



# ROLE OF SAMBALPUR IN CREATION OF SEPARATE ODISHA PROVINCE DURING COLONIAL ERA

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## Abstract:

Sambalpur is the hub of Western Odisha. It has unique cultural heritage. West Odisha was inside the jurisdiction of Central Provinces in 1862 A.D. It was known as 'Odia country' in government records, Odia was the official language for certain administrative inconveniences like problem faced by Hindi officials in non-Hindi areas. In the other hand the Odias, who form a linguistic minority lost their identity in these provinces and their welfare got neglected. There was a tendency of powerful linguistic and cultural organisation of the Bengali, Telugu and Hindi- speaking people to dominate over the Odia minorities and their culture. Odia language faced an uphill task in its struggle for survival. The Odia movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century precisely aimed as safeguarding the Odia language and culture. The active leaders of Sambalpur like Balabhadra Supkar, Braja Mohan Pattanaik, Mahanta Bihari Das, Madan Mohan Mishra and Sripati Mishra urged for a separate political identity of their own. There were popular agitation in Sambalpur, demanding proper justice from the Government. The cause of the Odia language and Odia culture was espoused by local newspaper particularly "Sambalpur Hitaisini". In creating a strong awaking for political identity of the scattered Odia race, credit should be given to Sir Basudev Sudhal Dev, Bhima Bhoi, Gangadhar Meher. Lastly, it was announced that the new Odisha province would come into being on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1936 with Sir John Austin Hubback as the first Governor.

**Keywords: Romantic, Sambhal, Gangadhar Meher, Bhima Bhoi,**

**Sir Basudev Sudhal Dev, Sambalpur Hitaisini.**

## 1. Introduction:

**Sambalpur**, the western most district of Odisha. It lies between 20° 43' and 20° 11' North latitude and between 82° 39' and 84° 13' East longitude. The district of Sambalpur has its own cultural heritage and great historical importance in the field of social, religious and political consciousness. The people have evolved their own romantic dialect known as Sambalpuri, which is prevalent in all the districts of Western Odisha. The district is noted for "tie and dye" weaving in cotton and tassar silk bringing out excellent artistic designs from the loom almost like magic with the help of formulae which have passed down from father to son for generations.

Sambalpur is a rich receptacle of various strands of archaeological antiquities dating back from Pre-historic down to the present time, intraces, ruins and extent in different stages of preservation. No major excavation has been taken place in any of the sites suppose to be repositories of artifacts. Whatever little we possess now has come to light as a result of surface exploration. It is not possible to describe or even simply to document or catalogue, all the items in the limited space of this writes-up. The items

includes both paleolithic and Neolithic ones of Ulapgarh of Sambalpur and Vikramkhola of Jharsuguda district on the wall of cave pictograph writing still undeciphered.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Origin of Sambalpur:

In the ancient times Sambalpur was a part of South Kosala, comprising roughly the modern districts of Raipur and Raigarh in Chhatisgarh and the undivided districts of Sambalpur, Bolangir and Sundargarh in Odisha.<sup>2</sup> South Kosala has been one of the most ancient places of human civilization. That a developed civilization existed in Sambalpur region is clearly evident from rock engraving and painting. South Kosala played an important role in the history of India. Its vast territory once formed the Mahakosala (greater Kosala) empire, which was one of the foremost Mahajanapadas of India and produced some great personalities like Ikshvaku, Mandhata, Sagar, Harichandra, Raghu, Rama and Prasanjit. Its history is traditionally known from the Puranas, the great epics and the early Buddhist literature. The territorial limit of ancient Kosala was very large. Then it known as North Kosala and South Kosala. Sambalpur was in South Kosala. The term 'Kosala' has got its derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Kusalam' (betterment).<sup>3</sup> According to the source from Budhaghosa, Kosala means one who is clever in the art of plucking, 'Kusa' grass, which is very useful in the performances of Yagnas and religious sacrifices. So it appears that, this area once used to supply 'Kusa' grass to other part of India for use at the time of religious rituals.

