-1575), was the last great king of Patnagarh.

4. Sambalpur unde the Chauhans;

Many traditions and stories say about the foundation of Sambalpur kingdom by Balarama Deva. (1570-1595). A popular tradition is that, during the month of Sravana (rainy season) the chief queen of Narasingha Deva was in labour. The chief maid, who was in charge of the queen's care, was staying on the other side of the river Mayavati and nobody was willing to cross the flooded river to call her for the service of the queen. In such a circumstance, her brother-in-law Balarama Deva personally crossed the river and brought the maid back to the service of the queen. The queen gave birth to a son who was named Hamir Deva. Impressed with the bravery of his younger brother Balarama Deva, King Narasingha Deva offered the Sambalpur province to Balarama Deva as a reward for his service. Balarama Deva got the Huma area, which was situated in between the rivers Mahanadi, Anga and Suktel and established his capital at first at Bargarh on the bank of the river Zira and later shifted to Sambalpur, which was situated, on the bank of the river Mahanadi.

Another tradition as per Jaya Chandrika that a quarrel between Narasimha Deva and Balarama Deva for partition of the kingdom and the dramatic settlement made by their mother who led them to a village, named Kalapathar on the bank of the river Ang. She asked the eldest son, Narasimha Deva, to stand on the right bank and the younger, Balarama Deva, on the left bank. She then declared that, the river would be the demarcation line of their shares and any attempt at crossing it would be tantamount to the crime against their mother in the, 'Kosalananda' and even the 'Jayachandrika' Balarama Deva has been described as an obedient brother, rendering faithful service to Narasimha Deva in time of need. Their quarrel for the partition of the kingdom and the dramatic interference of their mother, therefore, do not appear sound. Balarama Deva was a great warrior and had a reputation for his military activities long before his coming to Sambalpur. He was sent by his father, Hiradhara Deva, to help Gajapati Mukunda Deva when Utkala was invaded by the Muslim ruler Bayazid, son of Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal in 1568 A.D. He was then, the commander of an army consisting of 32,000 infantry, 30 elephantry and 700 cavalry.⁸ (K N-49) He rendered valuable military service to his elder brother, Narasimha Deva when the latter succeeded to the gubdee of Patna about 1570 A.D.

Orissa, then, had passed into the hands of the Afghans of Bengal who were plunged into a

conflict with the Moghuls of Delhi. The Afghans became weak with the death of Sulaiman Karrani in 1573 A.D. Sultan Daud, the son of Sulaiman Karrani, had not the mettle of his father and, being repeatedly defeated by the Moghul generals, and ultimately met his end in the battle of Rajmahal in 1576 A.D. During this time, they hold of the Afghans over Orissa was only nominal.

So, it is believed that Narasimha Deva entrusted the administration of Sambalpur region to his brother, Balaram Deva owing to military necessity. The western frontier of the Chauhan kingdom was then in danger of invasion by the Kalachuri ruler Kalyan Sahai of Ratnapur. It was probably to counteract the ambitious design of the monarch that Balaram Deva was allowed to consolidate the Chauhan rule on the western front. It is therefore, very probably that Narasimha Deva sent him to check the Kalachuri menace by carving out the semi- independent kingdom of Sambalpur. ⁹(Sahu, Mishra & Sahu: 1980)

After that, Balarama Deva vanquished Lakhman Sahai, the weak successor of Kalyana Sahai of Ratnapur who forced to relinquish him Sarangagarh, Raigarh, Baragarh and Sakti. Even Balaram Deva defeated the rulers of Bamanda, Gangpur and Surguja and forced them to acknowledge the suzerainty of Sambalpur. He married a princess of Surguja and brought from the state the Anantasayya image. Kamal Kumari, princess of Gangpur, was another queen of Balarama Deva.¹⁰ (Ibid)

With the emergence of Sambalpur kingdom, the hegemony of kingdom of Patnagarh declined and its rulers became subordinate to Sambalpur. Thus, the political barometer began to shift from Patnagarh to Sambalpur. Raja Narasimha Deva passed away in 1575 and succeeded by his son Hamira Deva (1575-1580) who ruled for only three years. At the time of death of Raja Hamira Deva, his son Pratapa Deva (1595-1620) was a minor. That's why, Balarama Deva sent his son Hrdyanarayana Deva (1580-1593) to govern Patnagarh as regent. The ministers of that kingdom, who complained against the interference of Sambalpur were dismissed. The dowager queen became suspicious of the situation and fled to her parental abode Nandapur with her young son. When Hrdyanarayana Deva succeeded to the throne of Sambalpur, after death of Balarama

Deva, he brought Pratapa Deva from Nandapur and restored him to the chiefship of Patnagarh. From that time Patna became a vassal state under Sambalpur. ¹¹ (Ibid).

