

**Abstract**

History is written past as well as hidden future - a formula which I have applied in exploring the untried saga of Kolabira, not so popular among community, known as 'agnititha' on pages of history and dynamic association of its third successor Karunakar Singh with the great freedom fighter Surendra Sai, who had fought vigorously during the sepoy mutiny from Sambalpur region of Odisha. Situated at the bank of Telen River in Jharsuguda district of above state, the administrated area of the Kolabira fort was 278 square miles. Association of Kolabira fort in the Sambalpur freedom struggle of 1857 is neglected by most of the researchers, which if explored scientifically, tell us about the glorious past of zamindars of Kolabira. However contradictory interpretations on surrender, arrest, execution and death of Karunakar Singh by different scholars leads to confusion among readers. Even some writers do not hesitate to write Karunakar Singh as three different persons with three different names such as Karunakar Nayak, Karunakar Garottea and locally, as Karna. However, to preserve uniformity, the writer has always described him as Karunakar Singh. This paper attempts to discover the glorious association of zamindars of Kolabira with Surendra Sai- the leader of 1857 freedom struggle of Sambalpur as well as creation of Kolabira village and contribution of Gonds tribes in the freedom movement of Sambalpur.

Key Words: *Kolabira Fort, Zamindars of Kolabira, Surendra Sai, Gonds Movement, Agnitirtha, Sambalpur Gadjat*

Role of Kolabira Fort in Freedom Struggle of Sambalpur in Odisha

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Introduction:

Not far away from the Jharsuguda town, headquarter of the same district and on the riverbank of the *telen*, there is an old, bare and semi ruined citadel, called Kolabira fort, named after its original village where it is situated, often remain away from the gaze of politicians, tourists, historians, researchers, media and academicians. Even today descendants of this fort reside there, which require to be preserved and necessary maintenance works to be undertaken by the government, so that this historical monument will not lose its identity and tell the stories of its glorious

past to future generation. The estate created in 1785 during the reign of Jayat Singh (1781-1818), the tenth Raja of Sambalpur was second biggest estate with 278 square miles of administrated area, after the Borasambar estate with 841 square miles.¹ As per the land and revenue administration of Sambalpur - the western most region of Odisha division, the district was divided into two tracts, zamindaris and khalsa. Khalsa area was 1570 square miles, distributed among two tehsils of Sambalpur and Bargarh in proportion of 743 and 827 square miles respectively. However zamindari area comprised of sixteen feudal tenures called zamindaris or estates of whom, by caste ten were



Gonds, two were Binjhals, two were Chauhans Rajput, one Kulta and another one of other caste, with an estimated area of 1791 square miles, which includes 1416 square miles of surveyed village lands and 375 sq. miles of un-surveyed forest. Nine estates such as Borasambar, Barpali, Bijepur, Ghans, Bheran, Kharsal, Patkulunda, Paharsirgira and Mandomahal were under Bargarh tehsils and rest seven estates were under Sambalpur tehsils. Property of nine out of above sixteen estates named, Kolabira, Kodabaga, Ghans, Paharsirgira, Patkulunda, Rampur, Bheran, Kharsal and Mandomahal having proximity to Surendra Sai were confiscated due to their active involvement in freedom movement. Six estates, except Ghans, Paharsirgira and Mandomahal were restored to their owners as recommended by Colonel Foster, Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur in his letter no-179 of 4th August, 1858, vide Government of Bengal's letter no- 2149 of 29th September, 1858.² It was further reaffirmed by the proclamation of amnesty in 1859. However Sahu (1998) describes number of confiscated estates as thirteen and it was prepared by Lieutenant Cockburn, out of which, above six restored estates including Kolabira were described as six native villages before government by Colonel Foster and awarded to one chap very devoted to him, named Ray Rup Singh Bahadur for his loyal service to British. After that Maj. Impey had taken back these estates from Ray Rup Singh Bahadur and bestowed to its real owners.³ Chauhans Rajput rulers of Rajpur and Barpali are offshoots of Raja of Sambalpur, while the smallest estate, Patkulunda had been created as an assignment of a part of Bheran to one younger brother. Bijepur was created in 1841 by Raja of Sambalpur in favor of one Gopi Kulta for loyal service to the Raja. It is said that before granting it to Gopi Kulta, Bijepur (also called as

Uttal-Baisi) was ruled by two Gonds zamindars, one of whom was Uttal, residing at Uttal fort situated at Talpadar village under Bijepur while other was called Baisi, having ownership over twenty two villages with headquarter at Bijepur. Kharsal was awarded to one Gond named Uddyan Singh, who later changed their surname as Sardar.⁴ Table no 1 depicts a detail picture of above zamindaris. But majority of rulers of Sambalpur district belonged to Gonds tribe - a martial race, expert in use of bow and arrows, comfortably accustomed with forest life and easily negotiated the jungle and hilly terrain.⁵ Ancestors of these Gonds belonged to Gondwana area of central providence (present Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), migrated to Sambalpur district after disintegration of their estates during fourteenth century. Present inheritor and tenth zamindar of Kolabira estate, Sri Veer Amarendra Pratap Singh told that, his forefathers immigrated from their native, a place known as Sarangarh, presently in Chhattisgarh.⁶ Loyalty, arduous, bravery and expertise in war techniques are few best qualities they had, which has attracted the attentions of Rajas of Sambalpur.

This writer has made an attempt to prepare the complete and untested genealogy of successors of Kolabira fort, which is yet to be verified by their heirs, however had made a correct and confirmed incumbency chart of zamindars of Kolabira in a chronological manner as reflected in table no 2.