The district of Sambalpur has been named after the headquarter town Sambalpur. According to L.S.S.O'Malley, the town itself derives its name from the Presiding deity Samalai, whose image was founded by BalaramDev(1570-1595), the first Chauhan King of Sambalpur, beneath a Simul (Silk cotton) tree. Ptolemy, the Greek Geographer (Middle of the 2nd century A.D.) in his work "Geographike" refers to a town named Sambalaka situated on the bank of the Mananda. Sambalaka and Mananda may be identified with modern Sambalpur and the river Mahanadi respectively.<sup>4</sup>

We find description of the territory of Sambhal identified with Sambalpur. The Suffix 'Pur' was later added to the original name 'Sambhal', when the territory came under the rule of the Chauhans. The naming of the town could have been made after the word 'Sambhal' which means 'Resource'. The area is resourceful owing to large source of diamonds in Sambalpur. From time immemorial Sambalpur was famous for the finest type of diamonds available on the river bed of the Mahanadi. The kosalanandakavyam(1664) of PanditGangadhar Mishra, is the first source to tell us about the Chauhan dynasty of Sambalpur and Jaya Chandrika(1781), another kavya in Laria (Chattisgarhi) dialect by Prahallad Dubey.

## 3. Language Agitation in Sambalpur:

The Central Province was a Hindi-speaking Province with the exception of Sambalpur district where Odia was spoken by the people. The Government was aware of this in 1862 when the district was tagged with the Central Provinces. Ethnologically and culturally Sambalpur was an Odia region. Since 1862, Odia was used as the official language in the district administration notwithstanding the fact that in all other districts of the Central Province, Hindi was used as the court language.

No change was made by the Government in the language policy till 1895. In the Government records, the district was therefore termed as 'Odia Country.' This difference gave rise to administrative difficulties between Sambalpur and other districts of the Central Provinces, where Hindi was the official language.<sup>5</sup> The Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces Sir John Woodroff had declared on 19th January 1895 Hindi became the medium of instruction and court language .

To remove these difficulties, the Government of the Central Provinces substituted Hindi for Odia as the official language of Sambalpur and simultaneously changed the medium of instruction in school.<sup>6</sup> The new language policy offered a great opportunity to the Hindi-speaking people to qualify for Government jobs over the Odia-speaking people for their ignorance of Hindi had a relative disadvantage.<sup>7</sup>

Unexpectedly for the Government the people of Sambalpur reacted against the imposition of Hindi. Their mother tongue and social customs came under grave peril. The Sambalpur Hitaisini, a Odia weekly newspaper, started its publication on 30th May 1889 under the patronage of Sir Basudev Sudhal Dev of Bamra at Sudhal Press, Deogarh. The Sambalpur Hitaisini published a series of editorials on the issue. The people thought that, like the Bengalis who had tried to abolish Odia from the Odisha Division, the Chief Commissioner was trying to obliterate Odia from Sambalpur. Several Public meetings were organised to ascertain the views of the people and to educate them on the evil consequences of the new language Policy.<sup>8</sup> Dharanidhar Mishra, (He was the first Matriculate of Sambalpur) a leading member of Odia elites of Sambalpur organised the meetings in the town and neighbouring villages. He could mobilize the public opinion against the arbitrary decision of the Government.

In a very well represented public meeting of Somnath Babu, the affected people resolved to submit a printed memorandum to Lord Elgin, the Viceroy pleading for the revocation of the order of the Chief Commissioner. The memorandum was signed by about six thousand persons in Odia and submitted to the authorities on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1895.<sup>9</sup> It was an excellent document

in which the misconception and prejudices of the Government were brought under sharp focus and the cause of Odia language and culture was strongly defended by convincing arguments in support

However, inspite of all the public protests, memoranda and personal pleadings by the end of 1895 Odia ceased to be the official language of Sambalpur. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 1896 Hindi became the medium of instruction and court language.<sup>10</sup> The imposition of Hindi had an injurious effect upon the mental faculties of the Odia children. The number of Hindi teachers and Hindi schools began to increase at the cost of Odia teachers and Odia schools. The employment of the district went to the benefit of Hindi-speaking people.<sup>11</sup> This had a tremendous impact upon the Odia-speaking people as the new policy impeded their social and cultural growth. From that year they started continuous agitation on all fronts for the amalgamation of Sambalpur with the Odisha Division. Representations were made and efforts were made to meet the then Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1901. The British Government was finally forced to succumb to popular demand and Odia language was reintroduced in place of Hindi in 1902 in Sambalpur.

