

Subarnapur and Balangir Royal Palace: A Blend of History, Culture and Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Subarnapur and Balangir districts are two famous districts of Western Odisha. Both regions are proud of their glorious history and rich cultural values. Subarnapur district is situated at the confluence of the rivers Tel and Mahanadi. This is also known as Sonepur. This region's history dates back to 850 C.E., when Sonepur (Subarnapur) was the capital of the Kosala region. The present royal palace of Subarnapur was established when Telugu Chodas started their rule over this region, between the period of 1070 to 1115 C.E.. The remnant of the Subarnapur royal palace can be seen on the banks of the Mahanadi River. The palace represents the glorious history of Subarnapur, but it is now a neglected part of the region, waiting for its last breath. Another royal palace in western Odisha is the Balangir royal palace, also known as the Patna royal palace or Sailashree Rajabati. This royal palace is a symbol of Chauhan rule in the Balangir area and a representation of Rajasthani architecture in western Odisha. The royal palaces are not just structures of the early period; they present a comprehensive knowledge of history, culture, and architecture. As national history cannot be complete without reconstructing regional history, regional history cannot be complete without visiting its royal palace. The royal palace is the heartbeat of any royal dynasty. This paper has highlighted the socio-cultural, economic and architectural contribution of these royal palaces to Odisha's history.

Key Words- Royal Palace, Subarnapur, Balangir, Regional History, Cultural Value, Architecture

INTRODUCTION

“The actual feelings of history can found in the hard stones. Not in soft pages of book”

India was fractured and scattered into so many administrative units, ruled by Rajas, Maharajas, Zamindars, feudal lords, and local chieftains before Indian independence. Royal palaces in Odisha indicate the historic residences of Kings, Rajas and Maharajas. These palaces are very important because they are the centres of administration, Culture, art and heritage. Here, the Subarnapur and Balangir royal palaces have come together to discuss various dimensions.

Subarnapur or Sonepur is an important part of Western Odisha. The name of “Sonepur” was given by the Somavamsi ruler “Janamejaya Madhabagupta”. The present royal palace of Sonepur was established by the king of Telgu chodas. It is located on the banks of the Mahanadi River. The palace was constructed over an area of three acres. This palace was constructed in a well-planned manner. It had a beautiful Darbar Hall, Badal Mahal, Dwarapala Kakhya (Security Room), Bhandara Ghara (Store room), Pakasala (Royal Kitchen), Yuvraj Mahal (Personal Mahal for the Prince), Rani Mahal (Queen's palace), etc. This palatial structure was once became the pride of the Soneput region. From this palace, many brave kings ruled over the region. This was the centre of administration, but now it is in a dilapidated condition. No one tries to preserve this royal structure, no administration, no public and no archaeological department. In Western Odisha, another royal palace, Sailashree Royal Palace, is located in the heart of Balangir district. It is situated close to the Rajendra University. Compared to the Subarnapur royal palace, this one is well-maintained. Prithviraj Singh Deo was the first ruler to use the present palace of Balangir as the royal Palace of Patnagad (Balangir). This palace gives the actual vibes of

Rajasthani Pattern architecture. It's sad that many people, even historians, are unable to highlight these palaces. Our work is simply to inform about these palaces and their significance in the fields of history, culture, and architecture. Early architecture is not just a piece of art; it is a treasure of our country.

Objectives of the study:-

- To explore the royal palaces of Subarnapur and Balangir districts.
- To represent the historical values of these palatial structures.
- To conduct detailed surveys and documentation of the architectural elements of the palaces of Subarnapur and Balangir.

Review of Secondary Source: Many historians and scholars have studied the history and culture of the two districts of Subarnapur and Balangir, but no one has focused on their royal palaces, which are the heartbeat of regional history. In literature, tracing accurate information about these palaces can be challenging.

In Liza Nayak's Royal Palaces of Odisha: A study from the 10th to the 19th Centuries C.E., a significant contribution to the understanding of Odisha's royal palaces is made through the field of Archaeology. It gives much information about these palaces' architecture. Sonepur Itihasa, written by S. Agrawal, is another source of information which helped us to write this article. A YouTube channel, Rajaghara Katha, provides a lot of accurate information, with visualisations, about the palaces. Besides these, we have collected additional information during the investigation and field visit, which helped us write this article.

Methodology: To carry out this study, a comprehensive research strategy has been developed, which includes Archival research, Field Surveys, historical documents, maps and photographs. The sites will be surveyed to document their current condition, architecture and layout. We have taken interviews with many local people who have ideas about these palaces.

