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## Stages of Tradition: A Study on the Evolution of Sambalpuri/Kosli Drama

Sri Arabinda Panda

Assistant Professor, School of Performing Arts, Sambalpur University, Email-arabind1967@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

Sambalpuri, or Kosli, drama is an important part of the cultural heritage of Western Odisha. Emerging from folk traditions such as Dhanuyatra, Rasleela, Pala, and Danda Nata, it developed from community-based ritual performances into a recognized theatrical form with literary, artistic, and social significance. The evolution of Sambalpuri theatre reflects the influence of regional oral traditions, music, dance, and local storytelling practices that shaped its language, themes, and aesthetics. This study examines the historical growth of Sambalpuri/Kosli drama and the contributions of playwrights, performers, and cultural organizations in popularizing and institutionalizing the form during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It also highlights the role of print culture, radio, television, and digital media in expanding the reach of Kosli dramatic literature. Major themes explored in Sambalpuri drama include rural life, migration, social inequality, gender relations, folklore, and regional identity. The study concludes that Sambalpuri/Kosli drama has successfully preserved indigenous traditions while adapting to modern social and technological changes, thereby remaining a dynamic and enduring expression of cultural identity in contemporary Odisha.

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### Introduction

The first Sambalpuri play, Gauntia Babu, was written in 1957. After its appearance, there was a period of stagnation for a few years. However, the arrival of playwright Atal Bihari Panda accelerated the development of Sambalpuri theatre. Through his literary contributions, the treasury of Sambalpuri drama



became enriched both quantitatively and qualitatively. Except for a few plays written by Atal Bihari Panda, dramatic writing in the Kosli language remained slow until the 1980s.

Atal Bihari Panda entered the world of Sambalpuri theatre in 1962. His first short play, 'Golok Dhanda' (1962), was staged in 1963 at the Hirakud Indal Club auditorium under the banner of Bharati Club, Burla. Many high-quality dramas such as 'Fata Kapal', 'LenJha Tara', 'Bhains Aagenag Dhuni', 'Kumna Bhitare Denu', 'Sadgati', and 'Dandua' flowed from his pen. After 'Gauntia Babu', another full-length drama, 'Fata Kapal', was staged on 22 June 1966 under the banner of Bharati Club, Burla. In 1974, the play was published and earned recognition as the first published full-length Sambalpuri drama. Apart from Atal Bihari Panda's works, no major remarkable drama appeared in the Sambalpuri language up to 1980.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study, titled "Stages of Tradition: A Study on the Evolution of Sambalpuri/Kosli Drama," aims to examine the historical growth, aesthetic features, and socio-cultural significance of Sambalpuri/Kosli drama in western Odisha. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To trace the historical evolution of Sambalpuri/Kosli drama from its roots in folk performance traditions to its emergence as a modern theatrical form.
2. To identify the major phases of development of Sambalpuri drama, including early folk-based performances, organized stage productions, and contemporary experimental theatre.
3. To analyze the contribution of prominent playwrights, directors, and theatre groups, including scholars such as Dr. Panchanan Mishra, in shaping the growth of Sambalpuri dramatic literature and performance.
4. To examine the influence of indigenous folk forms such as Danda Nacha, Rasarkeli, Karma, and other local performance traditions on Sambalpuri theatre.
5. To study the linguistic and literary characteristics of Sambalpuri/Kosli dramatic texts, including themes, dialogue patterns, symbolism, and use of regional idioms.
6. To investigate the socio-cultural role of Sambalpuri drama in preserving regional identity, language, customs, and collective memory.



7. To assess the impact of modernization, media, and globalization on the production, dissemination, and reception of Sambalpuri drama.
8. To evaluate the current challenges and future prospects of Sambalpuri theatre in terms of audience engagement, institutional support, and digital preservation.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and historical research methodology to explore the evolution and development of Sambalpuri/Kosli drama. The methodology combines archival research, textual analysis, and field-based inquiry to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

### 1. Research Design

The study is descriptive, analytical, and interpretative in nature. It seeks to reconstruct the historical trajectory of Sambalpuri drama and interpret its literary, performative, and cultural dimensions.