Surendra Sai - the real inheritor to the throne of Sambalpur was born on 23rd January, 1809 and died on 28th February, 1884 lived up to 73 years, one month and five days and spent more than half of his life (approximately 38 years) in jail in two phase, first during 1840 to 1857 at Hazaribag jail and second from 23rd January, 1863



up to his death as a prisoner at Ashirgarh fort. Gallantry shown by the third zamindar of Kolabira, Karunakar Singh was well known among all close associates of Surendra Sai as he had taken leadership among the rebels in absence of Surendra Sai, who was almost a second line leader in team Surendra Sai. O'Malley (1909) in page thirty one describes Karunakar Singh as *'the chief of Kolabira or Jaypur was one of the most powerful of these zamindars, and on his taking up the rebel cause, many of the others followed from the force of example, or were compelled to join by the more influential'*. In the language of Mishra (1986) *'the Kolabira zamindar, Karunakar Singh, was the chief of all rebel zamindar'*. But till today the writer is unable to get any evidence of his association with Surendra Sai during his first phase of freedom struggle (1827-1840) while there are enough reliable facts and huge undisputed evidences available at different archives of Sambalpur, Bhubaneswar, Nagpur, Patna and London, which not only tale us the glorious association of Karunakar Singh with Surendra Sai during his second phase of struggle (1857-1863) but also confirmed his dynamic leadership, that he had taken in absence of Surendra Sai. Misra (2002) in page 113 described him as a 'leading activist' among all followers of Surendra Sai.

Surendra Sai breathed his whole life either as a mutineer spending years at dense forest or as a prisoner at different jails located along the length and breadth of India. In this paper an attempt has been made to reveal some original and distinct episode of Indian freedom struggle fought from Sambalpur area under the control of a superhuman called Surendra Sai and contribution of Kolabira fort to this war of independence. This paper has also argued to establish the active partaking of Karunakar Singh

in Sambalpur freedom movement. Gonds - a tribal community frequently described as master for their *modus operandi* in forest war and their contribution in the above freedom movement is also an integral part of this paper. The paper also ascertains systematic estate administration of zamindars of Kolabira.

Kolabira Fort: The Genesis

The then Kolabira - a big village as described by Capt. Misra, is also known as Jaypur estate had taken a prominent and active role in the Indian freedom struggle from Odisha province in general and Sambalpur region in particular, under the legendary and vibrant leadership of Surendra Sai, the landlord of Khinda and chief pretender to the crown of Sambalpur. Not so much accepted in the pages of history, the era of Kolabira fort is known as *Agnititha*. Fortified with several layers of prickly bamboo bushes, dense and indiscernible, further bordered with ring like deep water, wherein dangerous wild reptiles such as toxic snakes and crocodiles having expertise in attacking enemy not only guard the fort from bullets and fire cannons but also makes every entry impossible for an intruder. Janmajaya Bohidar, a senior resident of this village described this in his local language as; *'even an elephant cannot come out from the fort in six months due to thorny bamboo bushes and deep water'*.⁷ He further blamed illiteracy as one and only reason for which history of Kolabira remained unexplored, undocumented and unrecognized for more than a century, after which one lower primary school was started by the zamindars of Kolabira in this village to make villagers educated and aware. Tripathy(2012), a historian by choice residing at Jharsuguda avowed that the name Kolabira is derived from the primitive inhabitants of this village, belongs to Kolh



tribes - an ancient tribal community migrated from Kolabira, a village near Chapra (headquarter of Saran district in Bihar) during twelfth century. Kolabira is derived from the word 'Kolh' - a primordial Indian tribe. They first reside at a place, presently known as Kolabira in Lephripada block of Sundargarh district (early Gangpur estate). Later on one sect get separated from main stem and migrated in search of livelihood and inhabited at a place, somewhere in between Ib and Bhaden river of Jharsuguda district, known as Bhogragarh(also known as Bhograpali), where they erect their fort at the bank of river Bhaden. During the thirteenth century, due to huge relocation/migration of Gonds to Sambalpur kingdom as a result of breakdown of Gondwana kingdom in modern Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, war broke out between Gonds and Kolh tribes. This leads to establishment of Gonds raj at Bhogragarh and Kolh rule come to an end. Later on these Gonds established their fort at present Kolabira in Jharsuguda district during reign of Jayat Singh. However this writer has made an intensive search of villages in India at different websites but does not found any Kolabira village near Chapra, headquarter of Saran district in Bihar. But surprisingly there are several villages named Kolabira are found in different blocks/sub-districts of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand with headquarter at Chaibasa in present Jharkhand state. Further south of this district is surrounded by Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts of Odisha, which again confirm our belief that predecessors of people of present Kolabira must have migrated from different villages of West Singhbhum district. Table no 3 gives a portrait of different villages named as Kolabira situated at different district of Odisha and Jharkhand. Tripathy further says, before the above incidence one Biswanath Dev of Kalachuri dynasty, without any

issue, ruled in the above area, whose kingdom was surrounded by princely Bamanda, Surguja and Gangpur estate. Inhabitants of this state were mainly Bhuyans, Kumuras and Gonds. Absence of their heirs causes lack of leadership which leads to political uncertainty in the region and thus jointly attacked by Rudranarayan Dev of Bamanda and king of Gangpur, leading to death of Biswanath Dev and his realm was shared by conquerors. Division of empire of Biswanath Dev once more leads to disturbance in the area. Mighty and daring Gonds suppressing other tribes in the community takes administration into their control and thus eight brave Gonds ruled the state in phase manner, with a symbolic lemon on the throne, known as '*asthamalla rule*'.⁸

