

# Historical Importance of Sambalpur District

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**Abstract:-** Sambalpur district in Odisha, India, stands as a testament to a profound historical legacy shaped by cultural, political, and economic transformations across the centuries. Its strategic location along trade routes has made it a vibrant melting pot of cultures, absorbing influences from dynasties like the Mauryas, Guptas, and Marathas, leaving an enduring imprint on the local heritage. The engineering marvel of the mid-20th century, the Hirakud Dam, symbolizes Sambalpur's historical prowess in infrastructure development. Beyond its role in irrigation and flood control, the dam has fundamentally altered the socio-economic landscape of the region. The district's cultural richness is evident in its traditional handloom industry, with the renowned Sambalpuri sarees serving as masterpieces that reflect unique weaving patterns and vibrant colors. These sarees embody the artistic skills transmitted through generations, contributing significantly to Sambalpur's cultural identity. Sambalpur's landscape is dotted with ancient temples and archaeological sites, such as the Samaleswari Temple, standing as witnesses to centuries of religious and cultural activities. These landmarks offer glimpses into the historical religiosity and architectural achievements of the region's inhabitants. Sambalpur's historical significance encompasses its part in India's struggle for independence from British colonial authority. The district produced notable leaders who played pivotal roles in shaping the political landscape during the fight for independence. In summary, Sambalpur district's historical importance lies in its diverse cultural influences, strategic positioning, engineering achievements, artistic traditions, religious heritage, and contributions to India's struggle for freedom. Exploring the layers of Sambalpur's history unveils a nuanced understanding of its evolution and its pivotal role in shaping the broader history of the Indian subcontinent. The historical significance of Sambalpur District has to be emphasised in this article. When composing this paper, the researcher/author used data from primary as well as secondary sources.

**Keywords:-** Sambalpur, District, Historical, Temple, Cultural.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Located in the western region of Odisha, India, Sambalpur District is distinguished by having Sambalpur, India's mediaeval city, as its headquarters. Situated in the Mahanadi River watershed, the district covers 6,702 km<sup>2</sup> in total, of which roughly 60% is covered in dense forests. It shares borders with Deogarh to the east, Bargarh and Jharsuguda to the west, Sundergarh to the north, and Subarnapur and Angul to the south. Sambalpur City plays a crucial role as a connecting hub between Chhattisgarh and Odisha.<sup>1</sup>The Sambalpur district is positioned between latitudes 20°43' and 22°11' north and longitudes 82°39' and 84°45' east.<sup>2</sup>Sambalpur district unfolds a rich tapestry of historical significance. A crossroads of civilizations, it has absorbed influences from dynasties like the Mauryas and Marathas. The mid-20th-century engineering marvel, Hirakud Dam, symbolizes its infrastructure prowess. Sambalpuri sarees, an artistic legacy, reflect the district's cultural identity. With ancient temples and a role in India's freedom struggle, Sambalpur stands as a testament to a vibrant history, awaiting exploration.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The information gathered, which came from primary as well as secondary sources, is critically analysed in the paper. The principal author's realistic observations and interviews conducted throughout an experimental field survey, gazetteers, and unpublished theses are examples of primary data sources. Using the field study questionnaire, the researchers conducted in-person interviews. The historical significance of Odisha's Sambalpur district was the survey's main focus. Examples of secondary data sources include books, periodicals, reviews, journals, conferences, documents, and reports. The article gathers information from several sources in order to enhance knowledge on this topic.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To study the Historical events on Sambalpur district
- To study of Architectural and religious heritage
- To understanding the role in India's freedom Struggle

#### IV. ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF THE DISTRICT

The town of Sambalpur, serving as the district headquarters, derives its name from the ruling goddess "Samlei." According to O' Malley, the goddess was discovered under a "Simul" (silk-cotton) tree by BalaramDev, the first Chauhan King of Sambalpur. The deity is commonly referred to as Samlei, Sammalai, and Sammalei by the local people. When Sanskritized, the deity is known as Samaleswari (samalei+iswari).<sup>3</sup>

#### V. HISTORY

The Sambalpur region has a rich historical heritage reaching back to the Paleolithic period, with archaeological artefacts such as a stone Celt at Lasa near Kuchinda. In a cave in the neighbouring Jharsuguda district, proto-historic inscriptions were found.<sup>4</sup> The region may have been ruled by the Chedi following the fall of the Mauryan empire, based on its historical pattern, which links it to the pre-Magadhan dynasty of Mahapadmananda. Ptolemy mentions Sambalpur as Sambalaka, which is located across the Mahanadi River and was acknowledged by the ancient Romans for its diamond trading until the beginning of the 17th century. Subsequent to Kharavela's reign, the Megha dynasty ruled the area, eventually integrating into Dakshina Kosala.<sup>5</sup>

Samudra Gupta's presence is mentioned in the Allahabad inscriptions from the fourth century CE, even though the region was not included in the Gupta Empire. The availability of Gupta coinage indicates that the area, which corresponds to the plains of modern-day Chhattisgarh and western Odisha, continued throughout Gupta fields of dominance.<sup>6</sup>