### 2. Sources of Data

#### Primary Sources

- Published and unpublished Sambalpuri/Kosli dramatic texts.
- Scripts and manuscripts of notable plays.
- Audio and video recordings of stage performances.
- Interviews with playwrights, actors, directors, and theatre practitioners.
- Personal observations of live performances and theatre workshops.

#### Secondary Sources

- Books such as *Sambalpuri Drama at a Glance* by Dr. Panchanan Mishra.
- Research articles, dissertations, and conference papers.
- Journals on theatre studies, folklore, and Odia literature.
- Newspaper archives, souvenir publications, and cultural reports.



### **3. Methods of Data Collection**

#### **Archival Research**

Historical documents, manuscripts, and published literature are examined to trace the origin and growth of Sambalpuri drama.

#### **Textual Analysis**

Selected plays are analysed to study themes, characterization, language, dramaturgy, and socio-cultural concerns.

#### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with theatre scholars and practitioners to gather firsthand insights into the development and contemporary status of Sambalpuri theatre.

#### **Observation**

Live performances and rehearsals are observed to understand staging practices, acting styles, music, and audience interaction.

The history of Sambalpuri Kosli drama is not very ancient. Its development began mainly after the year 1957. Though the lifespan of Sambalpuri Kosli theatre is comparatively short, its growth has been remarkable and extraordinary. Within a limited period, many outstanding and thought-provoking dramas were created. During this short span, several renowned actors, directors, and playwrights emerged. From the viewpoint of quality, Sambalpuri Kosli drama has proved itself equal, and at times superior, to many regional theatrical traditions of India.

#### **Revolutionary Change in the 1980s**

At the beginning of the 1980s, Sambalpuri Kosli drama witnessed a revolutionary transformation. The slow and inactive theatre movement suddenly became vibrant and dynamic. In 1976, the Rourkela Cultural Academy organized a drama competition in Rourkela for the first time. On 19 November 1981, a full-length drama 'Ukhi', which was directed by Rajendra Prasad Panda and written by Binod Kumar Pasayat and staged by Srushti Kalakar Kendra of Sambalpur in a folk drama festival organized by the Rourkela Cultural Academy. The play was based on the traditional Gauntia system once prevalent in



Western Odisha. Since the drama reflected local folk dance and the folk culture of Western Odisha, it deeply touched the audience.

This period marked the beginning of the golden age of Sambalpuri theatre. After the remarkable success of 'Ukhi' in the Rourkela drama competition, Sambalpuri drama developed into a full-fledged movement. Following 'Ukhi' (1981), several important dramas appeared, including 'Bhukha' (1983), 'Sasemira' (1983), 'Hirakhandara Abhishapta Hira' (1984), 'Samudra', 'Harigale Sarigala', 'Udla Patar Budla Danga' (1984), 'Bhutiari Hatia' (1985), and 'Sarmangala'. Important playwrights of this period included Vinod Kumar Pashayat, Prasanna Kumar Sahu, Mangalu Charan Biswal, and Bipin Bihari Das. Eminent directors such as Rajendra Prasad Panda, Shankar Prasad Nayak, Panchanan Mishra, Prasanna Kumar Sahu, and Dr. Dwarika Nath Nayak played major roles in bringing these plays to life on stage. Organizations like 'Srushti', 'Bahumukhi Shram Mangal Kendra', 'Srujani', 'Pandit Laxmi Narayan Cultural Association', 'Dharmata', and 'Sambalpur Kala Kendra' etc carried the responsibility of producing these dramas.

By the 1990s, the Sambalpuri theatre movement became even more dynamic. Significant changes were visible in both the artistic and technical aspects of drama. The quality improved steadily. Playwrights introduced changes in plot, construction, dialogues, conflict, dramatic movement, message, and symbolism. Directors experimented with lighting, stagecraft, and background music. Greater emphasis was placed on realism and balanced expression in acting. As a result, Sambalpuri drama gained greater artistic richness. Plays such as 'Mankad Khaye Kankad Kasi', 'Amba', 'Gadhara Katha', 'Upasira Chithi', 'Baa', 'Gha', 'Kleeba', 'Srushti', 'Pashu', 'Hajla Fagun', 'Banaguda', 'Bhumisuta', and 'Sati' etc became excellent examples of this artistic maturity.

