CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SAMBALPUR
INTRODUCTION

Sambalpur, the westernmost district of Orissa, has been named after the headquarter town Sambalpur. The district is within 20°43' and 20°11' North Latitude and between 82°39' and 85°31' East Longitude. It lies on the bank of the river Mahanadi triangular in shape. It is now surrounded by the district of Sundargarh in the North, the district of Dhenkanal in the East, the district of Bolangir in the South and the district of Kalahandi in the west. The districts of Raigarh and Raipur of Madhya Pradesh lie along the north-western and western boundaries of Sambalpur.

The district has an area of 1,75,203 square kilometers. According to the census of 1981 the district had a population of 2274,155. In order of size and population it holds second and fourth places respectively among all the districts of Orissa. According to 1981 census 47 scheduled tribes are inhabiting the district. The main tribes among them are Binjhals, Bhuiyans, Gonds, Saura, Mirdha, Kundh and Munda. The district consists of wide expanse of fairly open

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country fringed by forest-clad hills as well as a series of low hill-ranges of extremely irregular shape. The Barapahar (literally 12 hills) are the main hill ranges in the Bargarh Sub-division covering an area of 777 square kilometers and attaining a height of 2,267 feet. Besides, the Gandhamardan range rises from 2,000 to 3,000 feet. Other principal ranges are Jharghati and Maula Bhanja.

The present district of Sambalpur was in ancient times a part of Kosala which roughly comprised of the modern districts of Raipur and Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh and Bolangir, Sambalpur and Sundargarh districts of Orissa. The Aranyak Parva of the Mahabharata describes a few places of pilgrimages of Kosala, for example - Rishava Tirtha and Kala Tirtha which can be identified in this region. The Greek Geographer Ptolemy (in the middle of 2nd century A.D.) in his classical work 'Geographike' noticed a town called Sambalaka on the bank of the Manada. These have been identified with modern Sambalpur and 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 Somelpur in Bengal. Somelpur in Bengal is the modern Sambalpur in Western Orissa.

The history of Sambalpur can be traced as back as to the fourth century A.D. From Allahabad pillar
Inscription it is known that Samudra Gupta, the king of Magadh defeated the king Mahendra of Kosala which at that time comprised of the present districts of Raipur, Bilaspur and Sambalpur. During 5th and 6th century A.D. Kosala was under the Sarabhapuriya dynasty. The town Sarabhapura which was the headquarter is identified by some scholars with modern Sarabhagard in Sundargarh district and by some with modern Sambalpur. A large number of copper plate grants issued by the Sarabhapuriyas have come to light and from the archaeological evidences it is known that the Nauapara Subdivision of Kalahandi district as well as part of Sambalpur district was included in the Sarabhapura empire. After the Sarabhapuriyas the kingdom passed to the hands of Panduvamsi king Tivaradeva sometime in 7th century A.D. Towards the last decade of 9th century A.D. King Janmejaya I Mahabhavgupta (c.822-922 A.D.) consolidated the Eastern part of Kosala comprising of modern Sambalpur and Bolangir districts under his sceptre and from this time onwards the dynasty is popularly known as Somavamsi. During the later part of Somavamsi rule Sambalpur was occupied by the Kalachuris of Ratnapura. The Kalachuris greatly influenced the culture of Sambalpur. 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 the Sambalpur region remained under the rule of
the Gahgas and was placed under a Ganga Governor.

The middle of the 14th century A.D. was a critical period of the Ganga rule in Orissa. It had to face a series of invasions from the neighbouring kingdoms and amidst chaos and confusion which prevailed in the region one Ramai Deva, a Chauhan Rajput, laid the foundation of Chauhan rule in western Orissa.