#### 4. Amalgamation of Sambalpur with Odisha :

The restoration of Odia as the court language of Sambalpur was partial fulfilment of the objective of the Odia Movement. This success inspired demand for the implementation of Andrew Fraser's suggestion, "Sambalpur ought to be joined with Odisha to which it really belongs." The amalgamation of Sambalpur with Odisha Division was not far to be attained.

After due consideration and exchange of views with the Provincial administration, the Government of India recommended the transfer of Sambalpur,<sup>12</sup> along with the adjoining Feudatory States like Bamra, Kalahandi, Patna, Rairakhol and Sonapur, from the Central Provinces to the Odisha Division.<sup>13</sup> The two Feudatory States (Gangpur & Bonai) under the Chhotnagpur Division along with the above mentioned areas were also amalgamated to the Odisha Division and came under the Bengal administration with effect from 16 October, 1905. This marked the end of a successful Odia Movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It appears, therefore, that Odia language provided the bond of unity among the politically scattered areas inhabited by the Odias. The language crisis and the perilous situation faced by Odia culture served as a powerful stimulus to arouse the dormant spirit of the Odias and galvanized them to vigorous action. Their initial struggle to safeguard Odia-culture intimately assumed a political character, when the Odia Movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century got transferred in to the amalgamation movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To spearhead the amalgamation movement the elite class formed the first political organisation in 1903, which came to be popularly known as the Utkal Union Conference.

The language agitation started in Sambalpur and became widespread in Odisha. Sir Andrew Fraser, Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces, visited Sambalpur in 1901<sup>14</sup> when people met him in large number and submitted a memorial to restore Odia language and to transfer the district of Sambalpur to Odisha. Sir Andrew Fraser appreciated the cause of the popular movement of Sambalpur and recommended it owing to the ethnical and linguistic differences between Sambalpur and other districts of Central Provinces. As a result, subsequently in October, 1905 the bulk of the district was transferred to Odisha and remained a part of the Province of Bengal until 1<sup>st</sup> April 1912 when the Province of Bihar and Odisha was constituted.<sup>15</sup> The table indicating detail about the district of Sambalpur, when its power was transfer into various presidencies from time to time .<sup>16</sup>

**Table**

Years	Transfer of Power
1797-1817	Sambalpur ruled under Marathas suzerainty
1817 - 1849	Sambalpur under British rule
1849 - 1860	Under British rule in Central Province
1860 – 1862	Under British rule in Bengal Presidency
1862 - 1905	Under Central Province
1905 – 1912	Under Bengal Province
1912 – 1936	(31 <sup>st</sup> March) Under Bihar and Odisha States
1 <sup>st</sup> April 1936	Sambalpur came under Odisha after creation of new Province.

## 5.Social Reformation:

The spread of English education led to the emergence of an elite class in Sambalpur. The middle class intellectuals always formed a core in any revolution. This class was most responsive to the call of socialism, equality and human rights, for people of this class had the ability to look beyond their time. They subjected every institution of the society to test of reason and through that fostered the ideas of change and progress. The Odia poets and writers like Gangadhar Meher, Bhima Bhoi and others advocated social reforms in their poems, stories and essays.

The prominent middle class intellectuals played a significant role in the socio-cultural revolution in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them made remarkable contribution in the field of Odia literature. Some played very important role in the spread of ideas relating to social reform ideas in Sambalpur. They were bent upon uplifting Odia community from a lamentable state-administrative neglect and social degeneration.

Bhima Bhoi (1850-1895),<sup>17</sup> was a blind poet who belonged to the Kondh tribe. He could compose poems extempore. Though blind and deprived of education, he composed verses which reveal high philosophical thoughts and divine inspiration. Bhima Bhoi's literary creation always carried a special message for the exploited people of Odisha and he attempted through their pages as much as through his field work to instil a new faith in them. Some of his works echoed his mutinous voice against the social set up. He laid bare the superstition that had polluted the entire social atmosphere and had emasculated the people of Sambalpur and laid stress on a fresh and free national life. Even, he could sing the song of eternal sacrifice<sup>18</sup>. His following poem became world famous and inscribed on the wall of the United Nations Organisation Hall.

