

## Sirkata Copper Plate : Revisited

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### Introduction

The Sirkata copper plate was discovered from Bargarh district. It is now preserved in the N.K. Sahu Museum of Sambalpur University. It was edited by G.S. Das and S.C. De.<sup>1</sup> That this paper, however, tries to understand the socio - political and economic significance of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Sambalpur on the light of this copper plate. Palaeography and Orthography are other interesting historical points that this charter carries. It is inscribed in chaste Odia language and script prevailing in the Odia speaking tracts of Eastern India in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the epigraphic record was issued, when Sambalpur was on the eve of its cessation to British Empire through the doctrine of Lapse of Dalhousie and the outbreak of the revolution of Surendra Sai. In addition, the epigraphic record reveals the character of Odia prose style and its script in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE which the paper insists upon.

### Description of the Copper Plate ( Plate - I)

The copper plate contains 16 lines of writing of Odia language on the obverse and 9 lines of drafting on the reverse side of the plate. It measures, 3.37" in length and 2.25" in breadth. On the top, there is a hole where a copper ring is attached. There is symbol of Chakra carved at the top of the plate on the obverse side which may be construed as the crest of the royal family, whose scion issued the land grant. On the right side, there is another symbol which probably represents the king's banner.<sup>2</sup> It is written in Odia script of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The copper plate was issued on the third day of the week of the 7<sup>th</sup> *Tithi* of the bright half of the month of *Margasira*, which falls on Tuesday on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1843 A.D.<sup>3</sup>

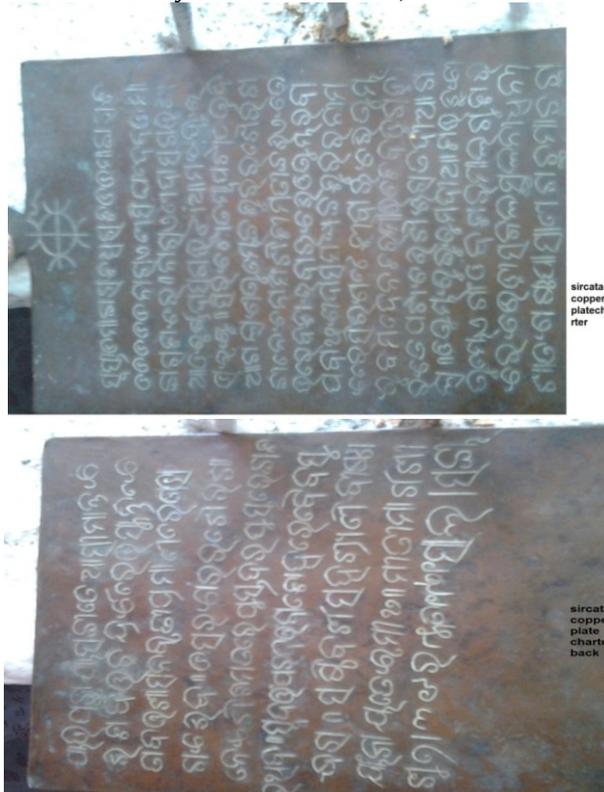


Plate - I

**Subject of the Plate**

The subject matter of the copper plate is that it recorded the donation of Village Bargarh to two brothers Narayan Das Gauntia and Krushna Das, sons of Balmiki Das, who was killed by a tribal during the 1857 mutiny. In recognition of his service, Maharaja Narayana Singh Deva donated a piece of land in favour of his two sons Narayana Das and krsna Das. The donated land was located in Bamdenagar Mauja of *Bargarh*. The donees were exhorted to collect tax in *kaudi/ Kauri* and enjoyland, water, tree and fish et c. On the reverse side of the plate are inscribedfractory verses from Dharmasastra.

Maharaja Narayan Singh Deva was the last Maharaja of Sambalpur of the Chauhan dynasty. He was raised to Gaddi of Sambalpur on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1833<sup>4</sup>. He died issueless in 1849 and after him Sambalpur was annexed to the British India as per The Doctrine of Lapse of Lord Dalhousie.