Hridayanarayana Deva, during his brief reign (1595-1605) did not have any new conquest and maintained properly what was succeeded by his father. Thereafter, he was succeeded by his son Balabhadra Deva (1605-1630) who defeated Raja of Baud, Siddhabhanja after a protracted battle. The Kosalananda describes that Balabhadra Deva got angry at some satirical comments made by Raja Siddhabhanja and invaded Baud to punish him. The Baud invasion of the Raja has been described more details in the Jaya Chandrika. It is said that Balabhadra tried twelve years to besieged Baud but unsuccessful. So, he sought the help of Bhikha Raya, his feudatory chief of Sarangagarh for this purpose. Bhika Raya defeated Siddhabhanja and brought him a captive to Raja Balabhadra Deva. However, Balabhadra pardoned to Siddhabhanja and restored to his chiefship on his promise to pay tribute to Sambalpur. Sonepur region was taken away from Baud and annexed to Sambalpur. Bhika Raya was rewarded with a grant of twelve villages and conferred title of Dewan on him.

After Balabhadra, his son Madhukar Deva (1630-1660) came to the throne of Sambalpur. This king constituted Sonepur as feudatory state under Sambalpur and appointed his second son Madan Gopal as its Raja. He also created Chauhan chiefship of Rajpur- Khinda and conferred it on his third son Anuruddha Sai. Surendra Sai, the popular leader of resistance movement of Sambalpur was a son of the Rajpur- Khinda family. Bansi Gopal, the fourth son of Raja Madhukara Deva renounced the world and became a Vaishnava ascetic.

Madhukara Deva was succeeded by his eldest son Baliara Deva (1650-1688). He was the most powerful ruler of Chauhan of Sambalpur. During his reign kingdom of Sambalpur reached the apex of its power. He was the undisputed master of eighteen Garhs and endowed with a proud title of Atharagada- maudaamani (the great jewel on Eighteen Garhs). These states were: Sambalpur, Patna, Sonepur, Baud, Athmallika, Khariar, Rairhakhhol, Bamanda, Gangpur, Bonai, Raigarh, Baragarh, Sarangparh, Sakti, Phuljhar, Chandrapur, Bindra - Nuagarh And Surguja) ¹² (Op.Cit Sahu, Mishra & Sahu -250). His territory was extended over the present Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Bolangir districts and portions of Phulbani and Kalahandi district of Orissa and

Raipur and Bilaspur districts of Madhya Pradesh. It almost corresponds to the South - Kosala kingdom of ancient time.

Baliara Deva created the estates of Barpali and Saria and bestowed them on his younger sons Vikram Singh and Phate Singh respectively. He also granted the Zamindari of Kharsal to a Gond soldier. Udam Singh and decorated him with the hereditary title of Sardar. A descendent of Udam Singh joined Surendra Sai and was hanged in 1860.¹³(Ibid)

Baliara Singh was a great warrior. His favourite two horses were Parjang and Phatejang, who led the Raja to all important battles. The most significant military campaign of Baliara Singh was directed against Bonai state, whose chief, Indradeva of the famous Kadamba dynasty, was overpowered and was made to submit to the authority of Sambalpur. With these conquests Baliara Singh became sovereign lord of a vast territory comprising of eighteen garhs such as Sambalpur, Patna, Sonapur, Khariar, Baud, Athmallick, Rairakhol, Bamanda, Surguja, Befidra Nawagarh, Sakti, Phuljhar, Bastar and Yamatangi. Baliara Singh built the leaning temple of Vimalaswara Siva at Huma on the bank of the river Mahanadi about twenty miles south of Sambalpur.

