

# ART & ARCHAEOLOGY OF EASTERN INDIA & ADJOINING REGIONS

RECENT PERSPECTIVES  
(ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROF. PRADEEP KUMAR BEHERA)

Complimentary Copy

EDITORS

Sakir Hussain & Subodha Mendaly



SHARADA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
DELHI

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, without written permission of the publisher/editors.

The responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached is entirely that of the contributors and the editors and the publisher takes no responsibility.

*First Published 2023*

© Sakir Hussain (b. 1987) & Subodha Mendaly (b. 1988)

ISBN: 978-93-83221-49-3

₹ 5500

## Complimentary Copy

*Published by*

SHARADA PUBLISHING HOUSE

111, Vidya Vihar Apartment

Sector-9, Rohini, Delhi-110 085 (INDIA)

Ph.: +91-11-4702 6210 (O), +91-9899028954 (M)

E-mail : bansal\_sph@rediffmail.com  
books@sharadabooks.com

Website : www.sharadabooks.com

*Printed at*

Delhi

# 15

## SUN-WORSHIP IN NORTH ODISHA: AN ICONOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

---

Arabinda Bose

### **Abstract**

From very ancient time the tradition of Sun-worship in Odisha has been practised. A detailed study of several inscriptions and monumental architectures across the state suggest that Sun-worship was popular among different royal dynasties in Odisha. Being an important region of Sun worship, Odisha has several Sun images of different types having conventionality with the details given in many sacred texts. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to highlight the evidence of Sun-worship from selected sites of north Odisha.

### **Introduction**

In the religious history of mankind, the Sun-worship occupies a prominent place (Srivastava 1972; Nagar 1995). The process of development of the Sun worship from a mere symbol to an anthropomorphic figure can be recorded from several

literary and archaeological sources (Srivastava 1972: 19-339). Even in ancient civilizations like Egypt and Mesopotamia, Sun was considered as the main divine being. The Indo-European character of sun worship is also seen in the conception of the solar deity, drawn in his carriage, generally by four white horses, common to many Indo-European peoples, and recurring in Indo-Iranian, Greco-Roman, and Scandinavian mythology. In India, one can trace the origin of Sun-worship to the prehistoric period (Srivastava 1972: 20-23). Although several literary references are found in the Vedic and post-Vedic texts regarding sun worship but the earliest anthropomorphic representations of the Sun has noticed on a terracotta circular disc dating back to the Mauryan period from Patna in Bihar (Singh 1935: 82), where Sun-god is mounted on a chariot drawn by four horses. Occurrences of other early figures of Sun have been recorded from Chandraketugarh (Dasgupta 1959: 46), from a medallion of Bharhut (Nagar 1995: 151) and a railing of Bodhgaya Stupa (Srivastava 1972: 294-95), and from Bhaja cave (Banerjea 1956: 432-33). Subsequently, many shrines associated with the Sun-worship were constructed particularly across the northern part of the subcontinent. Moreover, the text like *Brihat Samhita* deals with detailed instructions concerning the installation of Sun images (Gupte 1980: 52). The worshippers of the Sun-god are known as Sauras.

### **Sun-worship in Odisha**

From very ancient time the tradition of Sun-worship in Odisha has been practised, which reached its glorious climax in the form of a monumental Sun temple at Konark (Behera and Donaldson 2002; Bedbak 2012; Sahu 2012: 25-32, 2014). The concept of Sun-worship in Odisha seems to have had multiple layers of influence from different sources since pre-historic times. There is enough evidence to consider an indigenous tradition of Sun-worship, which probably preceded the Vedic Sun-gods, among the primitive tribes of Odisha (Sahu 2012: 30-31). A detailed study of several inscriptions and monumental architectures across the state suggest that Sun-worship was popular among different royal dynasties in Odisha (Sahu 2012), viz. the Matharas, the Nalas, the Sarabhapuriya the Sailodbhavas, the Bhanjas of Khijinga *mandala*, the Somavamsi, and the Gangas. Being an important region of Sun worship, Odisha has many Sun images of different types having conventionality with the details given in many sacred texts (Sahu 2011: 28-34). Some of these images even throw fresh light on the iconographic features of the deity. At present, the great temple of Konark, the beautiful Sun temple at Palia in the district of Bhadrak and



the temple at Buguda in Ganjam district are the only three known examples of Sun monuments in Odisha (Bedbak 2012; Sahu 2014).

