

 <p>ISSN (O): 2320-5407 ISSN (P): 3107-4928</p>	<p>Journal Homepage: <a href="http://www.journalijar.com">www.journalijar.com</a></p> <h2>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</h2> <p>Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/23287 DOI URL: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/23287">http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/23287</a></p>	
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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## RAJENDRA NARAYAN SINGH DEO AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO BALANGIR: A REGIONAL HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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### Manuscript Info

#### Manuscript History

Received: 12 February 2026

Final Accepted: 15 March 2026

Published: April 2026

### Abstract

The district of Balangir has historically been one of the most underdeveloped yet culturally vibrant regions of Odisha. This paper examines the contributions of Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo with a particular focus on Balangir. As the former ruler of Patna State and later Chief Minister of Odisha (1967–1971), Singh Deo played a decisive role in shaping the administrative, agricultural, educational, and cultural landscape of Balangir. The study argues that his leadership laid the foundational framework for Balangir's transition from a princely territory to a modern administrative district, even though structural challenges persisted.

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### Introduction:-

Balangir occupies a significant position in the historical geography of western Odisha, yet it has long been associated with economic backwardness, drought-prone agriculture, and infrastructural deficiency. Historically part of the Patna princely state, Balangir's development trajectory was deeply influenced by its rulers, particularly Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo. The region's semi-arid climate, dependence on monsoon rainfall, and limited industrial base contributed to persistent poverty. However, Balangir also possessed a rich cultural tradition, vibrant festivals, and a strong agrarian society. In this complex setting, Singh Deo's contribution must be understood not merely as administrative action but as a long-term intervention aimed at regional transformation.

### Patna State and the Administrative Foundations of Balangir:-

Before independence, Balangir formed the core of Patna State, ruled by the Chauhan dynasty. When Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo ascended the throne in 1931, he inherited a region with limited infrastructure but significant administrative potential. During his rule, he initiated reforms in land revenue administration, judicial systems, and local governance. He introduced measures to streamline tax collection, improve record-keeping, and strengthen the accountability of local officials. These early administrative reforms created a structured governance system that later facilitated Balangir's integration into the modern state of Odisha in 1948. Unlike many princely rulers, Singh Deo actively engaged with developmental concerns such as road connectivity, irrigation tanks, and public institutions within Balangir. These initiatives marked the beginning of planned development in the region.

### Transition to Democratic Governance and Representation of Balangir:-

After the merger of princely states, Singh Deo emerged as a key political representative of Balangir. His entry into democratic politics ensured that the region, often neglected in state planning, found a strong voice in the legislative framework. As a political leader, he consistently raised issues related to drought, poverty, and lack of infrastructure

in Balangir. His association with the Swatantra Party under C. Rajagopalachari reflected his advocacy for decentralised economic policies and regional autonomy. Balangir, during the 1950s and 1960s, suffered from recurring droughts and food shortages. Singh Deo used his political position to draw attention to these crises and push for targeted government intervention. His leadership helped bring Balangir into the broader discourse of state development planning.

#### **Irrigation and Agricultural Development in Balangir:-**

Agriculture has always been the backbone of Balangir's economy, yet it has been severely constrained by erratic rainfall. Recognising this structural challenge, Singh Deo prioritised irrigation development as a central component of his policy. One of the major contributions during his leadership was the extension of irrigation benefits from the Hirakud Dam system to parts of Balangir. Although the dam was constructed earlier, its effective utilisation for western districts required political will and administrative coordination, which Singh Deo actively facilitated. In addition to large-scale irrigation, he supported minor irrigation projects such as tanks, canals, and lift irrigation systems within Balangir. These efforts aimed to stabilise agricultural production and reduce dependence on monsoon rains. Archival records indicate that agricultural output in irrigated pockets showed noticeable improvement during this period. He also encouraged farmers to adopt improved seeds and modern farming techniques, marking an early phase of agricultural modernisation in the district.

#### **Educational Expansion in Balangir:-**

Education in Balangir before independence was limited to a few institutions catering mainly to elite sections. Singh Deo recognised that without expanding education, long-term development would remain unattainable. During his leadership, several schools and colleges were established or strengthened in Balangir. He promoted access to education in rural areas, ensuring that educational facilities were not confined to urban centres. His emphasis on vernacular education made learning more accessible to the local population. The expansion of educational institutions during this period contributed to the emergence of a new educated class in Balangir, which later played a role in administration, politics, and social reform. This educational transformation, though gradual, marked a significant shift in the socio-economic structure of the district.

#### **Infrastructure and Administrative Development in Balangir:-**

One of the critical challenges facing Balangir was the lack of infrastructure. Roads, communication networks, and administrative institutions were underdeveloped, limiting economic growth. Singh Deo's administration focused on improving road connectivity within Balangir and linking it with other parts of Odisha. This facilitated trade, mobility, and administrative efficiency. He also worked towards strengthening district-level governance by improving coordination between local and state authorities. Healthcare facilities, though limited, also saw gradual expansion during this period. Primary health centres and basic medical services were introduced in rural areas, addressing long-standing gaps in public health infrastructure.

#### **Cultural Patronage and Identity of Balangir:-**

Balangir has a rich cultural heritage, deeply rooted in folk traditions, festivals, and rituals. Singh Deo played a crucial role in preserving and promoting this cultural identity. He extended patronage to regional festivals and traditions, including those linked to agrarian cycles and local deities. While Dhanu Yatra is often associated with the wider region, the cultural ethos it represents is shared by Balangir as well. Singh Deo also encouraged the promotion of local language, literature, and performing arts. His support helped sustain cultural practices that might otherwise have declined due to modernisation and economic pressures. This cultural engagement strengthened social cohesion and regional identity within Balangir.

#### **Balangir During His Chief Ministership (1967–1971):-**

As Chief Minister of Odisha, Singh Deo was in a position to influence state-level policies in favour of Balangir. His tenure saw increased attention to backward districts, particularly in terms of irrigation, rural development, and administrative decentralisation. Although political instability limited the full implementation of his policies, Balangir benefited from increased allocation of resources and developmental focus. His governance marked a shift towards recognising the specific needs of drought-prone and underdeveloped districts.

**Limitations and Continuing Challenges in Balangir:-**

Despite these efforts, Balangir continued to face significant challenges. Poverty, seasonal migration, and lack of industrialisation persisted. Structural issues such as geographical isolation and limited natural resources could not be fully overcome during Singh Deo's tenure. However, these limitations do not diminish his contributions. Instead, they highlight the scale of challenges faced by leaders in post-independence India, particularly in regions like Balangir.

**Legacy in Balangir:-**

The legacy of Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo in Balangir is both tangible and intangible. Tangibly, his contributions can be seen in irrigation systems, educational institutions, and administrative structures. Intangibly, he instilled a sense of political awareness and regional identity among the people. Balangir's later political movements and demands for development can be traced back to the foundations laid during his leadership. He remains a central figure in the district's historical memory.

**Conclusion:-**

Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo's contribution to Balangir represents a crucial chapter in the region's transition from a princely past to a modern administrative unit. His efforts in irrigation, education, infrastructure, and cultural preservation laid the groundwork for future development. While challenges remained, his leadership provided direction and vision at a time when Balangir faced severe socio-economic constraints. This study reaffirms that his role was instrumental in shaping the historical trajectory of Balangir and continues to hold relevance in contemporary discussions on regional development.

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