But as per Siba Prasad Dash (1962), writer of Sambalpur Itihash, there was a terrific war between Balaram Dev (1540-1556), first and founder king of Sambalpur territory and king of Surguja at Bhogragarh fort sited at the bank of Bhaden.⁹ Tripathy told that it was fought in 1514 and Lalit Singh, the king of Surguja run away from battle and his state was annexed to Sambalpur realm. Demolition of Bhogragarh fort leads to migration of its population to modern Kolabira, where they rebuild their village and fort, as well as re-established their tutelary deities Bhubaneswari inside a shapeless temple as Maa Samaleswari. Later on zamindars of Kolabira build an earthen temple for Maa Samaleswari near their fort, which passed through test of times and even today existed at the fort premises. Above edition of the Samaja newspaper from an unknown source further claimed that on her ways to modern Kolabira from Bhogragarh, scarifies killing of 300 goats was performed before deity Bhubaneswari, one at each steps. In the entire Sambalpur monarchy there are also huge instances of worship of tribal goddesses like Samaleswari,



Khambeswari, Pateneswari, Ranjeeta, Budha Raja and Mauli by the Chauhans kings of Sambalpur and erected good numbers of temples or shakti shrines throughout the Sambalpur kingdom. However non tribal populaces in the community were also found to worship tribal gods like Linga, Budha Deo, Jangha Linga of Gonds.¹⁰

Role of Kolabira Fort in Sambalpur Freedom Struggle:

It was diamond that attracted Robert Clive to Sambalpur, which he felt was the best way to transport wealth from India to England for which he send Mr. T. Motte in 1766 as his emissary.¹¹ It was the first visit of any European to Sambalpur. Further in different official reports, Sambalpur was described as 'Garden of Eden' and 'Land of Promise', as said by O' Malley; the district was also immune to famine until 1900.¹² Since the district was one of the most backward in education among other district under Bengal, intervention of British in day to day administration of Sambalpur continued till death of Maharaja Sai in 1827, after which they installed his widow, Rani Mohan Kumari as proxy head on the throne, leading to broke out of revolt by Surendra Sai, the prime contestant to throne of Sambalpur. Gonds and Binjhals were the two main tribes in the district supported Surendra Sai in this revolt.

Freedom movement of 1857 in the entire Sambalpur district was an indication of deposited angers and revenge feelings dumped since years against foreign rule among the large number of zamindars, garohotteas, gountias, landlords or village headmen and establishment of indigenus command under Surendra Sai. Excessive levies and control of land/civil administration by British rule has act as a catalyst on these scattered estate owners, segregated by castes and tribes. Kolabira or Jaypur estate was ruled by brave and

audacious Gonds tribes, who had taken a foremost role in 1857 freedom movement from Sambalpur. Kolabira, Ghans and some others zamindari were granted special autonomy by kings of Sambalpur and having their own armed forces and allowed to guard the confederacy as well as to confirm loyalty to Sambalpur raj.¹³ Second phase freedom movement of Sambalpur started when two companies of 8th battalion mutinied at Hazaribag and freed all prisoners, including Surendra Sai and his brother Uddant. People from all castes and sections, zamindars, garohotteas and gountias gave a warm reception to both the brothers. People were impulsively attracted towards them and revealed their love and admiration. Misra (2002) describes it as 'magnetic personality' of these two brothers. On their way from Hazaribag to Sambalpur on foot, at Kolabira they were given a red carpet welcome by the villagers and zamindar as per prevailing social traditions, when one unknown person told that '*it is just like return of mythological hero, lord Krishna and Balaram to Mathura to kill Kansa, the demon king*'.¹⁴ This message spread through the entire Sambalpur raj at an electronic speed, which has helped to unite large mass of scattered people throughout Sambalpur and strengthen freedom movement. In every village, under every gountias, garohotteas or zamindars the followers of Surendra were active and guarding against quisling. Finally in the middle of September, 1857, Surendra Sai entered Sambalpur in a procession of 1400 or 1600 people and held a meeting at old fort peacefully with slogans against British and in praise of Surendra. Following two resolutions were passed in the meeting. First demand was withdrawal of life sentence over Surendra and his brother Uddant and second was restoration of native rule at Sambalpur with Surendra Sai as new king.



The house of Kolabira zamindar was not only destroyed completely but also houses of all innocent villagers were burnt up, who were already, vacated it and left the village with rations for short period of stay at jungle. After this incident villagers felt unsafe to reside inside the fort and prefer to stay at a little bit safe and high land outside the fort and built a new colony which is now called as *nua pada* (new habitat). On their return journey they again visited Khinda on 8th November, 1857 and followed the same courses like Kolabira. However Klocker claimed that 'Operation Kolabira' was just like a flag march, aimed to inject a sense of fear and terrorise the enemy with a view to effect the dispersal of any combination.¹⁵ On the other hand Bohidar opined (as he heard from his father and forefathers) that British army being unable to enter the fort due to bulky and thorny bamboo trees defending the fort, they burnt houses of all villagers which was then situated at present *demul* (place of village deity) and claimed that they have destroyed the Kolabira fort and village. Later on these villagers established a new camp near to *demul* called as *nua pada*.¹⁶ Even today people of Kolabira trust that their village deity was at *demul* and village *Jhankar* worship there every year for god health and harvest. Prior to this a less successful raid was carried out with scanty of arm forces at Kolabira by Captain Leigh but unable to displace the rebel numbering about 1500.¹⁷ On the other hand Dash (1962) narrates it as, 'on 5th November 1857, Klocker jointly with Hadow attacked Kolabira, burnt the village and its old zamindar was arrested'. Tripathy further declare that on 30th December, 1857 when Surendra Sai was at Panchpada, a village near Jharsuguda town for collecting forces, war broke out at Kudopali where Karunakar Singh had taken leadership among the rebel. Chabila Sai, brother of Surendra becomes martyr in this war.¹⁸

But Panda says that Surendra Sai was present at there on that day and led the activists at Kudopali and it was the very auspicious day of Pousa Purnima or *pushpuni*.¹⁹ Dash again opined that from Kudopali the troop moves towards Kolabira, burnt the village and its zamindar along with 13 followers surrendered before the force, zamindar's property was confiscated and he was hanged. According to him Captain Wood after reaching at Sambalpur on 29/12/1857 attacked Kudopali on 30/12/1857 leading to death of fifty three and arrest of eleven revolutionaries, from whom six were hanged. Fifty three died which includes Chabila Sai, the 5th brother of Surendra Sai, who was shot in his back while running away to catch his horse. Pasayat (2009) described the Kudopali massacre as one and only incident in Odisha during that period where maximum number of rebel died at a single action.²⁰