SAMBALPUR UNDER THE CHAUHANS

From the 14th century A.D., Sambalpur came under the Chauhan Ruler of Patna who was the head of a cluster of eighteen states known as 'Atharagarjat'. We know from all available evidences that Ramai Deo was the founder of Chauhan rule in Patna. The Orissa Chauhans claim themselves to be Mainpuri as well as 'Garh Sambhari' (in Rajsthan) because of the fact that they regarded themselves as the descendants of the Chauhan ruling family of Mainpuri whose ancestors were Chauhans of Garh-Sambhar related to famous Prithviraj III. In course of time the Chauhans extended their influences over the surrounding territories including Sambalpur and the adjoining states.

1. N. Senapati (ed), ODG, Sambalpur (1971), p. 60
2. The early history of Chauhan rulers of Patna is known from a sanskrit work 'Koshalananda Kabya' written by Gangadhar Mishra and a Hindi work Jaya Chandrica by Prahallad Dubey.
In the middle of the 16th century Narshing Dev, the Chauhan ruler of Patna ceded to his brother Balaram Dev the territory of Sambalpur where the latter built a kingdom independent of Patna. Balaram Dev was a reputed warrior and soon consolidated the Chauhan rule in Sambalpur region and after the death of his brother Narshing Dev he also had the political suzerainty over Patna kingdom.

It was under the rule of Balaram Dev that the kingdom of Sambalpur was extended on all sides by wars and conquests. He ruled from 1552 to 1584. According to Koshalananda Kabya of Gangadhar Mishra, Balarama Dev helped Ramchandra Dev I, the Raja of Khurda against the muslim invasion. Thus he was the contemporary of Ramchandra Dev, who was reigning during the second half of the 16th century A.D. The Haiyaha ruler of Ratanpur being defeated by Balaram Dev ceded Sarangarh, Raigarh and Sakti to the kingdom of Sambalpur. Soon after a quarrel took place between Balaram Dev and the king of Surguja on the issue of boundary between their territories. Balaram Dev invaded Surguja through Gangpur which was then a feudatory state of Surguja. The ruler of Gangpur acknowledged the overlordship of Balaram Dev without any war. Subsequently Surguja was defeated and was

made a vassal state. Balaram Dev brought the image of Vishnu reclining on the serpent Ananta from Surguja which he installed in a temple constructed by him at Sambalpur. In the meanwhile, Narashimha Dev, Raja of Patnagarh, died. His successors were very weak. Taking this opportunity Balaram Dev not only asserted his independence but also reduced the kingdom of Patna as an appendage to the growing kingdom of Sambalpur. The Chauhan territory grew from a struggling principality to a powerful kingdom during his time.

Balabhadrana Singh, the grandson of Balaram Dev, ruled for a long period of about 25 years (1605-30). He conquered Baud after protracted battle which lasted for twelve years and subjugated its ruler Siddha Bhanja. The Chauhan kingdom however reached the pinnacle of power during the rule of the fifth raja of Sambalpur. Baliar Sing is credited with having conquered two important states Bonai and Yamtangi. Yamtangi is identified with Yamagarta Mandala which comprised a portion of modern Keonjhar district, that is Pallahara region and was ruled by a Bhanja ruler. With these conquests Baliar Sing became the sovereign lord of an extensive territory.

2. Gangadhar Mishra, Kosalananda Kabva, (Sonepur-Darbar, 1927), Canto XX, Verse-XV.
3. Ibid, Canto XX.

Baliar Sing was succeeded by his son Ratan Sing and subsequently by Chhatra Sai (1690-1725) who proved himself to be an efficient administrator. He fortified the town of Sambalpur by improving upon the construction work done during the time of Balabhadra Deo.