Many talented young playwrights and directors contributed significantly to Sambalpuri theatre during and after the 1990s. Among them were Kesh Ranjan Pradhan, Ravi Ranjan Pradhan, Bajendra Nayak, Satya Ranjan Behera, Pradeep Bhol, Ashok Bahidar, Subash Pradhan, and Ashish Sonar etc.

### **National Recognition**

After establishing a distinct identity in state-level drama competitions, Sambalpuri drama began its journey at the national level. Many Sambalpuri plays won recognition in all-India competitions and helped the language gain prestige. Plays such as 'Samudra', 'Sasemira', 'Dadara Darpan', 'Sarmangala', 'Hajla Fagun', 'Srushti Pashu', 'Sati', 'Kleeba', 'Gha', 'Amba', 'Singhasan', and 'Gadhara Katha' etc left strong impressions in national theatre festivals and competitions.



On 17 January 1983, the play ‘Sasemira’, written by Dr. Prasanna Sahu and directed by Shankar Prasad Nayak, was staged by Bahumukhi Shram Mangal Kendra at the All-India Multilingual Drama Competition organized by Allahabad Natya Sangha. It became the first Sambalpuri competitive drama to participate at the national level. For their performances in this play, Dr. Panchanan Mishra and Kumari Pushpanjali Behera won the Best Actor and Best Actress awards respectively at the national level. Later the play ‘Samudra’ (1984) also received recognition in the same competition. Dr. Panchanan Mishra won the Best Actor award for the third consecutive time through his performance in this drama.

Apart from competitions, Sambalpuri dramas were also invited to various regional and national theatre festivals. For example, ‘Hajla Fagun’ was performed at the Folk Drama Festival organized by the Department of Culture of the Bihar Government at Tata in 2000, and again at the All-India Theatre Festival organized jointly by Utkal Rangamanch Trust and the Tourism Department of Odisha Government in Bhubaneswar in 2002. Similarly, ‘Amba’ participated as an Indian play in the International Theatre Festival organized by Utkal Yuva Sanskritik Sangha at Cuttack.

Recognition at the state and national levels strengthened the Sambalpuri theatre movement. New playwrights, actors, directors, theatre groups, and organizations emerged. Drama competitions exclusively devoted to Sambalpuri plays began to be organized in various places. In 1997, Swara and Yuva Udayan jointly organized the first ‘Bir Surendra Sai State-Level Sambalpuri Drama Competition’ at Aranyaka Stage in Sambalpur. This became the first exclusive Sambalpuri drama competition in Odisha. Inspired by the success of this competition, many more Sambalpuri theatre festivals and competitions were organized across Western Odisha including ‘Srujani Mahotsav’ of Jharsuguda, ‘Kosli Natabadi’ of Balangir, and programs organized by Utkal Gaurav Kalakar Sangha and other cultural organizations.

### **Role of Radio and Television**

All India Radio and Doordarshan also played major roles in the development of Sambalpuri theatre. Radio adaptations of stage play such as ‘Bhukha’, ‘Ukhi’, ‘Sat Gati’, ‘Burti’, ‘Sati’, ‘Ulta’, ‘Purthi’, and ‘Hajla Fagun’ were broadcast by All India Radio.

The radio play ‘Bagh’, written by Satya Ranjan Behera, became the first Sambalpuri radio drama to receive a national award. In 2002, it was translated into all Indian languages and simultaneously broadcast from radio stations across the country.



Doordarshan also contributed significantly. In 2005, the Bhawanipatna Doordarshan Centre produced the Sambalpuri teleplay ‘Mignina’, which won first prize at the National Doordarshan Awards. In 2009, the Sambalpur Doordarshan production ‘Alajhat’, written by Nakul Badi, won first place in the national competition. Another Sambalpuri play, ‘Bhalu’, participated in the Doordarshan awards competition in 2010.

Akashvani Sambalpur further enriched Sambalpuri theatre by producing the 26-episode radio serial ‘Kathani’, based on folk tales collected from villages of Western Odisha. Produced by Muralidhar Panda and based on stories collected by Satya Ranjan Behera, this became the first long-running Sambalpuri radio drama serial.

