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.¹ That this paper, however, tries to understand the socio-political and economic significance of the early 19th 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 19th 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 19th 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.² It is written in Odia script of the 19th Century.

The copper plate was issued on the third day of the week of the 7th Tithi of the bright half of the month of Margasira, which falls on Tuesday on 28th November, 1843 A.D.³
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 Krsna 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 enjoy land, water, tree and fish et c. On the reverse side of the plate are inscribed fractory 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 11th October, 1833. 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 - 1 )
[ Obverse side]

1) Swasti (Sti) Shree Maharaj (Ja) Dhiraja Shri Shri Shri Ma (Ma) Haraja.
2) 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 Pata ra 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) Oure Bajae Baru Kari Prong Tumbha Ba.
14) Pa Baluki Desa, Madhya Hajurar hi (ne) ma.
15) Katre Singh (si) rakateji (ye) baru kare tumbha.
12) Rakata Pata Kari Khairati di (de) aja (ya) Liahiki (ke)
13) Tumbhe ae gram a ree Bazaara Malagujara
14) Kara Kaudi (de) Sajalalasta ni(ne) dhina (ne)
15) Khata Kastharpasana gacha Macha Chha.

Reverse side

1) Ya Upachaya Sahi, he te Pranasimanta Ka
2) RiJa (ya) bant (tt) Chandra (ndra) rkra (rike)
3) Tabant (tt) sasane brunti bhasmantika Prama Nari Bho
4) Ga Kariha Il Shree Sararakara Khair a Kha
5) Ne Ka (2) Khijamatre Pustadara Pustare haja
6) Rathiba Il Sadanta Paradauta Baja (ya) hare (tt) bai basu.
7) Ndhra Il Sa (s) Sthibasa (bs) Sahaistra 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 16th 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 19th century cannot be brushed 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; 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 19th 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 19th 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 / 19th century CE.

*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.