FIRST VISIT OF AN EUROPEAN TO SAMBALPUR

The reign of Ajit Sing, the successor of Chhatra Sai was one of internal feud and weak administration. The king was weak and indolent. He ruled the kingdom from 1725 to 1766. On the eve of his death in 1766 A.D., T. Motte sent by Lord Clive came to Sambalpur for negotiating with him for trade in diamond. His records clearly reveal the chaotic condition of Sambalpur towards the close of the reign of Ajit Sing. The administration of the kingdom was completely

under the influence of the ministers, especially the Dewan Dakhin Ray who rose to power and prominence. He managed the administration according to his whims and acquired much wealth. When the raja was warned by his queen Muktamani Devi to get rid of this powerful minister, Ajit Sing hatched a plot against Dakhin Ray. The Raja raised a party privately and an assassination best suited the spirit of the Government. Ajit Sing on the 16th June 1763 ordered the public hall to be cleared of all except Dakhin Ray on the pretence that the queen would pass through it on her way to a temple. The Dewan not suspecting any violence sat waiting for her, when ten or eight ruffians, who had been concealed for the purpose rushed out and cut him to pieces. Piloo Ray was the Principal actor of this tragedy. One Kascree, who was an officer in charge of royal household was jealous of him and advised Ajit Sing to keep the post of Dewan vacant for some time. His aim was to acquire power and wealth like Dakhin Ray taking advantage of the indolence of his master. Piloo Ray, however could smell the evil purpose and employed an assassin to murder him. After Kascree's assassination Piloo Ray became the Dewan and Ajit Sing soon came under his notorious influence. But the internal feud in his court did not end here. Akbar Ray, a relative of Kascree, wanted to take revenge upon Piloo Ray. He convinced the king of the wickedness of the Dewan and warned him not to be puppet in his hands.

Ajit Sing was so much impressed by Akar Ray, that he privately directed him to murder Piloo Ray. It was on 27th August 1764 when all the important people of the town gathered in the public hall with the Raja on a festive occasion, Akbar despatched two or three ruffians after Piloo Ray and he was murdered while passing through a crowd.

Soon after this, Akbar Ray was appointed as the Dewan of Sambalpur. He surpassed all previous Dewans in cruelty and corruption and created a reign of terror. It was in the midst of such a chaotic situation that Ajit Sing died in May, 1766. It was believed that he was poisoned by Akbar Ray, after his coming to throne. In his death bed he cautioned his son and successor Abhaya Sing to get rid of the Dewan Akbar Ray.

Abhaya Sing became the king of Sambalpur (1766-78) at the age of sixteen. Reciprocal suspicion and resentment between him and Akbar developed into open hostility. Abhaya Sing appointed Krisna Barmalic as his dewan and tried to suppress Akbar Ray by military forces. Akbar was prepared to meet such a situation as he himself also commanded some armed forces. He fortified himself in his own house which was situated in the midst of the town. Consequently the whole town was divided into two hostile parties and at the time of this civil war Motte visited Sambalpur. He was an eye witness

1. R.C.Mullick, op. cit., p.181.
2. Ibid, p.182.
to the chaotic condition of the town. Motte was requested to help Abhaya Sing against Akbar but he did not like to be dragged into the civil war. Motte reports, "matters came to a crisis on the 17th June at midnight, when Akbar having collected his people marched from his own house to the palace, secured the persons of the Raja and murdered everyone who opposed him. A massacre followed in the town, where three hundred dependants of Krisna Barmallick were put to death. I doubled my guards and kept all my people together. They were in Rajas service. Two Germans and two Frenchmen who were employed in taking care of his guns, the two former were killed in the palace; the two latter, making their escape to me, were protected. Akbar Ray confined Krisna Barmallick in a dungeon, the entrance to which was by a trapdoor where on Akbar always slept".

The kingdom of Sambalpur was thus torn by dissension when Motte visited Sambalpur.

Akbar Ray, being free to act, had become all powerful. He imprisoned Abhaya Sing, killed a large number of Royalists who opposed him. Abhaya Sing apprehended that Akbar Ray might put an end to Chauhan rule. He therefore instructed his brother Jayant Sing and Padman Sing to oust the dewan by force, failing which at best one of them should go out of the kingdom to preserve the lineage. Accordingly Jayant Sing fled to Berar and he got himself enrolled in the Maratha regiment at Garhmandal.