Intelligence network of Karunakar Singh, as described by his heir Sri V.A.P. Singh was very logical and planned. He told that there was a place adjacent to boundary of Kolabira estate called as *Denga Bar*, named so due to presence of a big, tall and old Banyan tree, whose peak is used as a watching tower by spy, who manage to walk aside the telen river to reach Kolabira fort to share secret information with Karunakar Singh, the zamindar of Kolabira.²¹ He told that there was also an iron smelting shop under the Banyan tree where war weapons is made from iron ore by smelting process by one or two families from lohar community, appointed by Karunakar Singh.

Dilemma over Death:

It is truth as well as trustworthy that Kolabira fort has witnessed the armed and brutal battle of its three heirs who lost their lives as well as their assets in the Sambalpur freedom movement. Two out of these three legatees of



Kolabira zamindars were Karunakar Singh and his brother Khageswar Naik (also known as Khaga Naik). As per the list of 26 self-motivated leaders, who played a pivotal and dynamic role in fighting against the Britishers in support of Surendra Sai as supplied by Deputy Commissioner, Sambalpur to Dalton, the Officiating Commissioner, Chhattisgarh vide letter No.113, dated 9th February, 1958, names of Karunakar Singh and Khaga Naik placed at serial number nine and ten.²² Some researchers/scholars of history claimed that a third person named as Kanehai Naik, son of Khaga Naik was also hanged or killed at an outlaw during freedom struggle in the above area.

Misra (2002) says that Maj. Bates as Commander of troops sieged Jharghati, which was an iron grip of insurgents and restored road connection in between Sambalpur and Ranchi and according to Panda it was on 04/01/1857. Karunakar Singh, zamindar of Kolabira was a loyal supporter of Surendra Sai from very beginning and had keen interest in restoration of Chauhans rule at Sambalpur. Maj. Bates along with Capt. Wood jointly attacked Kolabira, crushed the insurgents mercilessly and imprisoned Karunakar Singh along with other influential leaders and in the early fortnight of December, 1861, Karunakar Singh along with Dayal Singh and Jagabandhu were hanged. He further says, in absence of Maj. Bates, Lieutenant Robinson, who remain in charge of command, sent Karunakar to Sambalpur, where he was trialed by Lieutenant Cockburn and executed, being unknown about his surrender on condition that his life be spared. He also confirmed the surrender of Khaga Naik and Kanehai Naik before new British force commanded by Dyer, who was kind towards people, criticized execution of Karunakar

Singh and due to his concern 30 supporters of Kolabira zamindar were retried and freed. This episode was described by O'Malley (1909) in similar manner but he speaks that Capt. Wood arrived Sambalpur from Nagpur on 30th December, 1857 to take part in Kudopali expedition and he killed three of his enemy in his own hand but injured by an arrow. In early January of 1958, after Maj. Bates arrive Sambalpur, they jointly attacked Kolabira, leading to Surrender of Karunakar Singh along with his 13 supporters. His estate was confiscated and Karunakar Singh convicted of treason and hanged.

However, Panda (2012) affirmed that Karunakar Singh was arrested on 7th January, 1858 while he was taking rest at his house along with his eleven followers and he was hanged on 11th February, 1858.²³

Gonds Movement in Sambalpur and Role of Kolabira Fort:

Gonds were the fighting forces of western Odisha. Gonds and Binjhals have played an important role in the history of Sambalpur. As per the census of 1901, they constitute 63,248 and 39,225, second and third among others castes in the district.²⁴ Out of sixteen, ten estates were ruled by Gonds and two were by Binjhals, which is prime cause, that Gonds have taken leading role in the freedom movement. In most of the villages Gonds filled the post of *Jhankar* or principal watchmen- an honorable post and a secondary village priest, responsible to propitiate the local earth god (*gram debata*) and there by ensure good harvest.²⁵ Gonds were usually agriculturist by occupation but appointed as zamindars under the Chauhans of Sambalpur. Mishra (2012) describes that Gond zamindar of Sarangarh and Raigarh helped Baliara Singh (1617-1657), the fifth raja of Sambalpur in carving out the vast



dominion over eighteen garh.²⁶ In social hierarchy they were divided into, Raja Gonds - the noble class and Dhur or Dust Gonds- represented in the lower stratum. The Raj Gonds generally wore a sacred thread like that worn by Brahman as they believed that the Brahman had stolen their sacred thread, claimed themselves as the son of soil. Being a prime caste in the district, blind and absolute support of all the ten Gonds zamindars as mentioned in the table no 5 had arisen Sambalpur movement to its peak, known by the common man as '*Gondmaru*'. During Maharattha rule and in their line, people of Gonds community created a terror among villagers and snatching, mainly from wealthy class, which even continues during British rule is popularly called as first and second phase of '*Gondmaru*' respectively.²⁷

The rebellion of Sambalpur in 1857 was mainly a tribal rebellion where Gonds zamindars of Kolabira, Paharsirgira, Bheren, Kharsal, Kodabaga, Laida, Loisingha, Machida, Mandomahal, Patkulunda etc, have taken a key role to support Surendra Sai. They give up their every comfort, left their families as well as homes and resorted to jungle life. They were noted for their bravery, scarifies and heroism. They were arrested in mass, imprisoned at different jails, trailed at fast track courts and hanged (even some time illegally executed), killed at various military operations and lost their entire estates/property. With espouse of these people Surendra Sai was able to organise rebels in groups at different locations.²⁸ Bhalabhadra Singh, the zamindar of Lakhanpur was first and prominent among all Gonds zamindar, who organized them to fight against foreign rule in 1827, however was killed in 1837 as a traitor showed way to the forces of raja of Sambalpur to his resting place for which the Gonds got more incensed to fight. Also

increased revenue from Rs.8800 in 1849 to Rs.74,000 in 1854 caused anger among Gonds and Binjhals zamindars was another reason for which they become more united against Britishers.²⁹