### **Sambalpuri/Kosli Drama and Cinema**

Renowned Odia filmmaker Sabyasachi Mahapatra adapted Mangalu Charan Biswal’s play ‘Bhukha’ into a feature film of the same name. This became the first full-length Sambalpuri film and achieved international recognition and awards. It was also the first Sambalpuri film adapted directly from a popular stage drama.

Sambalpuri theatre has also undergone various experimental developments. The number of characters in plays gradually reduced from large casts to two-character and even one-character plays. Examples include Dr. Dwarika Nath Nayak’s ‘Tume Achha Bali’ and ‘Kete Dura Mora Akasha’, Ashish Sonar’s ‘Simna Kanthi and ‘Palata Bagh’, and Satya Ranjan Behera’s ‘Mui Karna Kahuchhen’. These experiments made performances easier in distant places without reducing artistic quality.

A remarkable example was ‘Palata Bagh’, staged in Bihar in 2009 by Shri Cultural Association, Sambalpur, during the All-India Multilingual Drama Competition ‘Anga Natya jangya’. The production involved only four members, including two performers and two backstage technicians, yet won seven awards.

On the other hand, Pradeep Bhol’s play ‘Mau’ became famous for its massive scale staged in Sundargarh in April 2011. The play involved 100 performers on a huge stage of 1100 square feet, along with another 100 people working backstage. ‘Mau’ entered the Limca Book of Records as the first Sambalpuri play performed by such a large number of artists.

Sambalpuri theatre has evolved continuously through experimentation in stage decoration, lighting, music, characterization, and themes. Full-length dramas of over two hours gradually



transformed into shorter one-hour plays suitable for competitions. Playwrights also moved beyond social themes and began exploring historical and mythological subjects. Satya Ranjan Behera's 'Mui Karna Kahuchhen' and Kesh Ranjan Pradhan's 'Amba' are major examples. The play 'Amba', staged in the first Bir Surendra Sai sambalpuri drama competition in 1997, was performed entirely by female actors and became the first all-women Sambalpuri play.

Sambalpuri dramatic literature has been enriched by the publication of many plays. After the publication of Atal Bihari Panda's 'Fata Kapal' in 1974, numerous Sambalpuri plays such as 'Bhains Age Nag Dhuni', 'Lalo', 'Gachha', 'Ukhi', 'Bhukha', 'Sasemira', 'Samudra', 'Hirakhandara Abhishapta Hira', 'Nimak Haram', 'Ulta Purthi', 'Mankad Khaye Kankad Kasi', 'Tume Achha Bali', 'Rakata', and 'Amba' were published. However, compared to the number of plays staged, relatively few were published in book form.

Sambalpuri drama has won a long list of awards and honors in theatre, radio, television, and cinema. Plays such as 'Sasemira', 'Samudra', 'Bhukha', 'Ukhi', 'Singhasan', 'Keda', 'Saarp Sidi', 'Baa', 'Gha', and 'Simna Kanthi' etc received notable recognition. Playwrights and directors like Vinod Pashayat, Dr. Panchanan Mishra, Pushpanjali Behera, Mangalu Charan Biswal, Rajendra Prasad Panda, Bipin Bihari Das, Satya Ranjan Behera, Subash Pradhan, Ashish Sonar, Ashok Bahidar, and Kesh Ranjan Pradhan contributed immensely to this success.

Yet awards alone cannot determine the greatness of Sambalpuri drama. The growing popularity, audience admiration, and increasing demand for Sambalpuri Kosli theatre prove its true success. Sambalpuri plays have been performed and appreciated in prestigious theatre festivals organized by Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi and other cultural institutions. In 1993, the play 'Parlin', written by Bhaskar Chandra Mahapatra and directed by Lala Biren Ray, was staged at the National Theatre Festival 'Natya Samaroh-93' in Jamshedpur. In 2007, plays such as 'Mayet Maa' by Parameswar Munda and another play by Subash Chandra Pradhan were highly appreciated at the Rang Pratibha Festival organized in Bhubaneswar.