1. P. Dubey, Jaya Chandrika, Canto - III.
The Marathas became de-facto overlord of Orissa in 1751 when Nawab Aliwardikhan of Bengal ceded the territory to the south of Suvamarekha river to them. Orissa thereafter formed a separate subah and was ruled by Maratha governors, appointed by the court of Nagpur. The Marathas however faced difficulties in managing the administration of Orissa subah, which was cut off from the kingdom of Berar by the independent Chauhan territories of Sambalpur. The most common and convenient route from Nagpur to Cuttack lays through the Mahanadi via Sambalpur and Sonepur. Before their occupation of Orissa, the Marathas were friendly with the rajas of Sambalpur and it is known that Bhaskar Pandit, minister of Raghuji Bhonsle, was meeting the Chauhan raja Ajit Sing with presentations. In March 1745 Raghuji himself passed through Sambalpur to Cuttack with an army of fourteen thousand horses without ravaging the kingdom of Sambalpur or being opposed by the Raja of this kingdom.

After 1751 the Maratha attitude towards Sambalpur underwent a change because of political reasons. But the Bhonsle, who was then deeply engaged in consolidating

2. Sonepur was a feudatory of Sambalpur under the Chauhans.
his position in Orissa where the Nawab of Bengal was still asserting his power, thought it wise not to take any hasty step against the Chauhan kingdom. In 1760, the dual Government in Orissa came to an end with the appointment of Seo Bhatsathe as the Maratha Governor and the demoralised politics of Sambalpur, offered the marathas an opportunity to invade the kingdom. From the account of Motte it is known that in 1766, the Maratha General Bahukhan being sent by Januji Bhonsle of Nagpur encamped near Sambalpur in his march towards Cuttack to assist Bhawani Pandit. He demanded forage and money of the Raja and getting no reply from him, attempted to attack the town. This was the first recorded encounter of the Marathas with the Chauhan ruler of Sambalpur. It ended in a fiasco.

Akbar Ray, the defunct ruler of Sambalpur had no friendly relation with the Marathas. The communication between Nagpur and Cuttack, became, therefore, precarious. On one occasion when the marathas were transporting some guns from Nagpur to Cuttack through the Mahanadi, Akbar, with a view to strengthening the fort of Sambalpur with them, ordered his men to attack them as a result of which the guns were sunk in the river and the artillery men were drowned. Akbar recovered eight of the guns and mounted them on the fort. The Raja of Nagpur tried to take revenge but the army sent by him was repulsed.

1. T. Motte, op. cit, p. 52.
by Akbar Ray\(^1\). From that day the Marathas were seeking an opportunity to attack Sambalpur which they did not get so long Akbar was in power.

Akbar Ray, let loose a reign of terror in the kingdom. The widow of Ajit Sing was found to have been involved in a plot against Akbar and he murdered her in cold blood\(^2\). On getting this shocking news in the prison, Abhaya Sing died of heart failure in 1778. He had no son to succeed him and his brother Jayant Sing, who was the rightful claimant to the throne was away from the capital. Akbar put the crown on the head of a small boy of six, Balabhadra Sai, who was a distant collateral of Chauhan family and in his name governed the kingdom\(^3\).

Viswanath Sai, Chief of Sarangarh, with a number of chiefs of Chhatisgarh, rose to the occasion. He sent words to Jayanta Sing at Garhmandal to proceed to Sambalpur and assured him all possible help. Jayant Sing, at once, acted accordingly. Sobha Sing, the Chief of Sonepur had the double dealings with the situation\(^4\). Getting the news of Jayanta's advance, he rushed to Sambalpur, and at the same time sent words to Maratha general, Chimnaji Bapu to invade the fortified township.

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1. R.C. Mullick, op. cit, p.192.
3. N. Senapati (ed), op. cit, p.66.
4. P. Dubey, \textit{Jaya Chandrika} (Hindi), Canto-VI.
by taking advantage of the critical situation. He assured the Marathas that he would secretly help them by opening the gates of Sambalpur, if as a reward of this, he would be made the ruler of that kingdom.