The Gonds ruled in Bheren estate (also called as Besaikela) before coming of the Rajput Chouhan to Sambalpur and its fearless zamindar Abdhut Singh turned himself into rebel when insulted by Britishers for delay in payment of revenue to government and joined hands with Surendra Sai during his first phase of freedom struggle (1827-1840), responsible for grabbing government food storage of Padampur, located near Kapilapur on Belphar-Kanaktura highway, now submerged at Hirakud basin, twice on 23/07/1830 and 23/07/1832. He also made a quick and close escape from Captain Thomas Wilkinson on 16/12/1830 after which he was sheltered by Bhalabhadra Singh, the zamindar of Lakhanpur at Debrigarh fort, located at Baraphar hilltop, where he was attacked from three sides of hill by Lieutenant Higgins led Ramgarh battalion, Subedar Gurudayal Tiwari and forces of queen of Sambalpur and Britishers led by Jay Bohidar respectively, which he successfully tackled with continuous flow of arrows from hilltop. Zamindar of Kodabaga and Paharsirgira also helped Abdhut Singh and Bhalabhadra Singh. Debrigarh mountain peak was situated at a height of 2267 feet (691 meter) used to be a strong hold of rajas of Sambalpur, where Bhalabhadra Singh was killed. Vindictive British force commanded by Foster started attack and arrest of rebels with a missionary zeal and arrested another close associates of Surendra Sai, the Gond zamindar of Kharsal, Sri Dayal Sing during last week of February, 1858 and trailed his case at fast track court and finally executed on 03/03/1858. However Mahalik (2007) described that Kharsal



fort was attacked by Britishers in 1860 and its zamindar was hanged by Britishers for taking active part in the revolt of Surendra Sai.³⁰ Meanwhile, one Chandra Gountia, the Gond zamindar of Loisingha makes up his mind to give up rebel and live in rest. His wish to surrender before Britishers was suspected and hence debarred from surrender on 20/03/1858 and told to stay at Sambalpur.³¹ Zamindar of Kodabaga was also arrested during same period and sentenced life time imprisonment. Kharsal was formed during the regime of Baliara Singh (1617-1657), the 5th raja of Sambalpur by grant of a village to one Gond, named Uddyan Singh, for his loyal service to raja and it's headquarter was at Kanakbira.

Zamindars of Kolabira were pioneer in organizing the Gonds community in the entire Sambalpur district and always tried for their betterment. For removal of social evils among Gonds community, Lal Rajendra Singh, the ninth zamindar of Kolabira and member of Odisha assembly has taken several steps through regular follow up in their community or *jati* meeting/convention called as 'Sadbansi (Gonds) Keshatriya Mahasabha'. He was also president of Jaypur Gonds Samaj. However, the first Gonds convention or *mahasabha* was held on 19/05/1940 at Sanua village (a station in between Nagpur- Howrah railway line) in Jharkhand under the chairmanship of Sri Nrupalal Singh, the seventh zamindar of Kolabira estate who was also nominated member of first pre-independence Odisha assembly.³²

Estate Administration of Kolabira Fort:

Kolabira was the largest Gond ruled estate in the district and its proximity to railway line and road link between Nagpur and Ranchi induced foreign rule to annex this estate under

their control. Only nine estates with 375 sq. miles zamindari forest in the district including Kolabira estate, yielded forest revenue to British exchequers. Since it was close to Jharsuguda railway junction, export of large timber was also possible from here, which was very difficult from Borasambar, which constitute lion share of forest revenue.³³ Iron ore was also found in some area of Kolabira estate, locally smelted and manufacturing of iron articles were done by local *lohar* community.³⁴

Administration of Kolabira estate could not be traced from Sansadhar Singh (first zamindar) to Krushna Chandra Naik (fourth zamindar) as the records of the above period were either lost somewhere in the Kolabira fort when it was destroyed and set fire by Britishers or damaged/lost during the freedom movement. Zamindars of Kolabira during above period also might not have been able to document evidence on their estate management due to their active involvement in the freedom war. However it can be only outlined from the tenure of Ghanashyam Singh, the fifth zamindar of Kolabira, who was given the right of Kolabira estate at the settlement court held at Kolabira on 9th April, 1872.³⁵ After the sad demise of Sri Chintamoni Singh, 6th zamindar of Kolabira on 21st, December, 1903, being a minor, his son Sri Nrupalal Singh (17 years old) was not allowed to act as zamindar of Kolabira and thus administration of Kolabira estate was taken by Britishers (Court of Wards).³⁶ On attaining majority, Sri Nrupalal Singh was appointed as zamindar on 15th January, 1910. From 21st December, 1903 to 15th January, 1910, Kolabira estate was under Court of Wards and in this period education and training on estate administration was imparted to Sri Nrupalal under direct supervision of Britishers. After taking over charge as zamindar of Kolabira, Sri Nrupalal