### Sun Images of North Odisha

A Sun image in the mutilated condition is found leaning against the platform of the Patanamangala temple at Chharapada in the district of Bhadrak is considered to be one of the earliest examples of Sun image in northern Odisha (Bedbak 2012; Sahu 2014). The figure bears all the characteristics of the early Sun image. The figure stands in *samabhanga* pose and wears a heavy tunic that hangs up to his ankles and heavy boots. All the earlier Sun images represented in standing or seated pose without any chariot or attendant figures. He holds the stalk of a full-blown lotus in each hand and assumes a rigid frontal pose, either *samabhanga* or *padmasana*. He is typically dressed in a heavy, northern type tunic and wears a truncated crown. A scarf frequently hangs from his shoulders and his feet are covered with boots. Except for one example on the Madhukeswara, which has four arms, most of the figures have only two arms. A brief discussion has been made below on selected sites from where evidence of Sun-worship is recorded.

#### Khiching

The two images of Sun preserved in the site museum of Khiching are the masterpieces of Saura cult images. N.N. Vasu refers to these images which point out the worship of the Sun-god in the Khijinga Mandala. Out of the two images preserved in the museum, one is a seated image which is a rare variety of its kind in Odisha. The god sits in *Padmasana* on a doubled petalled lotus throne with full blossomed lotuses in two hands. The god is ornamented with *kiritamukuta*, *kundala* and *hara* and is flanked by Aruna, the charioteer with seven horses. Another figure of Sun-god is in standing posture. The image is accompanied by his charioteer Aruna, attendants Danda on the left and Pingala on the right. The figures of Sun-god at Puranagaon, Kanisahi and Domagandara (Balasore district) resemble the Khijinga sculptures in broad outlines of their iconography.

#### Dumuria

A seated Sun image at the village Dumuria is found about 5 km away from Pratapura. The only lower portion of the image is intact (Fig. 15.1). On the lower pedestal, the seven spirited horses are depicted with charioteer Aruna, who is flanked

by the two attendants namely Usha and Pratyusha. The deity is seated on *vishwapadma* wearing boots. In another broken image of Sun is found from Ranibandha but only seven horses and charioteer Aruna figure are intact.

### ***Kaupur***

Kaupur village is located twelve kilometers northwest of Bhadrak on the bank of the River Salandi. Recent explorations revealed many sculptures and shrines of Shaivism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Sun-cult from the village and nearby areas, these remains are spanning in date from the seventh to thirteenth century. Among these iconographic remains, two beautiful images of Sun-god along with outer sculptures in the modern Viranchi-Narayana temple deserve to mention here. Traces of the original temple are not available, except the *asthana* (platform). Later on, the dilapidated brick temple has been renovated by the villagers. Among the two Sun images, one is a gigantic image standing on a chariot drawn by seven spirited horses. The portion below his thigh is broken. His head is decorated with long *kiritamukha* and he holds two lotus flowers in his hands. The gatekeeper Danda is carved with a sword in his hand and Pingala with Pen and inkpot in his hands. Aruna the charioteer is engaged in driving the horses with reins in her hands. They are well ornamented. The image can be assigned to the 7th-8th century and is in a good state of preservation. The second image of the Sun is identical to the first one except for a few differences. Here Sun is also carved in standing position on a chariot drawn by seven spirited horses. His charioteer Aruna and his two gatekeepers Danda and Pingala are carved in their usual position. It is measuring about 3 feet in height and 2 feet in breadth. It is also in a good state of preservation and probably dated to the eighth century.