Since the 1980s, many young playwrights have entered the field of Sambalpuri theatre and achieved remarkable success by adopting innovative ideas and creative approaches. Among them are Bajendra Nayak, Satya Ranjan Behera, Ashish Sonar, Prashant Majhi, Kesh Ranjan Pradhan, Pradeep Kumar Bhol, Nakul Badi, Subash Chandra Pradhan, Ashwini Panda, and Ashok Bohidar etc.



From its beginning until today, Sambalpuri Kosli theatre has progressed through the dedicated efforts of many playwrights, directors, actors, and cultural organizations. Numerous celebrated dramas have strengthened the foundation of Sambalpuri theatre and enriched Indian regional drama as a whole. Though many important playwrights and works may still remain outside this discussion due to lack of information, their contributions to Sambalpuri theatre remain equally valuable and significant.

## **Development of Sambalpuri/Kosali Drama**

### **Playwrights and Their Major Works**

The development of Sambalpuri/Kosli drama has been enriched by the contribution of many distinguished playwrights and their remarkable dramatic works.

- Binod Pashayat wrote plays such as ‘Ukhi’, ‘Alar’, ‘Mui Nai Maren’, ‘Nuakhai’, ‘Budigala God Tal Ke Tal Ke’, ‘Lita’, and ‘Mahabharatar Ched Li Parba’ etc.
- Mangalu Charan Biswal authored ‘Bhukha’, ‘Udala Patar Budila Danga’, ‘Bhutiari Hatari’, ‘Ulgulan’, ‘Dadara Darpan’, ‘Sundar Sae’, and ‘Maa Samalei’ etc.
- Bajedra Nayak composed plays including ‘Burati’, ‘Enta Enta Katha’, ‘Sarag Ke sidhi’, ‘Mankad Khae Kankad Kashi’, ‘Bhalu Natakare Bajai Baja’, ‘Bela Thauthau Dekh Bhai Dekh’, ‘Ulta Purthi’, ‘Suna’, and ‘Niaan’ etc.
- Satya Ranjan Behera wrote ‘Jhau’, ‘Sati’, ‘Pashu’, ‘Kleeba’, ‘Bhalu’, ‘Bagh’, ‘Hajala Fagun’, ‘Mui Karna Kahuchhen’, and ‘Sanskar’ etc.
- Prasanna Sahu created ‘Sasemira’, ‘Samudra’, and ‘Hirakhandara Abhishapta Hira’ etc.
- Panchanan Mishra contributed works like ‘Enta Enta Katha’, ‘Bap Re Bap’, ‘Ganthala Jura’, ‘Hak’, ‘Parab’, ‘Moksha ra Sandhan Thi’, ‘Jokar’, ‘Dhania Lang Chhat’, and ‘Kahake Kahema’ etc.
- Kesh Ranjan Pradhan authored ‘Dhuda Chedau Budha’, ‘Asura’, ‘Gadhara Katha’, ‘Nagnadi’, ‘Raematir Baer’, ‘Lengda Raja’, ‘Kuili Kuili Kiye Raja’, ‘Gaon’, ‘Amba’, ‘Ghati’, ‘Au Thare Bhagyabati’, and ‘Dhan Phul’ etc.
- Bipin Bihari Das wrote ‘Saramangala’, ‘Ghub Kudu’, ‘Khejura Kanta’, and ‘Kaenre Ghae’ etc.
- Ashok Bahidar composed ‘Pushpapuni’, ‘Ajira Khabar’, ‘Thik Dasha Baje’, ‘Baa’, and ‘Gha’ etc.