Baliara Singh was succeeded by Ratan Singh who reigned for only four months. In about 1690 A.D., Ratan Singh met his untimely death when his eldest son Chhatra Sai was at Chandrapur with his wife Radha Devi, the Ganga princess of Bamanada. Taking this opportunity, the ambitious Dewan of Sambalpur, who had the army under his control, seized all powers and defied the authority of Chhatra Sai. The young Raja got terrified at this news and instead of proceeding towards Sambalpur, he with his baby son Ajit, fled to Sarangagarh with a view to securing military help from the Dewan of that state, Udyota Sai, who was considered to be the most faithful and powerful feudatory of Sambalpur kingdom. He spent one year at Sarangagarh. The ruler of Raigarh Durjaya Singh also agreed to help him. With the combined force of these two states, Chhatra Sai and Udyota Sai appeared at Sambalpur. The rebels were mercilessly put suppressed and peace and order was restored to the kingdom. Chhatra Sai out of gratitude granted Udyota Sai forty two villages from the pargana of Kikirda for which the Dewan had to pay him an annual tribute of eight hundred seventeen rupees and ten anna only. The gift has been

recorded in a copper plate dated in 1747 V.S. i.e. 1690 A.D. The chief of Raigarh also was amply rewarded in recognition of his service and the title of Raja was conferred on him¹⁴. (Navayuga of 2nd issue pp.49-53).

Chhatra Sai (C.1690-1725) constructed for his residence a grand palace which is still to be found in ruins. He renovated the temple of Samalai and repaired many other temple¹⁵. (Mullick-184). On the confluence of the Ib and the Bheden, twenty five miles away from Sambalpur, he established a village Hampur which is now famous for coal mines.¹⁶ (Ibid-2016). He erected a strong fort in the town of Sambalpur and excavated a tank known as Chhatra Sagar near Patneswari temple. Besides Vimalaswara Siva, Samalai Devi and Patneswari Devi, he also constructed the temple of the goddess Durga and Kutha Jagannath temple and the Dasa Mahavidya Mahal at Sambalpur.

Apart from lover of art and architecture, he was also a patron of learning and literature. his court physician Gopinath Sarangi wrote 'Chikitsa Manjari' in bilingual verses both Sanskrit and Odia.

5. Sambalpur under the influence of Dewans :

Chhatra Sai was succeeded by his son Ajit Singh (C.1725-1766 A.D.) who had eight Queens and three sons namely Abhaya Singh, Jayanta Singh and Padman Singh. Ajit Singh was very often remaining absent from the capital leaving the administration of his kingdom in charge of his ministers. Taking advantage of his indolence, the Dewan **Dakshin Ray**, rose in power and managed the government at his whims. By taking suggestion of his wife, Rani Muktamani Devi, Ajit Singh ergo organized a plot to kill him. On 16th June, 1763 when the Raja was holding Durbar, it was announced that the Rani wanted to go out to the temple through that hall. So, the Raja requested the courtiers except the Dewan to vacate the hall for a while and when all of them left there came out of the palace, instead of the Rani, a number of ruffians, who killed Dakshin Ray in cold blood. The leader of the plot was Peelo Ray who organized it with the hope that he would succeed to the post of Dewan after the death of Dakshin Ray but another powerful officer, Kasree, influenced the Raja through his harem against this appointment. When **Peelo Ray** came to know of this, he employed a desperado, who cleft the skull of Kasree, as he was passing

through the gateway of the palace. Thereafter, Peelo Ray was appointed Dewan and Ajit Singh sank into his usual insignificance.

Akbar Ray, relative of **Kasree** wanted to take revenge upon Peelo Ray and convinced the king of the wickedness of the Dewan. Ajit Singh was very much impressed by **Akbar Ray** and privately directed him to murder Peelo Ray. Therefore, Akbar Ray able to murder Peelo Ray by some ruffians on festival day on 27th August 1764 and became the Dewan and de facto ruler of the kingdom. It was in the midst of the chaotic situations that Ajit Singh passed away in May, 1766. It is believed that he was poisoned by Akbar Ray.