The Sarbhapuriyas were the ruling family of Sambalpur in the fifth and sixth century. By the end of the 9th century, monarch Janmajaya I Mahabhavagupta had extended his dominion to encompass Sambalpur District and Balangir District. The Panduvansi monarch Trivaradeva had taken control of the region in the 7th century. The Somvanshi dynasty followed after his. The Kalachuris of Ratnapur gained control of Sambalpur after the Somvanshi dynasty, which sparked a 13th-century war with the Gandas. Sambalpur eventually fell into the hands of the Gandas.<sup>7</sup>

The Chauhan dynasty in western Odisha was established by Ramai Dev in the middle of the fourteenth century. But the Marathas' occupation of Sambalpur in April 1800 put an end to the Chauhan dynasty. Sambalpur District was subsequently seized by the British on January 2, 1804, and it came under their ultimate authority in 1817. In the years that followed, activities opposing British rule were spearheaded by the Kandhas and Binjhal Zamindars.<sup>8</sup>

Four distinct districts were created out of the former Sambalpur District on March 31, 1993. The temples constructed by the Chauhan emperors are among the district's noteworthy historical artefacts; they are significant cultural and architectural sites that represent the rich history and legacy of the area.<sup>9</sup>

Sambalpur made a substantial contribution to the liberation movement, with well-known figures like Chandra Shankar Behera, Nilakantha Das, and Kastaram Tanti playing important roles in educating the local population about the movement's principles. These people, along with others, were instrumental in reviving Sambalpur's spirit of independence and resistance. Through encouraging a sense of solidarity and resolve in the fight for independence from colonial control, their actions assisted in organising the local populace. Their contributions bear witness to the broad and varied involvement of Indians from all parts of the country in the struggle for independence.<sup>10</sup>

Odisha became its own state after Indian independence in 1947. Initially, the states of Debagarh, Bargarh and Jharsuguda comprised the Sambalpur District. However, these regions were split up into four distinct districts during a later administrative reorganization. Although Jharsuguda and Debagarh districts were established in 1994, Bargarh constituted an independent district in 1993. The objectives of this division were to improve the effectiveness of governance, enable targeted local development, and cater to the unique requirements of every area.<sup>11</sup>

#### VI. HISTORICAL PLACES

Sambalpur District is a renowned destination with a wealth of historical sites and natural wonders attracting global visitors. Notably, the Hirakud Dam and its lake host Siberian migratory birds. Major tourist destinations include the Wildlife Sanctuary at Badrama (Ushakuthi), the picturesque Gudguda Waterfall Khalasuni and Debrigadh in the Barapahad Mountain Range (Chourasimal), the Leaning Temple of Huma and the spiritually significant Ghanteswari Temple. The district offers a diverse and captivating experience, combining cultural heritage with the beauty of wildlife and landscapes.<sup>12</sup>

##### A. HIRAKUD DAM

Hirakud Dam, located in Sambalpur District of Odisha, India, is a monumental engineering marvel completed in 1953. Stretching over 25.8 kilometers, it spans the Mahanadi River, forming one of the world's longest earthen dams. The dam serves a triple purpose: flood control, irrigation for the Mahanadi Delta, and hydroelectric power generation. Its reservoir, Hirakud Reservoir, is one of Asia's largest artificial lakes and attracts tourists with boating and recreational activities. The dam's controlled water release benefits agriculture, and its scenic surroundings, including the presence of migratory birds, make it a popular destination for nature enthusiasts and visitors. Hirakud Dam stands as a testament to both engineering prowess and its vital role in regional development.<sup>13</sup>

Hirakud Dam, situated across a vast area of 743 square kilometers, holds the distinction of being the longest earthen dam globally. With a total of 64 sluice gates and 34 crest gates, it stands as a remarkable engineering feat. The sheer scale of the dam's infrastructure, coupled with its numerous gates, underscores its importance as a key water management and development initiative in the region.<sup>14</sup>

#### B. HUMA

Situated away on the opposite bank along the Mahanadi River, Huma is a small town in the Sambalpur Division, 23 kilometres south of Sambalpur. Of particular note is the Leaning Temple, built in honour of Lord Shiva during the period of rule of Sambalpur's fifth Raja, Baliar Singh. The temple's origin is attributed to a milkman (Gauda) who initiated the worship of Shiva after witnessing the miraculous absorption of his daily offering of milk by the underlying rock.

