

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE CHAUHAN TEMPLES IN SAMBALPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract

Sambalpur District was the hub of Chauhan dynasty in western Orissa. The Chauhan Rulers of Sambalpur was not only the popular and benevolent rulers regarding their territorial aggrandizement and administration but also they were famous for their significant interest of art and architecture. They ruled over this territory for a long period of time and during their reign, they constructed many temples all over the Chauhan kingdom because they followed a policy of religious toleration and extended their patronage to all forms of religions such as Hinduism, Saivism, Vaishnaism and Saktism. The present district is studded with large number of temple dedicated to a different sector of religious importance. Among the most prominent and majestic temples are Ananta sahya temple of Sambalpur, Kutha Jagannath temple, Gopalji Temple, Ramji Temple, Barhampura Jagannath Temple, Bariha Temple, Baladeva Jagannath Temple, Madan Mohan Temple, Budharaja Temple, Bhubaneswar Siva Temple, Raghunath Siva Temple, Samaleswari Temple, Patneswari Temple, Huma Temple and Astasambu Temples etc. The above mentioned temples are full of architectural excellent and worthy to visit. Though these temples are very old yet its gorgeous style attracting to outsiders very much and hundreds of hundred devotees are visiting daily to get their benediction.

Keywords: Chauhans, Temples, Vaishnavism, Saivism, Saktism

1. Introduction:

Sambalpur is one of the westernmost districts of Odisha. Its geographical location is extended from 20° 45' North and 22° 11' North Latitudes and 82° 39' East longitudes. It is bounded by the districts of Sundargarh in the North, Dhenkanal in the East, and Balangir in the South and Kalahandi in the West, while its North-Western Boundary touches Raipur and Raigarh of Madhya Pradesh.

This region long under Gonds and Binjhal Chiefs was destined to become an empire, then known as "Hirakhand Samrajya" and its ruler as Hirakhand Chhatrapatis during the Chauhan rule.¹ (Das-1969). Sambalaka has been identified with Sambalpur and manada with river Mahanadi. Sambalpur was the centre of religious and cultural activities in ancient times found mention in traditional account also. In the early historic times, it formed a part of the territory of South Kosala.² (Ibid)

2. History Chauhan Dynasty:

The founder of the Chuhans rule in Patnagarh kingdom was Ramai Dev in about 1360 A.D. who was a scion of Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi. Legend goes that after the defeat and fall of Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192 A.D. in the second battle of Tarain by Muhammad Ghori, a member of his family named Vishal Deva escaped to Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh and set up a small kingdom. However, Chauhan Raja of Mainpuri was killed by a Yavana ruler (who) of Delhi and his pregnant queen Jayanti or Asvavati fled to Patnagarh in western Orissa with some of her followers³. (Panda: 2012). She sought asylum with Bariha, a Binjhal tribal headman of Ramod village where she gave birth a male child. Later on the child was named as Ramaya or Ramai Deva because he was handsome, daring, prudent, popular and darling to all. He was adopted by a local Brahman Malik named Chakradhar Panigrahi. Once he killed a ferocious tiger with his axe and relieved the terror- stricken people. Out of gratitude, they raised him to the throne of Patnagarh, which was lying vacant because Kruttivasa Deva , the last Ganga governor of Patnagarh passed away issueless and the Gangas did not send any governor to that place. It had been governed by Asthamalik (Eight Maliks) or ministers who created chaos in the area⁴. (Panda: 1997).

Patnagarh at that time was under suzerainty of the Gangas of Orissa .The Ganga king Bhanu Deva III was pleased with the charismatic personality of Ramai Deva and as a reward, he got Bhanumati, the daughter of King's brother Samarsingh in married with him.⁵ (Sahu &Chopdar:2000)

With the support of Ganga king Bhanu Deva III, Ramai Deva consolidated the Chauhan kingdom in Patnagarh area and fortified the capital town and constructed there the temple of Goddess Patneswari, who later became the tutelary deity of the Chauhans. After Ramai Deva, there were 8 kings who ruled Patnagarh one by one up to the middle of the 16th century. They were Mahalinga Deva, Vaijala Deva, Vatsaraja Deva, Pratapmalla Deva, Vikramaditya Deva, Vaijala Deva II, and Hiradhar Deva.⁶ (JHSS:193)

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 Utkala⁷ (Op.cit Sahu, Mishra & Sahu :1980). Thus, the Gajapati of coastal Orissa had no time to interfere 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) Narasingha Deva (1568-1575), was the last great king of Patnagarh.