Main Context: Location of Subarnapur: Subarnapur district, also known as Sonepur district, is a very important part of western Odisha. It is considered an independent district of Odisha, located at the confluence of the rivers Tel and Mahanadi. This area is also mentioned in some books as "Paschima Lanka" by writers such as S. Agrawal. Some writers also mentioned this area as the Lanka Kingdom of King Ravan, but this later became a point of contention among intellectuals.

Around 850 CE, the Sonepur or Subarnapur area was the capital of the Kasala region, and a few years later, it was occupied by the Somavamsi rulers. It was believed that they had come to conquer Sonepur from Sripura. The name of "Sonepur" was given by the Somavamsi ruler Janamenjaya Mahabhabagupta. The present royal place of Sonepur was established when the Telugu Chodas started their rule over this region between 1070 CE and 1115 CE. The Mahoda copper plate inscription mentioned that the royal place of Sonepur was located in front of Lankeswari Daruha on the bank of the river Mahanadi. From 1115 to 1220 AD, this region, or Sonepur, came under the rule of the Kalachuris. After the Kalachuri period, the throne of Sonepur was occupied by the Jadabas, and after the Jadabas, the Gangas came to power around 1220. After the Gangas, the Bhanjas captured the throne, who ruled this region before the Somavamsis. When we look at the ruling dynasties of the Sonepur region, it was initially ruled by the Somavamsis, Bhanjas, and Kalachuris, and later by the Chauhans. According to folklore, the legendary Manu (the 1st human) had 10 sons. Ardhanariswar (half-female, half-male) was one of them. His name was "Pradyumna" when he was a Man, and she was called "Ha" when the person became a woman. It was said that Ardhanarishvara had three sons: Utkala, Binitaswa, and the third one is Gaya.

They gifted the lands to their father. The land of Utkala was known as the land of Prince Utkala. The land of "Binitapura" was known as the land of Binitaswa, and the last son of Gaya's land was known as "Gayapuri". In the reign of Binitapura, Somavamsis established their Capital. The Bhanjas ruled the area of Boudh in the 16th century. In this period, a struggle for the throne began between the Bhanjas of Boudh and the Chauhans of Sambalpur. In the early 17th century, Sidha rose to power as the ruler of the Bhanja dynasty of Boudh. As his rivals from the Chauhan dynasty of Sonepur reigned, Balabhadra Dev began his mission to secure the throne of

Boudh in 1625. Bhanjas were defeated in this battle, and the result was that the throne of Sonepur came under Chauhan rule. The Chauhans proudly ruled Sonepur from the mid-17th to the mid-20th centuries.²

The grandson of Balabhadra Dev and son of Madhukar Dev, Sri Madan Gopal Singh Deo, was regarded as the founder of this reign in 1635. It was believed that Sri Gopal Jew was also brought with him. There were 13 rulers who ruled over the Subarnapur reign from Madan Gopal Singh Deo (1635) until Independence (1947). The age of Bira Mitra Deo is considered the Golden period of Sonepur. Bira Mitra Deo started his rule over Sonepur in 1902.

Another source revealed that this area was once under the rule of the Patna area. It became a separate Gadjat in 1560 C.E.³ There are 13 Chauhan rulers who ruled over Sonepur from 1635 to 1947. Under King Bira Mitra Singh Deo, the 1st Municipal work was started in this reign, and in 1867, Sonepur was declared a Gadjat state. During his reign, Sonepur witnessed all-around development.

Architecture of Subarnapur Royal Palace: On the banks of the river Mahanadi, we can see the remnants of the Sonepur royal palace. The foundation of this palace was laid by King Madan Gopal Singh Deo, but many additions were made by other rulers, including Niladri Singh Deo, Pratap Rudra Singh Deo, and their descendants. During the reign of Raja Bira Mitra Singh Deo, the major architecture of this royal palace was built by him. Now it is in a deteriorated condition. The roofs of the Sonepur royal palace were almost destroyed. There were two extended wings on both the left and right edges of the palace.

This palace was constructed according to proper Vastu Sastra. This palace was constructed over an area of three acres. In this palace, we can find Darbar Hall (meeting Hall), Badal Mahal (Cloud Building), Dwarapala Kakhya (Security Room), Bhandara Ghara (Store Room), Pakasala (Kitchen), Yuvraj Mahal (Prince's Building), Rani Mahal (Queen's Palace) and many other architectural masterpieces. Nearby the palace are Kanak Durga temple, Gopal Ji temple, and Jagannath temple. After independence, the royal persons of this palace left the Rajabati and moved to Rajastan.⁴