*“Pranika Arata Dukha Apramita Dekhu Dekhu Keba Sahu*

*Mo Jibana Pache Nerke Padi Thau Jagata Udhara Heu.”*

*(Witnessing the plethora of plights on earth how one could bear with ;let my soul go to hell but let the world be saved.)*

Gangadhar Meher (1862-1924), is regarded as the nature poet of Odia literature. Through his writing, poet Gangadhar evinced great patriotism, love for language, culture and tradition. His epic *Utkal Laxmi* and Poems *Utkala BharatiraUkti*, *Matrubhumi*, *Udbodhana*, *Nabavarsa*, and other creations depict his nationalist spirit and project the poet as a great educationist.<sup>19</sup> Meherian Poetry attempted to resist attacks on Odia language from various quarters during the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Gangadhar Meher was not only a great lover of Odia and Sambalpur, but also a great lover of India. Two important factors were responsible to influence Gangadhar to be a nationalist. Firstly, the background of the place where he was born and lived. The resistant movement of the great hero Veer Surendra Sai of Sambalpur against the British rulers was such an event in the history of Indian Freedom Movement, which signified the nationalist spirit of the people of Sambalpur. This was the background of his locality, which encouraged him to be a patriot. Secondly, he, as a nationalist, was also influenced by the Indian Freedom Movement under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who visited Odisha in 1921.<sup>20</sup> So, this movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi deeply influenced him, and as a result he wrote his lyric *Bharati Bhavana* in 1923 to give expression to his national spirit. Through the lyric, he vehemently criticized the corrupt administration and attitude of British rulers in India.

Gangadhar Meher was a liberal nationalist. His revolutionary and appealing literary works generated great interest among the Odia people to work for the development of their mother-land and mother tongue. His writings depict, in an innovative, inimitable, colloquial style, the conditions that prevailed in the society the superstitions and also political chaos that confronted Sambalpur.

All these Odia intellectuals held before the common man the lens through which he could see what threatens him socially, culturally, politically and which made him aware of the danger that lie ahead. They created awareness in the minds of the people that the removal of social and religious superstition would go a long way in socio-cultural regeneration of Sambalpur.

Contribution of Zilla School of Sambalpur to the cause of social and political reformations are remarkable. It was established in 1852 at the heart of Sambalpur town and was also a famous school later.<sup>21</sup> This school was the product of lofty idealism of a few young intellectuals who were convinced that much of the evil could be eradicated through proper development and training of the young. First time in the history of India, the students of the Zilla School were to adopt the Non Co-operation Movement and boycott the classes.<sup>22</sup> The walls of the school were filled with posters bearing the slogans like “Do not go to school.”<sup>23</sup> Chandra Sekhar Behera, Nrusingha Guru, Laxminarayan Mishra, Dharanidhar Mishra and others were inspired by

Gandhiji's ideals, formed very close group and carried on their nationalistic, social and educational activities from Zilla School of Sambalpur.

They always rebelled against social superstitions and class-barriers and in fact against the Brahminic traditions although they came from conservative Brahmin families. In the process, however, they invited the wrath of the high caste people of the society. They fought against child marriage, supported female education, sympathized with the down-trodden and socially ostracized.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1928 Gandhiji, first time visited Sambalpur,<sup>24</sup> He stayed with Chandra Sekhar Behera (who was the President of District Congress Committee) and was pleased with the hospitality of the latter. The message of Gandhi reached the nooks and corners of Sambalpur on account of the untiring efforts of Chandra Sekhar Behera.<sup>25</sup> He firmly opposed social evils like untouchability, for the removal of which he had set up a committee for the depressed class.

## 6. Conclusion:

The chief instrument through, which the modern, political, social and economical idea spread in Sambalpur was the modern education. The impact of modern idea became inevitable. During the period from 1862 to 1936, it was deep and far reaching. The educated masses and the middle class people of Sambalpur were the first to feel humiliation of foreign subjection. In course of time, the best among them became the leaders, poets, organisers of the National Movement, language Agitation and Utkal Union Movement. As a result, Odisha get state-hood on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1936 and Sir John Austin Hubback as the first Governor. The leading mind of Sambalpur like, Chandra Sekhar Behera, Dharani Dhar Mishra, five elite person like Madan Mohan Mishra, Braja Mohan Pattanaik, Balabhadra Supkar, Mahanta Bihari Das and Sripati Mishra. a wave of unrest swept over the thinking minds as the education progressed. Out of the unrest "The Renaissance in Sambalpur" began to take shape.

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