During the time a powerful army headed by Chimnaji, a younger son of Mudhoji Bhonsle, was stationed at Orissa. Chimnaji had been despatched to Orissa to attack the British in Bengal according to the plan of the coalition that had been formed with the peswa of poona, the Bhonsle of Nagpur, Hyder Ali of Mysore and Nizam of Hyderabad. Mudhoji Bhonsle in his diplomatic dealings, professed perfect friendship with the allies, but at the same time he informed the British about the secret alliance. Acting upon the plan, he assembled an army of about 35,000 cavalry and secretly instructed his second son Chimnaji, whom he appointed the commander, to march towards Orissa. During this expedition Chimnaji attacked Dhenkanal and defeated its Raja Trilochan Mahendra Bahadur after a protracted battle for 20 days. In the mean time while the British Governor-general Warren Hastings despatched David Anderson to Cuttack to contact Chimnaji and to win him away from the coalition through diplomatic maneuver. Anderson reached Cuttack on 28th January, 1781. Chimnaji by that time had

1. P. Dubey, Jayachandrika (Hindi), Canto-VI.
3. Brajanath Badajena, Samara Taranga (Oriya), Dhenkanal (1964), Canto-VI.
marched towards Dhenkanal. The British Ambassador, therefore, handed over the letters from the Governor-general to the Dewan of Chimnaji and he left for Calcutta. When Chimnaji returned from Dhenkanal, negotiations were resumed. After a prolonged talk both the parties reached a preliminary agreement by which Hastings paid 13 lakhs of rupees to Chimnaji and a loan of 10 lakhs and the latter had to quit Orissa as soon as possible. On his way back Chimnaji was invited by the Raja of Sonepur to interfere in the affairs of Sambalpur. Chimnaji led his army against Sambalpur. The simultaneous appearance of the army of Jayanta Sing and that of Chimnaji on the two sides of the town frightened Akbar. He at once called a meeting of important persons and generals who advised him to offer the throne to Jayanta Sing. The raja of Sonepur who pretended to be a faithful friend of both Jayanta and Akbar was made the mediator. Soon the compromise was effected and Jayanta Sing entered the palace with triumph. The reconciliation of Jayant and Akbar frustrated the plan of Chimnaji. He did not want to take the risk and retreated to Nagpur showering blame on the Raja of Sonepur. After this

1. Bengal Secret and Military Consultation, 29th March, 1781, OSA.
2. P. Dubey, op. cit, Canto-VI.
3. For detail see P. Dubey, Jayachandrika, op. cit, Canto-VI.
coronation of Jayanta Sing was celebrated in Vikram Sambat 1838 corresponding to June, 1781 A.D.¹.

Chimnaji retreated, Akbar was put to death and the wickedness of the Raja of Sonepur was exposed. The latter however, submitted of his own accord and he was pardoned².

The rule of Jayanta Sing was however not peaceful and by that time Sambalpur had become a great enemy of the Marathas owing to the past activities of Akbar Ray. The recent frustration of Chimnaji rather enhanced the cause of enmity. Akbar, the strong bulwark against the Marathas being removed, the raja of Nagpur was bent upon bringing Sambalpur under his control. The Marathas harassed Raja Jayant Sing by plundering his kingdom from time to time. Jayant Sing however was willing to purchase peace and in 1794 he agreed to pay an annual tribute of Rs.32,000/- in Outtack coins which was equivalent to 16,000 sicca coins³. This arrangement prevailed till the year 1800 A.D. when the fort of Sambalpur was finally occupied by the Marathas⁴.