In spite of his shortcomings and his inglorious end, Ajit Singh was a powerful Chauhan ruler. He was a man of virtue and had great respect for the Brahmins and Vaishnavas. He established a Brahmin village, Ajitapur Sasana and built there a temple of Gopinath. The village situated seven miles east of Sambalpur, is known at present by the name of Sasana. Ajit Singh was succeeded by his son Abhaya Singh (1766-1778) at the age of sixteen. He was young, inexperienced and looked very stupid. His eldest natural brother Padman Singh, who was the commander of the army, was haughty and impetuous but his younger brother Jayanta Singh was of sweet and open disposition. Abhaya Singh appointed **Krishna Barmullick** as the Dewan of Sambalpur in place of Akbar Ray. So, Akbar Ray got dissatisfied and decided to get rid of the new Dewan. He was succeeded to imprison both King and Dewan and became the master of the kingdom of Sambalpur.

There were some minor rebellions here and there but they were easily suppressed. Akbar suspected the widow of Ajit Singh, Rani Gosani, to have been involved in a plot against him and he murdered her in cold blood¹⁷. (Mullick-192). It was a shocking news for Abhaya Singh in prison and he soon died disappointed and disheartened (1778 A.D.).

However during the brief period of his reign (twelve years), Abhaya Singh laid the foundation of the temple of Sakshi Gopinatha at Sambalpur and left it to be constructed by his brother Jayanta Singh. Abhaya Singh had no issue at the time of his death. So Jayanta Singh, the rightful claimant to the Guddee after him, was then far away from the capital. Viswanath, Dewan of

Sarangagarh requested Akbar Ray to install Padman Singh on the guddee but Akbar Ray rejected the proposal. It is said that Akbar Ray killed Padman Singh by giving poison.

On the other hand, Akbar Ray placed Balabhadra Singh, the young boy of Zamindar family of Padmanpur on the guddee and himself governed the kingdom in his name. This Balabhadra Singh was a grandson of Raghunath Singh, the second son of Raja Ratan Singh of Sambalpur. Therefore, Viswanath Singh sent words to Jayanta Singh who was at Garhmandal to proceed towards Sambalpur and assured him all possible help. Jayanta Singh at once acted accordingly. He halted at Khayaragarh, podadaha, Rampur, Surguja and Jashpur on the way. At Jashpur Viswanath Singh met Jayanta Singh and invited him to Sarangagarh. From there, Jayanta Singh sent words to all the Garhs including Patna to come to his help and he waited for two months before proceeding towards Sambalpur.

On hearing his approach Akbar Ray sent his men to Viswanath Singh, asking him to deliver Jayanta Singh. The Dewan of Sarangagarh turned down the proposal and defied the authority of Akbar Ray. Balabhadra Sai, who had been raised to the guddee by Akbar Ray, ran to him to beg his pardon. Jayanta Singh paid no heed to his entreaty and put him to death by dashing him against the throne. Overwhelmed with grief, the mother of Balabhadra Sai committed suicide by throwing by herself into a pan of boiling ghee¹⁸ (Op.cit-Mullick-194) Afterwards, Akbar Ray was beheaded and his followers were severely punished and Jayanta Singh entered the palace in triumph. Having thus removed all the obstacles and Jayanta Singh ascended the throne of Sambalpur in June 1781 A.D.¹⁹ (Jayachandrika-VI). He rewarded the Dewan of Sarangagarh with the pargana of Saria in recognition of his service for his restoration to the guddee. The copper plate grant issued for the purpose has been dated as Tuesday the 12th Tithi of the first half of Asharha in V.S. 1838 era (July 1781 A.D.) One Govinda Mohan Singh of Sonepur was appointed the Dewan of Sambalpur.

6. Conclusion: The Chauhan rulers, starting from Balaram Deva to Jayanta Singh ruled over of Sambalpur region for a long period of time. During Balaram Deva and Baliarsingh Deva, the territory of Sambalpur kingdom was touched almost boundaries of its neighbouring states and maintained a strong kingdom. The kingdom was consisted of Eighteen Garhs. The Chauhan

rulers were champion of art and temple architecture and patronage of literature. Veer Surendra Sai, the scion of Chauhans, continued his struggle for Sambalpur guddee against the British but Sambalpur kingdom annexed with British Empire through the Doctrine of Lapse in 1849 after the death of Narayan Singh.

7. Reference:

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