There are six rooms visible in the palace's present ruins, four in the middle and two on the left and right sides. To connect the palace from left to right, a corridor was built. The entry gate of this palace was on the left and right sides, and another was at the centre. The entry gates were made of an arch pattern. The structure of this palace is a half-rectangular pattern. Behind the royal palace, there was a large courtyard available. The main part of this palace is now covered by large trees, which are the main obstacle to entering it. Besides the main palace, there is another structure of two-storied buildings; it is the ruins of a temple. Another three-storied structure is also available there. Local people called it Darbal Hall. In the courtyard of the palace, the entry gate of Darbar Hall is found. From the back of the royal palace, we can see a five-pillar structure on each of the three floors. The palace roof was simple, with a railing line and a rectangular pattern on the upper part of the wall and on every side. The structure of Darba Hall resembles an "L"-shaped building. The top portion of this palace, or the edge wall of the Sonepur or Subarnapur district, has a "U" pattern along its edges.

This architectural brilliance structure is a gem of Chauhan history in western Odisha. During the ruling period of the great Chauhan kings over the land of Subarnapur, this palace became the centre of administration. Kings ruled from this palace, and their meetings were held in the Durbar hall of the Subarnapur royal palace. This historic royal palace, once a symbol of the great Chauhan ruler's power and popularity, is now going to collapse due to neglect. It is a structure of artistic brilliance that is awaiting its last breath. The palace symbolises Subarnapur's rich cultural heritage, artistic brilliance, the power and position of the Chauhans, and its proud history. Because the palace was built on the bank of the river Mahanadi to protect it from floods, a stone boundary was also built around it. During the period of Viramitra Deo, Many artistic designs were made on the walls of the palace and temple. There are many temples also constructed in the palace area. To this day, one can also see the exquisite craftsmanship in the temple walls. In the Subarnapur royal palace, the rooftop was generally simple, but attractive floral patterns were carved on some sections of the palace railing, and another section faced the public. Sonepur royal palace stands in a very dilapidated condition. Therefore, it was quite impossible to enter. So we are unable to know which materials are used for the construction of the inner rooftop. From the outside, it is almost collapsed; a few roof structures are still standing, but the area is filled with dense vegetation.

The doorway was made in an arch pattern, but it was not possible to determine the materials used: either iron or wood. The door materials were completely unavailable here. The windows of the Sonepur royal palace were made in an arch-and-flat arch pattern. Some of them look like present-day windows, and some are higher than others.⁵

Balangir Royal Palace (Sailashree Palace): Balangir is a very popular town of Western Odisha. This district is well known for its rich cultural heritage and glorious history. Balangir Royal Palace, locally known as Sailashree Royal Palace, is situated 3.5 km from the Railway station and very close to Rajendra University.

The entire campus of Sailashree Royal Palace spans 50 acres and includes the main palace, Raja Uasa, Garden, Ponds, and Temples. This royal structure was constructed by Maharaja Prithvi Raj Singh Deo between 1910 to 1920 AD, and formerly it was identified as Badal Mahal.

In the early period, Balangir was known as the Patna region. The great Chauha ruler Balaram Dev founded the Balaram-gada upon his own name. He also established his rule over the Sambalpur region. During his ruling period, the capital was shifted from Patnagarh to Balaramgarh. Balaramgarh was later popularly known as Balangir.⁶ The Balangir region was not automatically made by time; it was made by planning, and this city was planned by Pandit Vidyaratna Bidyabhusan. The palace, which was constructed for him, was popularly known as Sree's Mahal, but sadly, now this royal palace is going to lose its royalty and Identity.

This palace was constructed for King Ramachandra Deo. He ascended the throne in 1893. But in 1895, Ramachandra Deo and his wife attempted suicide. Saurabh Pratap Singh Deo also died. After that incident, this palace stood alone as a haunted house. After some years, Dalaganjan Singh Deo returned to this palace. It was constructed on 50 acres of land. Prithviraj Singh Deo was the first ruler to use this present palace as the royal palace at Balangir. Before him, Shree's Mahal was the royal palace. The new royal palace was known as the Sailasree Royal Palace. It was gifted by the king of Balangir, Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo.

Architecture: This palace gives the actual vibes of the Rajasthani Pattern. Palace to Singhadwara was a direct line. Though it appears to be a five-storied structure with its chhatris or Gambujas, in actual construction, it is a two-storied structure. From the ground, it feels so high, just like the palace touching the clouds; maybe earlier, this structure was called Badal Mahal. Chhatris and Jharkas are the major features of this palace.