Kingdom of Sambalpur was founded by Balaram Deva (1570-1595), during the reign of Narasingha Deva. The event was a turning point in the history of the Chauhans. 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.

The territory of Balaramadeva was first known as kingdom of Huma (Humadesa) and the capital was at Bargarh on the bank of the river Jira. Later on he shifted the capital to Sambalpur on the left bank of the river Mahanadi. He fortified the town, built the temple of Somalia and accepting the deity as his territory deity earned the support of the people.

Maharaja Sai died in 1827 and he was the last male ruler of Chauhan dynasty. His Rani Mohan Kumara was placed on the throne which created violence in Sambalpur because the people resented the rule of the Rani. It was however, suppressed by the Britishers and the Rani was deposed in 1833 after that an old and feeble man Narayan Singh, an uncle of Chauhan Zamindar Bhawani Singh of Barpali was made the king on 11th October 1933. But the relatives of Maharaja Sai claim to the throne and rose into revolt.

Narayana Singh died on 10th September 1849 leaving no male issues Sambalpur, then lapsed to the British dominion on the basis of the doctrine of lapse and the kingdom was converted into a mere districts.

3. Temples of Sambalpur:

The Chauhan not only made the Sambalpur kingdom extensive but also consolidated it by an efficient and benevolent administration the Chauhan ruler followed a policy of region toleration and extended their patronage to all forms of Hinduism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saktism. Thus, town was studded with large number of temple dedicated to a different sector.

Built by the ruler like Balarama Singh, Balair Singh, Balabhadra Singh, Chhatra Sai, Jayanta Singh etc. A details account of the temples of Sambalpur is presented in the following description.

1. Ananta Saja Temple

Ananta Saja temple of Sambalpur located of Kamli Bazaar in a beautiful vaishnavite monuments of a different architecture tradition in comparison to the other vaishnavite monuments of the town. It was built by Balaramadeva the first Chauhan ruler of sambapur⁸ (Impay-1863).

The temple is oriented east-west and facing to the east. On plan it has got three components vimana, the mandala and a pillared ardha-mandapa and it's constructed on a raised platform decorated with inverted lotus pattern on its borders. The sanctum structure is triradha on plan.

2. Kutha Jagannath Temple

Kutha Jagannath temple is another Vaishnavite temple of the city situated Balibandha. It was built by Bansi Gopal dev, the son of Madhukaradeva, the fourth Chauhan ruler of Sambalpur, the temple is constructed on a lofty platform and is made of stone with thick line mortar.

3. Gopalji Temple

Gopalji temple – cum- Matha is situated at Bara bazaar having another temple of Jagannath in the same complex, both being enclosed by a high enclosure wall. Both the temple was constructed by prince Bansi Gopal dev.

The Gopalji temple is facing to the east and s constructed on a high plenty measuring 0.8m. on plan the temple has got a sanctum , the mandapa and the pillar ardhmandapa in front the Vimana has a square sanctum enshrine the presiding deities Radha Krishna made of brash on a well decorated throne plated with marble.

4. Gopalji Temple

The temple of Bada Jagannath located inside the Gopalji temple complex at Bada bazaar was constructed by Bansi Gopal Dev. The son of fourth Chauhan ruler Madhukaradeva on plan the temple consists of Vimana, the mandapa and pillared ardhmandapa constructed on a lofty platform measuring 1.70m. it is a square sanctum enshrine lord Jagannath Balabhadra and Subhadra on a well decorated throne.

5. Ramji Temple

The Ramji temple located are Balibandha is a very beautiful vaishnavite shrine of Sambalpur is said to have been built by Asha Kumari Devi the daughter of the last Chauhan King Narayan Singh, who installed the images of Rama, Laxmana and Sita.

On plan the temple consists of a vimana , the mandapa and a pillared ardh mandapa. The temple is constructed on a high plinth made of stone with a thick lime plaster.

The vimana has got a small square something enshrining lord Rama at the centre Laxmana in the right and Sita in the left with usual dresses. The deities are standing on a throne. Besides numerous brass images of Rama, Laxmana , and Sita are found on the lower steps of the throne.