In 1799, Vincaji Bhonsle, the youngest brother of Raghaji II, the king of Nagpur, was passing through

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p. 56.
4. Ibid.
Sambalpur on pilgrimage to Puri. Govinda Mohan Sing, the Dewan did not come to greet him. He was also not properly received by the Raja of Baudh and Sonepur. On reaching Cuttack he despatched an army under Bhup Sing to chastise the Rajas. After a severe war Bhup Sing succeeded in taking the Raja of Boudh, Chandra Sekhar Bhanj and the Raja of Sonepur Prithvi Sing Dev as prisoners. He then encamped at Sonepur for the rainy season giving time to Jayant Sing for preparation. As soon as the rains were over, Bhup Sing appeared at the gate of Sambalpur. He besieged the fort continuously for five months without being able to effect an entrance. But by chance one of his officers named Chindaji discovered that the moat near Samalai gate was fordable. Chindaji while straying "with two rocket men in the forest of Bomboo lanes which surrounds the fort and coming unexpectedly upon it, found it carelessly guarded and remarked that the wall had fallen into the ditch in one place. He eventually threw a rocket into the fort by which the thatched building; and its contents were suddenly set on fire. Observing that the garrison was busy in endeavouring to extinguish the fire, without suspecting the occasion of it, Chindaji sent for troops from the camp, who arrived in time to take the fort by surprise". Sambalpur was thus occupied by the Marathas in April 1800 A.D.\(^1\). Raja Jayant Sing and his son Maharaj Sai were captured at Debrigarh

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while they were running away to save their lives\(^1\). They along with the king of Boudh and Sonepur were sent to Chanda as captives. Bhup Sing remained at Sambalpur to administer the country on behalf of the Maratha government of Nagpur.

The occupation of Sambalpur immensely increased the strength of the Marathas as it connected the different parts of their dominion which were in a manner cut off from each other while an almost independent chief occupied an intermediate extensive tract of the country. The occurrence was, therefore, deemed of sufficient magnitude and it was announced by a salute, fired from the part of artillery. On the other hand it startled the British in their attempt to build up an empire in India. Col Brooke, Resident of Nagpur, lost no time to inform the matter to the Governor General\(^2\).

Bhup Sing after occupying Sambalpur could realise that the tributary chiefs and the peoples of Sambalpur were not prepared to accept the Maratha rule without opposition. A sense of indignation prevailed upon the people who were determined to resist the Marathas to the last. Rani Ratna Kumari\(^3\) came to the forefront and firmly rebelled against the

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2. NRR,Vol.1, letter No.1 dated nil, April,1800 from H.Coblebroke to Marington, p.34.
3. Ratna Kumari, a Princess from Bamanda was the Chief Queen of Jayant Sing.
Marathas. She became the leader of the people during the crisis. Bhup Sing could foresee that he had to be involved in a long drawnout war which he intended to avoid because he had quite a good number of enemies in the Bhonsle court at Nagpur. Being very cunning, he had a compromise with the Rani and accordingly assumed the office of the Governor of Sambalpur.

Bhup Sing, the new Maratha Governor of Sambalpur soon formed an alliance with the Rani and disregarded the orders and warnings from Bhonsle. On being called to Nagpur to account for his conduct he refused to comply with the summons. The Nagpur raja then sent a large force to punish his contumacy, but Bhup Sing surprised the Marathas in an ambuscade at the Singhora pass which connects the Gandhamardhan and Barpahar ranges and routed them. This was a temporary success. While coming back to Sambalpur after this success, Bhup Sing foolishly plundered the village Garvana and provoked the anger and enmity of Ghamra Gauntia of that village. Shortly afterwards when the second Maratha army was sent against Sambalpur, the Ghamra Gauntia hid them in the pass and sent news to Bhup Sing that the area was infested

2. Dr.N.K.Sahu, Ratna Kumari, Saptarshi (Oriya), Sambalpur University, March, (1972), p.22.
with Maratha soldiers. When Bhup Sing arrived at the pass the Marathas in ambush fell upon his force and almost annihilated it. Bhup Sing, however escaped death and fled to Kolabira with two Ranas of Jayant Sing. After that he joined the British regiment and helped the English to win Sambalpur from the Marathas.  

Thus Sambalpur was occupied by Marathas for the second time in 1802 and Tantia Pharnavis was appointed as the Governor of Sambalpur. But this victory, because of the second Maratha war, was of a short duration.

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