**TEXT { Plate - I }****[ Obverse side]**

- 1) *Swasti (Sti) Shree Maharaj (Ja) Dhiraja Shri Shri Shri Ma (Ma) Haraja.*
- 2) *Shri Shri Shri Shri Naraya (Ya)na Singh Deva Shrima (Ma)*
- 3) *Haraj and Akara Nara (Ye) Na Dash Gautya*
- 4) *A (Htya) Shree Krushna Dash Gautya a (ttya) Madhya Dvee(e)*
- 5) *Bahi (he) Kusi (Si Raktya (ta) Tambha Pata Patra di.*
- 6) *Prang gala ki (ke) thumphe haj urar Khair Khwah.*
- 7) *Hi (e) nikhami Khijimati Thari (Kari) eka ta.*
- 8) *Oure Bajae Baru Kari Prong Tumbha Ba.*
- 9) *Pa Baluki Desa, Madhya Hajurar hi (ne) ma.*
- 10) *Katre Singh (si) rakateji (ye) baru kare tumbha.*
- 11) *Ku bamadenazara (Mauze) Badagada.*
- 12) *Rakata Pata Kari Khairati di (de) aja (ya) Liahiki (ke)*
- 13) *Tumbhe ae grama are Bazara Malagujara*
- 14) *Kara Kaudi (de) Sajalastala ni(ne) dhina (ne)*
- 15) *Khata Kastharpasana gacha Macha Chha.*

**Reverse side**

- 1) *Ya Upachaya Sahi, he te Pranasimanta Ka*
- 2) *Rija (ya) bant (tta) Chandra (ndra) rkra (rike)*
- 3) *Tabant (tta) sasane brunti bhasmantika Prama Nari Bho*
- 4) *Ga Kariba II Shree Sarakarara Khair a Kha*
- 5) *Ne Ka (2) Khijamatre Pustadara Pustare haja*
- 6) *Rathiba II Sadanta Paradauta Baja (ya) hare (tta) bai basu.*
- 7) *Ndhra II Sa (s) Sthibasa (basa) Sahaisra Shra) Ne bista (Stha).*
- 8) *Yam jayate Krami Ku II mi (e) ti Margasi (si)*
- 9) *Su 7/3 bar sna ta (2) 1901 sala Sahi.*

**Palaeography and Orthography**

In Odia Palaeography, writing / script after 16<sup>th</sup> century CE has been usually designated as modern script. The script of Sirkata copper plate is square in shape. Squares form of alphabet is usually found in the southern script. As such, the influence of southern script on the Odia script of 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot be brush aside. The style of writing in case of some alphabets is noticed on palm leaf manuscripts of Odisha. The epigraphic record too carries this style. The style of writing is called *Karani Riti* in Odia Orthography.

**Discussion:**

The name 'Sirkata' or *beheaded* in Odia language. In case of the copper plate, it stands for a reward to the successors because their father Balmiki Das;s Head was cut off by the rebellious party ( Tribal rebellion). Land donation by a king, who was under the British paramount shows the continuity of the early medieval practice of land donation still 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also divulges the existing agrarian economy as sustainable base of the people. The description of the donated land like habitants, tree, orchard, fish and permission of its possession to the donee and its descendants until the sun and moon lasts seems to betoken feudalism at its lowest level. Religious authority was sought at the end as imprecatory verses from *Bhagavata Purana* to make the donation more durable, is however inscribed on the reverse side of the copper plate which further suggests the Feudal structure in Sambalpur as the *donee* becomes intermediary between the king and the peasants in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Undoubtedly, early British polity too allowed it.

Interestingly, there is no mention of so - called *Kosali* language or any terminology\*. Sirkata copper plate thus stands for chaste Odia prose of the later part of the 18th / 19<sup>th</sup> century CE.

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\*Indeed, Kosali Language is an exercise of 20th century to demand statehood for western Odisha.

### References

1. O.H.R.J 1953-54. No. 3 - 4, 67, Bhubaneswar
2. Ibid
3. O.H.R.J 1953-54. No. 3 - 4, 67. to bring out its historical significance.
4. N.K Sahu, P.K Mishra, J.K Sahu - History of Orissa , 1980, 105, Cuttack.