6. Barhampura Jagannath Temple

Barhampura Jagannath temple of Sambalpur is located at Jhauapana on the left bank of the river Mahanadi, it was built by Balarama Deva. On plan the temple consists of a vimana, the antarala, bhogamandapa, the mandapa and the pillared ardhmandapa in front of it.

There is one square sanctum enshrining the deities viz, Jagannath Balabhadra and Subhadra on a throne.

7. Bariha Temple

Bariha temple is located at Nandapara on the left bank of river Mahanadi was built by Asha kumari devi the daughter of Narayana Singh, the last chauhan ruler of Sambalpur. The deities line Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra enshrined in the temple are worshipped as the presiding deities, the temple is facing to the east and the consists of a vimana , the mandapa and the pillared ardhmandapa.

It enshrines the wooden carved images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. In front of the temple a small temple having pyramidal structure over it.

8. Baladeva Jagannath Temple:

Baladeva Jagannath temple located at Kunjelpara was constructed by Chhatra Sai, the seventh chauhan ruler of Sambalpur, the temple consists of a vimana , mandapa and an ardha-mandapa.

The square sanctum enshrines the deities like Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. Besides brass images of Krishna playing flute, Radha and Gopies are found on the same throne, on the both sides of all entrance to the sanctum images of Jaya and Vijaya are found in the inches. On the lintel of the sanctum got a four armed seated Ganesha is found with usual attributed and is made of black chlorite stone.

9. Madan Mohan Temple

Madan Mohan temple located at Dalaipara is another vaishnavite monument of Sambalpur. Its builder is not known. It is however, said by the local people that it was by a ruler of Delhi.

The temple is oriented east west and facing to the east. The vimana is constructed on a high plated from measuring 1.22m. it has got a square sanctum enshrine lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra on a throne. On the left side to the entrance to the sanctum several images are fixed like Gajalaxmi, four armed Saraswati seated on a pedestal.

The temple is constructed on a raised platform measuring 0.97m. and as made of stone with thick lime plaster. On plan the temple has got three components viz: vimana , mandapa, and a pillared ardhmandapa.

10. Budharaja Temple

The temple of Budharaja is located on the summit of the Budharaja hill. Lord Budharaja is much revered by the people. According to BC Majumdar "Lord Budharaja was a deity of the Ganga. As a conciliatory measure many gods of the Gangas have been accepted by the Hindus and gods.

Like Budharaja, Budha Siva etc. were worshipped by them. So Budharaja a tribal deity was accepted by the chauhan. Balaramadeva through made arrangement for the worship of the lord on the top

of the hill named after the lord could not built a temple. The present temple was constructed by Chhatra Sai the seventh ruler of Chauhan dynasty of Sambalpur.

The temple is facing to the east and is constructed on a raised platform. A flight of steps leads to the temple. On plan the temple consists of the garbhagriha, the mandapa and the pillared ardhamandapa. Copper naga (snake) and a black stone representing the linga is found enshrining in the sanctum besides , an unidentified female deity in standing posture and a stone image of seated Ganesha are found in separate blocks of stone placed independently in the sanctum.

8. Bhubaneswar Siva Temple:

Bhubaneswar Siva temple is situated picture squarely in the junction of three ponds named as Ramsagar is said to have been built by Akbar Raya, the dewan of Abhaya Singh. Interestingly here the two shrines of Bhubaneswar Siva and Vana Durga have been constructed on a common raised platform.

The Siva temple is oriented east west facing to the east and a plan has got a vimana and the mandapa and the pillared ardhamandapa. The vimana, the mandapa and a pillared ardhamandapa, the vimana stands on raised platform is made of stone with a thick lime plaster. All the doors and gate way of the temple are provided with grilled iron-gate.

There is also the Vana Durga temple is comparability smaller then the Siva temple and on plan does not consist of mandapa. On the back side of the hall, which is attached with the sanctum of Siva temple, the goddess is enshrined in small dark sanctum.

This is a rare example among the Chauhan temples of Sambalpur where both Siva and Durga temples are found conjoined, both the sanctum being attached and worshipped separately.

9. Raghunath Siva Temple:

Raghunath Siva temple is located near the Barhampura Jagannath temple on the left bank of the Mahanadi at Jharuapara of Sambalpur town. Comparability it is a smaller structure then the Jagannath temple and is facing towards east on plan the temple consists of the vimana, mandapa and a pillared ardhamandapa and is con-structure on high platform.