### ***Trisalia***

The village Trisalia is situated in the close neighbourhood of Agarpara. A beautiful image of Sun-god along with some Shaivite and Vaishnavite sculptures of the Ganga and Gajapati period are found. The image of the Sun is measured about 12 x 93 and installed on an ancient ruined *asthana* (platform) made of bricks. He holds two lotus flowers in his two hands and is mounted on a chariot drawn by seven spirited horses. He is flanked by two gatekeepers Danda and Pingala with their usual attributes. The sculpture is small in size but very beautifully carved. The image is in a good state of preservation.



***Narendrapur***

Another image of the Sun is placed inside the campus of Patna Mangala temple at Narendrapur. It is a standing image with an attendant. His head is decorated with *jatamukuta* and some strands of his hair are fallen up to his shoulder, the right hand is broken from the wrist while his left-hand holds a *danda*. His face is mutilated that loses its artistic beauty. On the left side, his attendant is stand in *tribhanga* pose with *danda* holding in his right hand. It may be identified as his gatekeeper Danda as a stick is his identical marker.

***Viranchi Narayana Temple at Palia***

Palia is a small village situated about 15 km to the southeast of Bhadrak town which was a flourishing centre of Shiva and Sun worship. The village is famous for the Viranchi Narayana temple, dedicated to the Sun-god (Viranchi-Narayana). The original temple was broken and the present temple was reconstructed by the local Zamindar Ray Bahadur Bhuiyan Bhaskar Chandra Mohapatra. Two doorjambs of the eastern side of the temple are seemed to be originally belonging to a Shiva temple. The sculptures and carvings on the doorjambs have resemblances with the Shiva temples of Bhubaneswar and Khiching of the 10th-11th century.

The presiding deity of the temple is the Sun-god popularly known as Viranchi Narayana — the deity of light and lustre. The uniqueness of the image of Sun-god lies in the fact that it is constituted of a square sized stone slightly tapering towards the top are carved with four images of Sun god in relief on the four sides of the slab. The image holds two lotuses in two hands as usual and standing on chariots drawn by seven horses on each side.

The most interesting thing is the provision of four doors facing in all directions as per the four faces of God Viranchi Narayana installed in the temple. The other antiquities of the place are three detached images loosely placed in the sanctum of the temple. They are made of chlorite stone with the unusual iconographic and stylistic feature. The first one is a ten-armed Mahishamardini Durga accomplished with her usual attributes which are engaged in killing the demon. The other two images inside the temple are Govardhandhari Krishna and Anantasayi Vishnu lying on the coils of *Ananta sesha*. Although the present temple was constructed on the ruins of the original one but the sculptural motifs of the temple can be dated to the thirteenth century.

There is a traditional local legend connected with this place (Palia). In the *Dwapara* age, the people were disappointed by the torture of Samba, the son of Krishna. So that he was cursed and became paralyzed in the disease of leprosy. As per the advice of the crater Brahma, Samba settled at this place for the worship of Sun-god to get recovery from the disease. To please the Sun-god, he erected a temple for the worship of the Sun. There is a tradition that is continuing today that people offer the umbrella made of flowers to God Viranchi Narayana to get relief from the disease of leprosy. The main festival of Lord Viranchi Narayana is known as *Gunduni* festival. It is celebrated on the day of *Makara Sankranti* every year. During this festival, people from distant places are come to the temple for offering their homage to the God for the fulfillment of their desires. At that time the leprosy patients are doing meditation and offer flower umbrellas to Sun-god for their healing from the disease. This type of tradition is very rare in Odisha. *Samba Dashami* is also another important festival in this village. Special rituals have been performed on days of *Maga Saptami*, *Aghira Purnami* and *Vishuba Sankranti*.