Singh initiated reforms in administration by dividing the administration of Kolabira zamindari into different departments like, Revenue, Forest, Taxes etc and appointed person to his faith, having knowledge and experience on the above subjects. He was the only recipient of Kolabira fort who had undergone training on estate administration as per the British system and ruled as zamindar of Kolabira for more than forty five years, the longest period in the history of Kolabira zamindars. During his tenure 30-40 employee were found to be working at the Kolabira estate at his fort. Nrupalal has introduced cash book system for smooth and scientific financial management of the zamindari account and use to counter signed in every entry. Chintamoni Singh had established a hospital from his own fund at Kolabira in 1890 which used to provide health service to people of present Kolabira, Kirmira and Laikera blocks, consequently converted in 1918 to Chintamoni Charitable Hospital by Nrupalal Singh and later on taken over by Government of Odisha and recognized as primary health center in 1994. To eradicate illiteracy among community and impart English education in Kolabira village and its surrounding villages, he established Nrupalal Middle English School in 1939, before to which his predecessors already established Kolabira Primary School.³⁷ Born in between 1884 and 1886, he was also nominated member to first pre-independence Odisha assembly from 023-Sambalpur Sadar seat under United Party ticket from 3rd February, 1937 to 14th September, 1945. In spite of his paralyzed left limbs, he used to look after the affairs of estate up to 1956 and breathe his last in 1958. Afterward his son Lal Bir Mahendra Singh was appointed as zamindar of Kolabira estate for a short period and he died in 1963 when his son Lal Rajendra Singh became zamindar but from

November, 1952, zamindari system was already abolished from the state by the Zamindar System (Abolition) Act 1951. Lal Rajendra Singh joined a political party, named 'Ganatantra Party' which later on merged with the 'Swatantra Party' led by Rajendra Narayana Singhdeo, former Chief Minister of Odisha. Lal Rajendra Singh was elected to fourth Orissa Legislative Assembly (1967-1971) from Laikera reserved seat. He was also member of Panchyat Samati High School, Kolabira, President of NLME School, Kolabira. As president of Orissa Gond Samaj, he tried his best to eradicate social evils from the community.

To trace out the date of construction of present fort of Kolabira, the writer has referred several literatures which reveal that it was erected officially by Britishers during the regime of Sri Ghanashyam Singh; when he was minor and their earlier confiscated estate was restored to him as per the proclamation of amnesty in 1859 to which Bohidar strongly disagreed. He argues that it was erected in 1910 during the regime of Nrupalal Singh, because in the door of the main entrance, it was written that one carpenter, named Damador Moharana from Sanakhemundi of Ganjam district in Odisha had made the door in 1910. Name of Nrupalal Singh, Zamindar, Kolabira, was also written on the door, which the writer has observed during his visit to fort. Further he says that Damador Moharana was officially accommodated at a house at *nua pada*, later on Nrupalal Singh conferred its title to one Brahmin, who was a priest by occupation named Nanda Kishore Dash, whose heirs presently lives in that house. If it is true, then the fort must be completed after 15/01/1910, the date on which adult Nrupalal Singh assumes office. So the construction work must be initiated before one or two years when estate was under court of wards (Britishers) from 21st December, 1903 to



15th January, 1910. So we may conclude that the present fort may be constructed by Britishers after 1859 during the tenure of Sri Ghanashyam Singh or by court of wards during 21st December, 1903 to 15th January, 1910 which finished just few months after Nrupalal Singh assumed his office.

Conclusion:

Vigorous participation of Karunakar Singh, the third zamindar of Kolabira estate in Sambalpur freedom struggle of 1857 was neglected by researchers. In the war of 1857 the zamindar family of Kolabira lost their three brave successors, their property was confiscated and whole family underwent a frightened life. Bohidar told that relatives of zamindar with support of Gonds people kept minor Ghanashyam Singh underground at different villages and changing their hideouts frequently as Britishers wanted to kill him so that the entire dynasty of Kolabira zamindar will come to an end. After the proclamation of amnesty in 1859, British authorities had made an intensive search of Ghanashyam Singh at different places so that right of their confiscated property will be handed over to him, after which he was recovered from a village named Duandihi (near

Kolabira) and right of their property was granted to him followed by his coronation as fifth zamindar of Kolabira.³⁷ In the pages of Indian history, this episode of Kolabira fort known as *agnititha* is not so popular. Necessary steps must be initiated by the people of this area so as to keep the name and fame of these freedom fighters and advance research must be undertaken to explore the correct dates of these departed supermen. Kolabira fort is also losing its strength and neglected by its owner as they are unable to meet the huge maintenance cost. Due to lack of repairs the fort is ruined, which if not protected in time will lead to its complete demolition. State as well as people of this locality must find some ways so that this historical monument is preserved. It is also advisable that a complete search shall be made in and around the Kolabira fort, which will reveal some new and unknown episode of this fort. Necessary excavation work must be carried out at some selected places of Kolabira fort on the bank of Telen River and Bhogragarh village on the bank of Bhaden River. My hopes assure me that this will further expose some thought provoking facts about glorious past of people of Kolabira and Bhogragarh war.

Table 1: Feudatory Estates of Sambalpur District in 1857

Name of Zamindaris	Social Group/ Caste/Race	Area(in Square Miles)	Name of Zamindaris	Social Group/ Caste/Race	Area(in Square Miles)
1. Borasambar	Binjhals	841	9. Patkulunda	Gonds	06
2. Barpali	Chauhan Rajput	98	10. Kolabira	Gonds	278
3. Bijepur	Kulta	83	11. Rampur	Others	149
4. Ghans	Binjhals	40	12. Rajpur	Chauhan Rajput	36
5. Bheran	Gonds	33	13. Kodabaga	Gonds	29
6. Kharsal	Gonds	28	14. Machida	Gonds	10



7. Paharsirgira	Gonds	17	15. Laida	Gonds	41
8. Mandomahal	Gonds	07	16. Loisingha	Gonds	95

Source: Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur (1909)