The vimana has got a smaller square sanctum enshrining lord Raghunath Siva is iconic linga and a massive copper naga on the back wall of the sanctum a pillared porch surmounted by a miniature sikhara is found accommodating the images of Rama, Laxmana, and Sita . The floor of the sanctum is covered with marble plates one small gate from the mandapa leads to the cella.

10. Samaleswari Temple:

The Samaleswari temple is located at Bada Bazaar is one of the earliest shrines of the town.

The temples of Samaleswari and Patneswari built by Balaramadeva, the founder of Sambalpur kingdom

in the last part of the 16th century A.D. accordingly Balaramadeva built the temple of Somalia and established the town of Sambalpur, after the name of the presiding deity.

The number of Somalia temple in the district is quite large. They have been built in almost every important villages and town of the districts. Goddess Somalia is found mention in copper plate grants of Jayanta Singh which is dated to 28th April 1790.⁵ (Senapati-1968) but the worship of Somalia seems to be more ancient than the date of the copper plate. Because of the phonetic similarity simul and Somalia i.e king mention that since the goddess was worshipped under a simul tree she came to be known as Somalia. He accepted the deity as his tutelary deity in the order to appease the religious sentiments of the local people and built temple for the deity in c.1575 A.D.

The temple is oriented north south and facing to the north. It is constructed on raised platform the lower portion of which contains numerous niches all around occupied by various sakta goddesses. The temple is made of stone within a thick lime plaster. The flight of steps provide entry to the upper processional path and the temple

The vimana has a specious dark square sanctum enshrining the images of Samalai in a form of corresponding with any form of Sakta icons Hindu iconography. It is a huge block of stone in the middle of which is projection with depression on both sides over which gold leaf is placed representing eyes and close under it a narrow groove which is regarded as the mouth.

Three temples of Bajarangbali, Pitabali and Bhairavi are found inside the campus. The temple was built originally by Balaramadeva in C.1575 A.D. and during his rule puja services were supplied from the royal treasury. It was renovated by Chhatra Sai in C.1692 A.D. The main festival of the temple was Dussehra. It was celebrated with much extravaganza.

11. Patmeswari Temple:

Through goddess Samalai gained more popularity than Patmeswari among the people, a number of temples were built in honour of her.⁹ (Nayak-1978) goddess Patmeswari was the tutelary deity of the Chauhan of Patanagarh. The temple of Patneswari of Sambalpur was built by king Balaramadeva.

The temple of Patneswari is oriented north south and facing in the south. It is made of stone with a thick lime plaster. Modern gate and wall are of later addition to the temple there are a number of Sakta images and Gajasimha fixed on the niches of the outer wall of the sanctum. All these are made of sand stone carved in alto-relievo.

Goddess Patneswari also commands great veneration by the people of the district. She is normally worshipped in the vicinity of the villages in iconic stone pieces.

4. Huma Temple – The leaning temple of Odisha:

Archeological and historical remnants of the Indus valley civilization latest the fact that Saivism is a pre-aryan conception. Historian said that Pasupati (siva) was worshipped in the (Linga) phallic shape by the pre-aryan of Indus valley civilization. The practice of Siva worship seems to have spread to different parts of India from 3000 B.C. Sambalpur is not the exception to it.

Lord Bimaleswara at Huma is worshipped as the Adya-Sambhu, i.e. the earliest among the Asta-sabhu who appears to have been much administrated during the reign of Chauhan rajas in Sambalpur. This Saina Pilla is located on the left bank of the river Mahanadi 14 miles (24 km) south of Sambalpur. Lord Bimaleswar is worshipped in the Garbhagriha (sanctum) of the temple. Bhairavi Devi is adorned to his left and Lord Bhairo to his right. It is assumed that the temple is rebuilt or renovated by Maharaja Baliar Singh (1660-1690) the fifth Chauhan Raja of Sambalpur rajya.

The Huma is one of the wonders of medieval period. It reminds us the famous leaning tower of Pisa. Raja Balaram dev was successful in bringing people closer to this temple and by means to this temple he was able to consolidate his authority and influence over the forest region of Huma.

Thus from the preceding discussion it is clear that the Sambalpur group of temples constructed by the Chauhans are a homogeneous group of structure.

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