### ***Shergada***

The village Shergada, rich in archaeological heritage is situated at a distance of about 2 km away from Balasore, which was famous for Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Sun-worship and Buddhism in the medieval period. This village is also famous for the Khajuresvara group of temple. According to a legend, Khajuresvara Shiva Linga was installed here by Banasura-the legendary figure, besides, the other four Shiva Lingas around Balasore town were also enshrined. Among different sculptures, there are four Sun images of different dimensions, the highest one being 22 x 12 in size, are carved in chlorite stone (Fig. 15.2). All these images are found carved in the same posture and resemble *dhyana* as described in the *Shilpa Shastra* (Shukla 1967). The images are standing on a chariot drawn by seven spirited horses. Aruna, the divine charioteer is found seated in the front, and Chaya and Maya the two legendary consorts of the Sun-God display a full-blown lotus pedestal.

### ***Ada***

There is an image of the Sun inside the Narayana temple of village Ada along with other Brahmanical sculptures (Fig. 15.3A). The image is carved in his usual iconographic features with a very close resemblance to the Sun image of Kaupur.

Apart from this, Sun images are found at Kans, Ayodhya, Badasahi, Purangaon,



Vardhanpur, Soro, Kaptipada (Fig. 15.3B), Jalang (Fig. 15.3C-15.3D), etc. bearing the similar iconography.

### Concluding Remarks

The appearance of such a series of Sun images suggests that the cult-related to Sun-worship was one of the most vital segments of the Brahmanical faith in this part of Odisha. Odisha, being an important stronghold of Sun-worship has produced several Sun images of different types having conventionality with the instructions as given in various sacred texts. Some of them even throw new light on the iconic features of the deity. Instead of few conceptual variations, the basic iconographic features of the Sun remained the same in all the time. Moreover, systematic detailed documentation is required which will certainly provide valuable information relating to the distribution, various iconographic styles, and chronology of Sun-images in the study area.

### References

- Banerjea, J.N. (1956) *Development of Hindu Iconography*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta.
- Bedbak, S.R. (2012) *Sun Worship in Orissa*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Sambalpur: Sambalpur University.
- Behera, K.S. and T.E. Donaldson (2002) *Sculpture Masterpieces from Orissa: Style and Iconography*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Das, U.R. (2012) Antiquity of Sun Worship in Bhadrak District with Special Reference to Viranchi Narayana Temple at Palia, *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol. LIII (1): 163.
- Dasgupta, P.C. (1959) Early Terracotta from Chandraketugarh, *Lalit Kala* No. 6: 46.
- Gupte, R.S. (1980) *Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhist and Jains*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons.
- Nagar, S.L. (1995) *Surya and Sun Cult: In Indian Art, Culture, Literature and Thought*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Sahu, R.K. (2011) Sun Worship in Odisha, *Orissa Review*, Vol. LXIX (4): 25-32.
- Sahu, R.K. (2012) Iconography of Surya in the Temple Art of Odisha, *Orissa Review*, Vol. LXVIII (5): 28-34.
- Sahu, R.K. (2014) *Surya in Orissan Art: A Study of Art, Architecture, Iconography, and Religious Practices*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Bhubaneswar: Utkal University.

Shukla, D.N. (1967) *Shilpa Shastra*. Lucknow: Vastuvanmaya Prakashan.

Singh, B.P. (1935) Bharatiya Kala Ko Bihar Ki Den (Hindi). *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. III (2): 82-125.

Srivastava, V.C. (1972) *Sun Worship in Ancient India*. Allahabad: Indological Publication.



Fig. 15.1 Broken Sun image at Dumuria, Badashi



Fig. 15.2 Sun image at Khajureswar Temple, Sheragada





Fig. 15.3 (A) Sun image at Biranchinarayan Temple, Ada; (B) Sun image at Dhuni Temple, Kaptipada; and (C-D) Sun image at Chandi Temple, Jalanga