Table 2: List of Incumbency of Zamindars/Landlords of Kolabira Estate since 1785

1. Sansadhar Singh	Founder of Kolabira fort and 1 st Zamindar of Kolabira fort
2. Banmali Singh	2 nd Zamindar
3. Karunakar Singh	3 rd Zamindar & leading associates of Surendra Sai, Freedom Fighter of Sambalpur
4. Krushna Chandra Nayak #	4 th Zamindar
5. Ghanashyam Singh	5 th Zamindar
6. Chintamani Singh (death- 21/12/1903)	6 th Zamindar
7. Nrupalal Singh (birth in between 1884 to 1886, died in 1958)	7 th Zamindar and nominated Member to 1 st Pre-Independence Odisha Assembly from 023-Sambalpur Sadar Seat (United Party) (03/02/1937 to 14/09/1945)
8. Lal Veer Mahendra Singh, (death-1963)	8 th Zamindar
9. Lal Rajendra Singh (birth-29/02/1936, death-20/12/1996)	9 th Zamindar and elected Member to 4 th Odisha Assembly, 117- Laikera (ST) Seat (Swatantra Party) from 01/03/1967 to 23/01/1971
10. Veer Amarendra Pratap Singh, birth 26/06/1965	10 th Zamindar (Coronation is not solemnized)
11. Venkatasah Pratap Singh, birth 12/09/1997	11 th Generation

Different surnames are used by different zamindars of Kolabira. Original surname was Singh, being the leader (Nayak) of the struggle; Nayak surname was conferred by Surendra Sai during freedom struggle and being head of Kolabira garh/fort, locally called as Garohotteas.

- Sources: 1. Personal Diary of Sri Veer Amarendra Pratap Singh, 10th Zamindar of Jaypur Estate, Pages 25-27, January, 2000, entered on 8th September, 2006,
2. Personnel discussion with Sri Veer Amarendra Pratap Singh on 25th February, 2013.



3. Unpublished documents collected/compiled by Sri Rameswar Singh Naik, Former Member, Odisha Legislative Assembly from Laikera)
4. Judgment of Orissa High Court, Bishnu Priya Dei. V/s Brusabhanu Mohapatra, dated-10/12/1975

Table 3: Kolabira Villages at Odisha & Jharkhand

Sl. No. of the Village	Name of Village & Code No	Name of Block/ Sub-District	District & State
2773	Kolabiria(02953000)	Govindpur(Rajnagar)	West Singhbhum(Jharkhand)
2774	Kolabira(02923000)	Adityapur(Gamharia)	West Singhbhum(Jharkhand)
3294	Kulabira(02719300)	Gumla	Gumla(Jharkhand)
3295	Kulaburu(03076600)	Kumardungi	West Singhbhum(Jharkhand)
3296	Kulaburu(03042100)	Tatanagar	West Singhbhum(Jharkhand)
3297	Kulaiburu(03004800)	Manoharpur	West Singhbhum(Jharkhand)
5172	Kolabira(00153000)	Kolabira	Jharsuguda(Odisha)
6001	Kulabira(00398800)	Lephripada	Sundargarh(Odisha)

Source: Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, New Delhi.

Table 4: Opinions on Arrest/Surrender and Death of Karunakar Singh, Khaga Naik and Kanehai Naik

Source of Information	Remarks/Opinions
Panda(2012)	Karunakar Singh arrested on 07/01/1858 by Capt. John Bates while taking rest from his house at Kolabira along with eleven other. Hanged on 11/02/1858 at Sambalpur. After Proclamation of Maj. Impey, Khaga Naik, Kanehai Naik and 36 others surrendered. Lieutenant Robinson sent them to Sambalpur, trailed by Lieutenant Cockburn and both Khaga Naik and Kanehai Naik were hanged illegally on 22/12/1861 and other 36 were freed by R. N. Shore, Commissioner, Cuttack. ³⁸
Misra (2002)	Karunakar Singh executed in the early fortnight of December, 1861 along with Dayal Singh and Jagabandhu. Khaga Naik & Kanehai Nail surrendered before newly arrived British force commanded by Dyer. Dyer had a sympathetic attitude towards people as due to his intervention thirty supporters of Karunakar Naik, condemned to execution were retried and freed. ³⁹
Tripathy (2012)	Karunakar Singh surrendered executed on 22/12/1861 along with thirteen followers at jail premises, Sambalpur. ⁴⁰



- Mishra(2013) Karunakar Singh, Khaga Naik, Kanehai Naik surrendered after Maj. Impey 'proclamation and Karunakar Singh hanged at jail premises, Sambalpur on 22/12/1861.⁴¹
- Mishra. C.(1986) Karunakar Singh surrendered on guarantee of life along with his brother Khaga Naik and nephew Kanehai Naik as a result of proclamation by Maj. Impey.⁴²
- Dash ,K.(1998) In a list of twelve freedom fighters hanged/killed by Britishers, Kolabira zamindar along with his fourteen freedom fighters hanged on 11/02/1858 is place first, Karunakar Singh's name is place at ninth and zamindar, Kolabira is again place at tenth.⁴³
- Mahapatra, S.(1983) Karunakar Singh along with his brother Khaga Naik and Kanehai Naik surrendered before British force on 22/12/1861.⁴⁴
- Sahu, J.K.,(1998) Brother of Kolabira zamindar, Khaga Naik along with his nephew surrendered after Impey's proclamation.⁴⁵
- Dash, S.P.(1962) Old zamindar of Kolabira arrested.⁴⁶ Zamindar of Kolabira and thirteen others surrendered and zamindar was hanged.⁴⁷
- Mohapatra, R.(2008) Maj. Bates arrive Sambalpur on 07/01/1858. He also destroyed Kolabira village, the gountia of which was a rebel leader. The gountia was arrested and hanged afterwards.⁴⁸
- Patel, C.B.(2007) Karunakar Gartia with thirteen rebel chiefs surrendered and Gartia was hanged on 11/02/1858 and his zamindari was confiscated.⁴⁹
- Pati, B.(2010) Some people including goantia of Kolabira and thirteen influential men surrendered and the goantia was hanged.⁵⁰
- Mahalik, N(2007) Kolabira zamindar was hanged.⁵¹
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- www.jharsugudazp.odishapr.gov.in Rebel zamindar of Kolabira alternately surrendered and illegally and treacherously hanged in jail premises of Sambalpur on 11/02/1958.
- www.prasanna2000.hpage.co.in Rebel zamindar of Kolabira alternately surrendered and illegally and treacherously hanged in jail premises of Sambalpur on 11/02/1958.
- www.odisharajputs.blogspot.in Rebel zamindar of Kolabira alternately surrendered and illegally and treacherously hanged in jail premises of Sambalpur on 11/02/1958.
- www.falguniodisha.com Karunakar Singh surrendered before British army. Illegally & treacherously hanged on 11/02/1958 in the jail premises, Sambalpur.