Huma has become a pilgrimage site, drawing devotees, and also attracts curious visitors interested in observing the unique fish in the river. The Kudo-fish in particular is said to be so gentle that it accepts sweet foods from people taking baths close to the temple, resulting in an environment reminiscent of an aquarium. The temple is endowed with as lengthy as the temple remains standing and religious rites are observed, Huma along six additional communities will not be assessed. This award is thought to have been made during the reign of Sambalpur's first Raja, Balaram Dev. Overall, Huma represents a blend of religious significance, cultural history, and natural allure.<sup>15</sup>

#### C. SAMLESWARI TEMPLE

The temple of Goddess Samaleswari in the Sambalpur area is associated with numerous legends and stories. Historical evidence suggests that King Balaram Dev of the Chowhan dynasty constructed the temple in the 16th Century AD.<sup>16</sup>

#### D. DEBRIGARH

The highest point in Bargarh District's Barapahar hills stands at an elevation of 2267 feet (691 meters). This strategic location, once a stronghold of the Sambalpur Rajas, witnessed historical events such as the capture of Raja Jayant Singh and his son Maharaj Sai by Chandaji Bhonsla's Marathas. Additionally, during the uprising led by Balbhadra Dao, the Gond Zamindar of Lakhanpur, the hill served as a rebel stronghold, where Balbhadra Dao met his end. The site is marked by the Sambalpur District entry gate, situated nearly a kilometer away from the zero-point. With a rich history and legends tied to regional rulers and historical events, this elevated point in the Barapahar hills holds significance as a key historical and geographical landmark in the Bargarh District.<sup>17</sup>

#### E. GHANTESWARI/CHIPLIMA

A village on the left bank of the Mahanadi River, 37 kilometres south of Sambalpur town, Chiplima is important both historically and culturally. There is a great deal of reverence for the local goddess Ghatlei, also called Ghanteswari, and followers frequently tie chirping bells

outside her shrine.. Legend has it that Balaram Deva, the first Chauhan Raja of Sambalpur, once had his seat in Chaurpur, a village close to Chiplima, before moving to Sambalpur town. Another notable feature of Chiplima was the Kalyan Ashram, founded by the late Dr. Janardan Pujari (1944–1945). This ashram served as a major attraction in the region for some time. Overall, Chiplima represents a blend of religious devotion, historical legacy, and cultural heritage along the banks of the Mahanadi River.<sup>18</sup>

#### F. CHARMAL

The village located 16 km west of Rampur in the Redhakhhol Sub-Division is known for Suani hill, where the goddess Suani and other images are worshipped. Local tradition tells of a belief that wedded people to the goddess faced unfortunate fates. Yudhisthira, during his banishment, was asked by Suani's father to wed her, and he did so. However, due to their exile, the Pandavas did not bring Suani to their house, leaving her there with the promise to bring her back. The goddess Suani is revered, and an annual fair is held in Bhadraba from August to September, attracting a large gathering. This fair serves as a significant cultural and religious event, honoring the goddess and the associated legends.<sup>19</sup>

#### G. BUDHARAJA HILL

At the town's center, surrounded by lush vegetation, stands a hill featuring a Shiva shrine dedicated to the memory of Budharai, a Chauhan prince tragically killed. This shrine serves as a poignant and central location for remembrance and religious activities in the community.<sup>20</sup>

#### H. BHIMA MANDALI

It is a location of significant historical significance and is located 100 km from Sambalpur. This area contains extremely important paintings and engravings from the prehistoric and proto-historic periods. A cave known as Bhīma Mandali or Vimadali exists. In a different cave, they worship Gupteswar. The god has not yet been correctly identified.<sup>21</sup>

#### I. KUDABAGA

The Sambalpur Sub-Division's Rengali Police Station is in charge of the settlement. In 1876, V. Ball discovered a Paleolithic stone tool near Bursapal. Kudabaga, originally a 75-square-kilometer Zamindari, was owned by a Gond caste family. This family played an active role in Surendera Sai's uprising.<sup>22</sup>

#### J. KANDHARA

Situated 80 kilometers from Sambalpur in the Redhakhhol Sub-Division, this location is where the saint poet Bhīma Bhoi attained enlightenment. Transformed into a tourism destination, it features amenities like a small rest shed with drinking water facilities. This site holds religious significance for the Mahimaitees and is known for a legendary well, adding to its cultural and spiritual allure.<sup>23</sup>

**K. KUCHINDA**

Two prehistoric polished stone clet-like objects were found in Lasa, a community around 3 km from Kuchinda.<sup>24</sup>

**L. KHINDA**

The place is renowned as the residence of Surendra Sai. The government is constructing a beautiful structure in honor of the late Surendra Sai, serving as a picturesque resting place for observers. The structure features a platform pillar topped with a statue of Surendra Sai.<sup>25</sup>

**VII. CONCLUSION**

The district of Sambalpur holds great historical value due to its cultural diversity, strategic location, and noteworthy historical contributions that have been woven into India's fabric. The Hirakud Dam serves as an example of the district's strategic location, which highlights its ability to create infrastructure and its revolutionary effect on the socioeconomic environment. The district's cultural character is greatly influenced by the traditional handloom sector, which produces the famous Sambalpuri sarees in particular. This sector displays the artistic legacy that has been passed down through the years. The historical religious practises and architectural accomplishments of the Sambalpur community can be observed at ancient temples and archaeological sites. Furthermore, the district's historical significance in influencing the political environment is highlighted by its involvement in India's freedom movement. Examining Sambalpur's past highlights its ongoing influence on the region while also enhancing our comprehension of its development. The pride and dignity of the Orissan people are thus reflected in Sambalpur's outstanding importance in history.

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