- Subas Chandra Pradhan created numerous plays including ‘Rakata’, ‘Patangi’, ‘Tor Kiria’, ‘Bhat Muthe’, ‘Parab’, ‘Dangar’, ‘Abhimanyu’, ‘Bap Re Bap’, ‘Dibiri’, ‘Kapata’, ‘Jhaenre’, ‘Dudum’, ‘Lal Paen’, ‘Budhia Dada’, ‘Bhuk’, ‘Mar Ghichi Kari Chap Ko Lotho’, ‘Fer Samiya Asichhe’, ‘Yam Darbar’, and ‘Maha Adua Hela’ etc.
- Pradeep Bhol authored ‘Dumer Phul’, ‘Bhaji Shag’, ‘Baetha’, ‘Kana Mathia’, ‘Kurei Phular Katha’, ‘Bhumisuta’, and ‘Mau’ etc.
- Netra Nanda Barik wrote ‘Bap Puo’, ‘Dhundukudu’, and ‘Chup Ra’ etc.
- Ghanshyam Mahapatra created ‘Nistar’ and ‘Jiban Thile Jib Ka’ etc.
- Ashwini Panda wrote ‘Haribal’ and ‘Makaddama’ etc.
- Bablu Bag authored ‘Nimak Haram Jati’, ‘As Kiye Neba Deshar Ke Thika’, ‘Hak’, and ‘Gaon’ etc.
- Rabi Ranjan Pradhan wrote ‘Upasira Chithi’ and ‘Gupa Gundala Letha’ etc.
- Bhavani Shankar Pradhan created ‘Shishi Aur Lal Pan’ and ‘Baetha’ etc.
- Prashant Majhi authored ‘Jharaphul’, ‘Kal’, ‘Sarga Narka’, ‘Aghat’, and ‘Ram Raez’ etc.
- Nakul Badi wrote ‘Alajhat’ and ‘Rabiakhia’ etc.
- Akur Chand composed ‘Nuakhai Gute Garib Ghare’, ‘Hak’, and ‘Bhanga Danga’ etc.
- Deepak Panda authored ‘Sangram’, ‘Ghuda Khad Bada Khad Bada’, and ‘Shakuntala’ etc.
- Badrinarayan Mishra wrote ‘Makada Biha’, ‘Maanra Dak’, and ‘Nijara Hate Sabu’ etc.
- Dwarikanath Nayak created ‘Bhur Kuti’, ‘Phir La Fagun’, ‘Jiban’, ‘Nua Janam’, and ‘Sebati’ etc.
- Dhanapati Mahapatra authored ‘Mashan Pada’, ‘Akal’, and ‘Sendur’ etc.
- Santosh Pradhan wrote ‘Fata Maet’, ‘Shukha Akash’, ‘Eka Beusa’, ‘Thalathal’, and ‘Banaphul’ etc.

### **Dramatic Organizations and Their Contributions**

The theatre organizations of Western Odisha have played a significant role in the promotion, production, and development of Sambalpuri Kosali drama. Among the prominent organizations are:



- ‘Srushti’, ‘Swara’, ‘Kakhaga’, ‘Dharmatma Bahu Shram Mangal Kendra’, ‘Yuba Udayan’, ‘Chetana Natya Anusthan’, ‘Adrishya Natya Ashram’, ‘Mancha Nayak’, and Shree Cultural Association of Sambalpur etc;
- ‘Lu’ and ‘Abarni Guda Natya Sansad’ of Padampur;
- ‘Bhumika and Milita Kalakar Sangha’ of Balangir;
- ‘Ra Natua Dera’ of Bargarh;
- ‘Moon Light’ Voluntary Organization of Bhatli;
- ‘Hindalco Club’ of Hirakud;
- ‘Srujani Paribar’ of Jharsuguda;
- ‘Ame Kalakar’ and ‘SDA Mirror Theatre’ of Belpahar;
- ‘Darpan’ of Barpali;
- ‘Natya Kala’ of Deogarh;
- ‘Jagaran’ of Kolkata;
- ‘Titilagarh Kala Parishad’ of Titilagarh;
- ‘Mahanadi Sahitya Sansad’ of Sonapur;
- ‘Mahabir Cultural Organization’ of Bhawanipatna;
- ‘Nabajiban’ of Sundargarh;
- ‘Spandan’ of Rourkela
- ‘Sureswari Natya Sansad’ of Burla.

These organizations have continuously contributed to the growth of Sambalpuri Kosali drama by organizing drama competitions, producing plays, and encouraging theatrical performances.



## **Present Condition and Challenges of Sambalpuri /Kosali Drama**

For more than fifty years, Sambalpuri Kosali drama has progressed rapidly and established a strong cultural identity. However, several shortcomings are still noticeable.

Earlier, full-length multi-act dramas such as ‘Gauntia Babu’ by the Mishra brothers, ‘Fata Kapal’ by Atal Bihari Panda, ‘Len Jha Tara’, and ‘Ukhi’ by Binod Pashayat enriched the theatre tradition. Today, however, the number of such full-length dramas has significantly declined.