**Table 5: List of Gond Estates and their Chiefs under Sambalpur District**

Sl. No.	Name of Gond Estates	Name of the Gond Freedom Fighters
1.	Bheran(Besaikela)	Abdhut Singh (died in war) and his son Monahar Singh
2.	Kharsal	Dayal Sardar. He was hanged on 03/03/1858
3.	Kolabira	Karunakar Singh and his brother Khaga Naik and nephew Kanchai Naik
4.	Kodabaga	Anjari Singh (some writer called him as Abhari Singh). He got life imprisonment
5.	Laida	Jai Singh
6.	Loisingha	Arjun Singh and his son Chandra Singh, Madhu Singh
7.	Machida	Dhaneswar Singh. (also called as Dhanu Singh)
8.	Mandomahal	Annanta Sai, Arakhita Gountia
9.	Paharsirgira	Janardan Singh and his brother Khageswar Singh (Nannha Dewan) and Fathe Singh
10.	Patkulunda	Pitamber Singh

References:

- O'Malley, 'Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur', p.164
- Mishra, 'Kolabira Ra Sangram Katha O Sasana Byabastha', p.59
- Sahu, J.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', pp.74-75
- Dash, S.P., 'Sambalpur Itihash', p.257
- Misra, 'Surendra Sai- Pioneer of a Complete Revolution(1857), p.106
- Personal Discussion with Sri Veer Amarendra Pratap Singh on 28, February, 2013 and 28, January, 2014 at Jharsuguda and Kolabira respectively
- Personal Discussion with Sri Janmajaya Bohidar on 28, January, 2014 at Kolabira
- Asthamalla Rule*: Ruling the empire proportionately by eight strongest men with specific tenure with a symbolic lemon on the throne
- Dash, S.P., 'Sambalpur Itihash', p.234
- Linga, Budha Deo and Jangha Linga are different form/parts of Lord Siva.
- Hassan, K., 'Sambalpur Re Swadhinata Sangram', p.76
- O'Malley, 'Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur', p.122
- Ibid, p.66
- Misra, ' Surendra Sai- Pioneer of a Complete Revolution(1857), p.98
- Ibid, p.113
- Personal Discussion with Sri Janmajaya Bohidar on 28, January, 2014 at Kolabira
- O'Malley, 'Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur', p.33
- Tripathy, 'Agnitirtha: Kolabira Ra Kranti Katha', p.16
- Panda, D.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', p.33
- Pasayat, C., " Rebel Colleagues of Surendra Sai as depicted in Folk Songs of Sambalpur Region', p.26



21. Denga Bar consists of two words, Denga means tall and Bar means Banyan tree. The place is called as Denga Bag due to presence of a tall banyan tree.
22. Ibid, p.107
23. Panda, D.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', pp.35,36
24. O'Malley, 'Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur', p.65
25. Ibid, p.66
26. Mishra, B. 'Social Structure of Western Orissa under Chouhan of Sambalpur'
27. Dash, S.P., 'Sambalpur Itihash', pp.330,331
28. Ibid, pp.4-9
29. Pasayat, C., 'Rebel Colleagues of Surendra Sai as depicted in Folk Songs of Sambalpur Region' pp.23-29
30. Mahalik, N., 'Freedom Struggle in Ghans (Bargarh)', p. 71.
31. Panda, D.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', pp.39,40
32. O'Malley, 'Bengal District Gazetteers-Sambalpur', p.102
33. Ibid, p.152
34. Tripathy, G., 'Agnitirtha: Kolabira Ra Kranti Katha', p.15
35. Judgment of Orissa High Court, Bishnu Priya Dei v/s Brusabhanu Mohapatra, dated-10/12/1975
36. Personal Discussion with Sri Janmajaya Bohidar on 28, January, 2014 at Kolabira
37. Unpublished text written by Janmajaya Bohidar on 'Kolabira Freedom Struggle by Karunakar Naik and Kolabira fort' dated- 11/02/ 2006
38. Panda, D.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', pp.36,54
39. Misra, 'Surendra Sai- Pioneer of a Complete Revolution(1857), pp.137-138
40. Tripathy, 'Agnitirtha: Kolabira Ra Kranti Katha', pp.17
41. Mishra, 'Kolabira Ra Sangram Katha O Sasana Byabastha', pp.62
42. Mishra, C., Freedom Movement in Sambalpur (1827 -1947), pp.107
43. Dash, K., 'Odisha Ra Sashtra Mukti Sangram', pp. 67, 68
44. Mahapatra, S., 'Sangrami Surendra Sai- a Biography, pp.67
45. Sahu, J.K., 'Veer Surendra Sai', pp.83
46. Dash, S.P., 'Sambalpur Itihash', pp.361
47. Ibid, pp- 365
48. Mohapatra, R., 'Role of Veer Surendra Sai against the British Colonialism in Sambalpur' p.7
49. Patel, C.B., 'Associates of Veer Surendra Sai' p.
50. Pati, B., 'The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: exploring Transgressions, contests and Diversities', p.53
51. Mahalik, N., 'Freedom Struggle in Ghans (Bargarh)', p. 71.

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