The entrance to this palace is flanked by a corridor that connects to both the left and right sides. After crossing the corridor, one can reach Darbar Hall. Again, the Darbar Hall is flanked by a spacious corridor and a courtyard (Agana). Nearby is a pillared Mandapa and the royal kitchen, or Rosei Ghara. There is still work to be done on both the right and left sides of the palace in the front corridor section. The construction of both right and left structures was almost the same. There are around 15 to 20 rooms. The staircase is also available in the corner section of the rooms. To beautify the royal palace, a large garden with a water fountain was also installed on the front of the Raja Prasada. In the Sailashree royal palace, we can see the Horse shelter, or Ghodasala, and the Cow shelter, or Gousala, on the back side of the Palace. Besides the main palace, there are several additional rooms for the use of royal servants and Guests. Near this palace, there is also a jail. On the other side, the Maa Pataneswari temple is located. Pataneswari is known as the principal deity of worship for the Chauhan family. A pond was located in the southern part of the palace and was used by local people for daily purposes.

On the left and right sides of the palace were two temples, one dedicated to Lord Shiva and the other to Lord Ram. Rajendra Narayan Sing Deo constructed these temples in memory of his mother, Kishore Mani Devi. Both temples were constructed in the middle of the pond, and they were connected by a bridge. These sacred temples really enhance the beauty of the Sailashree palace. Neither temple followed any style of Kalingan temple architecture. They are quite different from the Kalingan style of temple architecture.⁷

Compared to the Gateways of other Odishan royal palaces, it was very simple. It has three structural divisions. The middle part features a large Gateway with three central arches. Compared to the other two structures, it is higher than both of the other side structures. On both sides of the Main Gateway, two pillars were attached. Both pillars are circular in shape, with tapered ends. There are two Elephant sculptures on either side of the entrance, facing each other. On both sides, there are two rooms that were also constructed, possibly for security guards,

but they now remain destroyed and plastered. Many artistic carvings were also seen upon these doors. But now all are destroyed, and only the Iron Gate is placed in the place of the main gateway of the Sailshree royal palace.

This palace is not just a building; it is the identity of the Chauhan rule in Patna and western Odisha. The palace symbolises power and royalty. In the architecture of the Odisha royal palace, we can find Rajasthani Chhatri or Gambujas on the rooftop of the Sailashree royal palace. This happened for the first time in Odisha's royal palace architecture. In each corner of the palace, there are Gambujas, and in the middle part of the palace's top, we can also see five Gambujas. In total, on the roof of Sailashree Palace, 6 Gambujas were installed for beautification and to give the palace a Rajasthani touch. The roof also features Jali railings, which add another element of Rajasthani architecture.

In the Balangir or Patna royal palace, there are very few windows available. Among them, some are in an arch pattern, and others are flat arch patterns, made of wood frames and panels. In the Patna palace, there are a large number of doors, as we made windows. In a single room of this palace, 5 to 6 doors were there. Doors are generally made of wood, with six panels, and are fixed in a flat arch. Carvings. The glass doors in this palace are of a very different style. It has a glass door of sixteen panels. Where eight panels were made of glass, and the other eight were made of wood. There is also a twenty-four-panel glass door, with twenty-four glass panels and the remaining four wooden are there.⁸

The Sailshree Royal Palace of Balangir district is located approximately 3 to 3.05 km from the main railway station of Balangir and 1 km from the bus stand. This is a very old architectural style in Odisha.⁹ Among all the early royal palaces of Odisha, the Sailashree royal palace is one of them. At present, the members of the royal family are not living here, but they visit this palace two to three times a month. Nuakhai is the most Crucial festival of this palace, which is still celebrated today with a lot of joy and happiness.¹⁰

To protect this palace, Security guards are on alert here 24/7. Although this palace is closed to tourists, it can be seen from the outside. We can see some antique furniture with a large and attractive photo of the King. The inner part of the palace also gives the actual vibe of royalty. It was looking amazing. The paka-sala or rosa-ghara of this palace is going to be destroyed, but the kitchen's structure is still clearly visible to this day. There are some attached fire altars or Chulis constructed of cement. Another single-floor building is also located near the main palace and was used by royal servants, or raso-sevakas. It is now under construction.

CONCLUSION

The royal palaces of Subarnapur and Balangir are significant repositories of the region's historical, cultural, and architectural heritage. It reflects dynastic power, artistic patronage, and socio-political developments over time. Despite its current condition, this palace remains a vital symbol of cultural identity. Its preservation through systematic documentation and conservation is essential for safeguarding regions' rich royal legacy and transmitting it to future generations. Just as national history cannot be completed without reconstructing regional history, regional history cannot be completed without visiting the region's Royal palace. The royal palace is the heartbeat of any royal dynasty and the administrative centre of the region. Royal Palaces are the living history of any region, representing the power and popularity of its culture. Behind every royal palace lies a glorious history. Preservation, protection, and promotion of these royal palaces are now very essential.

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