Modern Sambalpuri dramas are generally limited to one-hour performances and are mostly written according to the fixed rules of drama competitions. Only occasionally are plays based on mythological or historical themes produced. Most dramas today are created primarily to impress competition judges rather than to satisfy audiences.

As a result, many new playwrights and directors are becoming more interested in prize-oriented experimental dramas, which are often difficult for ordinary audiences to understand. This tendency may eventually harm creativity and originality in theatre. Some dramatists believe that it is enough if a play impresses the judges, regardless of whether the audience appreciates it or not. Such an attitude can become dangerous because, in the past, excessively obscure Odia experimental dramas had distanced audiences from the stage. Sambalpuri Kosali drama must avoid facing a similar crisis.

Whether performed in competitions or public shows, the ultimate objective of drama should always be the audience. Only if audiences remain connected to the theatre can the future of Sambalpuri Kosali drama remain secure.

### **Need for Permanent Theatre Infrastructure**

When Sambalpuri drama was gradually establishing its identity, performances were mostly staged in amateur theatres or in school and college auditoriums. Even today, the lack of permanent theatres in Western Odisha remains a major obstacle to regular dramatic performances.

In the present time, theatre production requires considerable time, labour, and financial investment. Therefore, the construction of permanent theatre halls similar to Rabindra Mandap of Bhubaneswar is highly necessary for the further development and prosperity of Sambalpuri Kosali drama across Western Odisha.



## Conclusion

Sambalpuri, or Kosli, drama stands as a powerful and enduring expression of the cultural identity of Western Odisha. Its journey from indigenous folk and ritual performances to a structured modern theatrical tradition reflects the creative resilience of the people of the region. Rooted in forms such as *Dhanuyatra*, *Rasleela*, *Pala*, and *Danda Nata*, Sambalpuri drama has successfully transformed local narratives, music, and dialect into a vibrant medium of artistic and social expression.

Over time, the contributions of playwrights, actors, directors, and cultural organizations have expanded the scope and recognition of Kosli theatre. By addressing issues such as social inequality, migration, gender relations, and regional identity, Sambalpuri drama has evolved beyond mere entertainment to become a meaningful instrument of public reflection and social awareness. The growing influence of print media, radio, television, and digital platforms has further strengthened its reach and relevance among contemporary audiences.

The evolution of Sambalpuri drama demonstrates a remarkable balance between tradition and innovation. While preserving the linguistic richness, folk aesthetics, and cultural memory of Western Odisha, it has continually adapted to changing artistic practices and social realities. This adaptability ensures that Sambalpuri/Kosli theatre remains both historically significant and artistically vibrant.

In conclusion, Sambalpuri drama is not only a theatrical form but also a living cultural archive that embodies the collective experiences, aspirations, and identity of the Kosli-speaking community. Its continued development is essential for safeguarding regional heritage and enriching the broader landscape of Indian theatre.

## Acknowledgement

The completion of this study on the evolution and development of Sambalpuri/Kosali drama has been possible through the inspiration, support, and contributions of many individuals, playwrights, theatre artists, and cultural organizations associated with the rich theatrical tradition of Western Odisha.

I express my sincere gratitude to all the eminent dramatists, directors, actors, and researchers whose creative works and literary contributions have enriched Sambalpuri theatre over the decades. Special acknowledgment is extended to pioneers such as Atal Bihari Panda, Panchanan Mishra, Prasanna Kumar Sahu, Mangalu Charan Biswal, Satya Ranjan Behera, and many other playwrights and theatre practitioners whose dedication strengthened the foundation of Sambalpuri/Kosali drama.



I also acknowledge the invaluable role played by cultural organizations, theatre groups, All India Radio, and Doordarshan in promoting Sambalpuri theatre through stage performances, radio dramas, teleplays, competitions, and festivals. Their continuous efforts have preserved and popularized the dramatic heritage of Western Odisha at regional, state, national, and international levels.

Finally, I express heartfelt gratitude to all scholars, audiences, and lovers of Sambalpuri culture whose encouragement and appreciation continue to inspire the growth and preservation of Sambalpuri/Kosali dramatic literature and performance traditions.

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