Sambalpur with a hoary past and enviable strategic significance was organised as a powerful kingdom by the Chauhans in the 16th and the 17th centuries while the rest of Orissa was rattled by the invaders and the incriminating Islam to the body polity and the social structure of an organised community. It was but for Chauhans the sub-regional status and culture continued to flourish in and around Sambalpur for about four centuries at a time when the very foundation of Oriya culture was being shaken. However the Chauhans could not hold on the fort and there appeared cleavages in their kingdom with the power play of the Marathas and the diplomatic manoeuvre of the Britishers in the 18th century. The Marathas utilised Sambalpur as a chess board to checkmate the periodical incursion that evinced between them and Muslim rulers of Bengal who had no political design for Sambalpur. The chaotic situation generated political confusion not only weakening the political fabric of Sambalpur, so assiduously developed by the Chauhans, but also ruined the commercial viability of Western Orissa in general making it a prey to the ever-zealous British power to intervene. Ever since the occupation of Orissa in 1803, the British Government was always in search of a plea to step into Sambalpur as it was in a crucial position in the lifeline between Nagpur and Calcutta.

The Britishers, unlike the process by which they succeeded in imposing them in some parts of Orissa as the master, moved very cautiously both in their intervention as well as their final placement as the sovereign authority in Sambalpur, precisely because their aim was to subjugate the political authority without jeopardising their popular acceptance as a civilising community. It was conspicuous in their policy of difference in dealing with the neighbouring Zamindaries of Sambalpur. They acted as supreme authority in Sambalpur but played the role of a go between in subsidiary zamindaries to avail safe passage
for their troops and ammunitions. But their wishes were not horses, and as such there arose an unprecedented popular rising in the form of armed resistance by the tribals under the leadership of Veer Surendra Sai gradually involving the common man against the British autocracy. The stubborn resistance became so intensive and widespread that the Britishers had to run from pillar to post to amass all possible strength to meet the exigency. At last they were so hurled and hurt that they had to admit that the resistance offered by the people of Sambalpur was not only responsible to thresh them to most humiliating position but also it became the most troublesome engagements in India. Even though Sambalpur became a part of the British Empire as per the Doctrine of Lapse in 1849, it took around a decade, even beyond the end of Sepoy Mutiny, to consolidate their position.

But till now no sincere work has been done by any scholar on this particular aspect of the history of Sambalpur. The attempts made by Siba Prasad Das in "Sambalpur Itihas (Oriya, 1962)", Sapneswar Das in "Chauhan Veer Surendra Sai (Oriya, 1958)", Aniruddha Das in "Life of Surendra Sai, 1963", do not deal exhaustively on this aspect of Sambalpur. It is worthwhile to mention here that such studies on regional basis are now being taken up by different scholars.

Therefore, an attempt has been made to bring to light the decline of the Chauhan power and the ascendancy and consolidation of the British in Sambalpur, mostly with the help of original and unpublished records available in Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar; Bihar State Archives, Patna; Madhya Pradesh State Archives, Bhopal; National Archives of India, New Delhi; Utkal Sahitya Samaj Library, and Gopabandhu Library Cuttack; National Library, Calcutta; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; Nagpur Secretariate Record Room, Nagpur; Sambalpur University Archives, Jyoti Vihar and
Board of Revenue Records, Sambalpur. The thesis has been enriched mostly by firsthand information.

The present work begins with the historical geography and historiography of Sambalpur. It highlights the geography of Sambalpur from the 4th Century A.D up to the advent of the Chauhans. Further it embraces the immortal works of the prominent historians of this region.

The second chapter deals with the Chauhan administration and the socio-economic condition of the people.

The third chapter depicts the turmoil in the body polity of the Chauhans. Further it describes the internal rebellion and feud, the conflict between the British and the Marathas leading to the Treaty of Deogaon and ultimately the occupation of Sambalpur by the East India Company.

The fourth chapter highlights the British ascendancy as its content. The tale of British excesses, the exploitation, the East India Company's increasing interference, denial of popular justice, local resistance, lapse of the state due to the Doctrine of Lapse form the core of this chapter.

The fifth chapter discusses the early administration of Sambalpur during the British occupation, detestably tyrannical and ruthless in its approach and function.

The sixth chapter delineates the most interesting and glorious aspects of the popular rising of the region under the valiant and heroic leadership of Surendra Sai.

The last chapter discusses the British consolidation in Sambalpur. Further it represents the theme of the relation of Sambalpur
with the neighbouring feudatory states with reference to general administration. Extracts of original records showing the status of the Garjats and some relevant information, supplementing and strengthening the contention about the relation of the British rule with these states have been reflected in Annexures.

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