



Surya, Bhuliasikuan
Dist. Nuapada

Minor Gods in Sculptural Art of West Orissa



Surya, Kamsara-Majhipali
Dist. Sonepur

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One of the earliest iconographic description of Brahma is found in *Brhatsamhita*, in which he has been described as a four-faced god holding a ritual water-vessel *Kamandalu* in one of his hands (*Brahma kamandalukaras'-caturmukhah*). In the last part of the Utpala's commentary from Kasyapa, Brahma is described as four-faced having a staff (*Danda*), the hide of a black antelope and a ritual water vessel (*Brahma caturmukho dandi krsnajinakamandali*). The iconographic details of Brahma image have been found in the texts like *Amsumadbhedagama*, *Suprabhedagama*, *Silparatna*, *Visnupurana* and *Rupamandana* also. His hands are invariably four in number, the attributes in them being *Aksamala*, *Sruk*, *Sruva* and the *Vedas* etc. In early images, he is invariably shown without beard.

Although Brahma is assigned with the act of creation in the Hindu mythology and has been taken as the first member of the Brahmanical triad, his position in the Hindu pantheon is even inferior to that of any of the principal cult deities like Visnu, Surya, Siva, Durga and Ganesa. Therefore, the images of Brahma, found in very few places are of a subsidiary in character. In most of the Sasasayi Visnu images of the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa, Brahma is depicted to be seated on a full-blown lotus, the stalk of which issues from

the navel of the god Visnu, sleeping on the body of the serpent Sesha. In the center of the uppermost portion of the back-slab of a Uma-Mahesvara image, at present kept in the vestibule (*Antarala*) of the Indralath brick temple at Ranipur Jharial, the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Visnu and Siva in a sequence from left to right are carved, sitting on their respective mounts (*Vahanas*) Hamsa, Garuda and Nandi bull. A detached image of *Caturmukha* (four-faced) Brahma is found inside the premises of the Ramesvara Group of temples at Baud. It is a four-handed figure of Brahma, standing in the *Samabhanga* posture. In his uplifted proper left and right hands are *Pustaka* and *Sruk* respectively, while in his lower left and right hands are *Kamandalu* and *Aksamala*. A long garland, made of rosary beads is hanging from his neck upto the knee-level. He is wearing a broad band of necklace on his chest and also a *Yajnopavita* around his body. A *Dhoti*-type garment is covering his body-portion from the waist to the feet-level. Another *Uttariya*-type garment is strongly tied around his waist. A beautiful conical *Mukuta* fitted with many strings of beads in round and vertical arrangements is adorning his head. The central stripe of the *Dhoti* is decorated with floral motifs and the many-folded *Dhoti* make this garment very beautiful. His fourth face, which is on the back side is not visible in the



Sarasvati, Narla, Dist. Kalahandi

image. He is clean-shaven. This image is of the size of around two feet in height and one foot in breadth, and can be dated to circa 10th century A.D. iconographically.

The Vedic aspect of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and music is described in texts like *Visnudharmottara*, *Amsumabhedagama*, *Purvakaranagama* and *Rupamandana* etc. Like Brahma, the image of his consort west Sarasvati is even rarely found in Orissa. An image of Sarasvati is found in a *Parsvadevata* niche of the Siva temple at Narla in Kalahandi district. As the stone inscription of this temple records the name of the Ganga king Madana Mahadeva, who was ruling in the last part of the 12th century A.D., this image can be dated to that period also.

Although, usually in Siva temples, Parvati figure is housed in the northern *Parsvadevata* niche, here at Narla, Sarasvati is housed. It is a sculpture of the height of nearly eight inches and breadth of four inches. Goddess Sarasvati is seated in *Lalitasana* on a Visvapadma pedestal. Below her left folded leg, her *Vahana*, the Swan (*Hamsa*) is carved. She is two-handed, her right hand being in *Abhayamudra*, while in her left hand, she is holding a *Vina*.

In the two stone panels containing the figure of the Uma-Mahesvara, which were originally fitted to the *Dvaralalatavimba* of

the Kosalesvara temples, both at Patnagarh of Balangir district and Vaidyanath of Sonepur district, a seated lady holding a *Vina* in her hands is carved inside two pilaster designs.

In the both figures of the stone panels of Patnagarh and Vaidyanath, *Hamsa* (swan), the *Vahana* (vehicle) of goddess Sarasvati is absent, which might have occurred due to the callousness of the sculptor in depicting her image.

Another minor god with whom much importance is attached in the Hindu pantheon is Surya, who was either worshipped as an independent god or in a subsidiary shrine as one of the *Panchadevata* in a subsidiary shrine of the *Panchayatana* temple complex.

Surya, the visible celestial luminary, was being worshipped in India from very early times. The Vedas refer to him and his various aspects as *Savitra*, *Pusan*, *Bhaga*, *Vivasvat*, *Mitra*, *Aryaman* and *Visnu*. Surya was the most concrete of the solar deities, and Savitra, 'the stimulator of everything' (*Sarvasya Prasavita* - *Nirukta*, 10, 31) denoted his abstract qualities.

Mitra was an Indo-Iranian god. Aryaman was also an Indo-Iranian deity.



Varuna, Kosalesvara Temple, Patnagarh, Dist. Balangir



Surya, Siva Temple,
Kapilapur, Dist. Jharsuguda

Therefore in the Surya images, the god is depicted as wearing high boots upto the knee-level like the Iranian gods. Very peculiarly enough the *Sthanaka Yoga Narasimha* image of Narasinghna standing in a *Samabhanga* posture

is seen wearing high boots of the Iranian origin like that of Surya. Surya's connection with Visnu is well-known. But this might be the only Narasimha image in entire India wearing the high Iranian boots of Surya. It can be called Surya Narasimha. An exquisitely carved Viranchi Narayana image has been collected from village Salebhata in Balangir district by the Sambalpur University Museum authority also.

Independent standing Surya images are found in the Durga temple at Manomunda in Baud district, in the Siva temple at Panchgaon in Jharsuguda district, amidst temple ruins at Bhuliasikuan in Nuapada district and carved in one side of a square-shaped temple pillar, presently kept inside the *Jagamohana* of the Svapnesvara temple at Kamsara-Majhipali in Sonepur district. Another standing Surya image was found during excavation amidst temple ruins at Sauntpur in Balangir district during the State period in 1946, which has been shifted to the Sambalpur University Museum subsequently. The pedestal portion of the broken Surya image are found at Narsinghna in Bargarh district, Gandharadi in Baud district and Lalei in Sundargarh district. The only Surya image, seated in *Padmasana* is found as a loose sculpture, and at present kept inside the *Jagamohana* of the Siva temple at

Kapilapur in Jharsuguda district. In the pedestal portion of the standing Surya figures of Manomunda, Kamsara-Majhipali, Sauntpur and Panchgaon, as well as in the broken pedestals seven galloping horses pulling the chariot with Aruna as the charioteer are depicted, whereas in the cases of the Surya images at Bhulia Sikuan and Kapilapur, there are three and four horses on the pedestal respectively. Surya is also depicted as sitting in *Padmasana* in the first position on all the *Navagraha* slabs found fitted on the door lintels of many early temples.

The image of Surya (sun-god) enshrined in the Durga temple at Manomunda is worshipped as goddess Durga by the local villagers. It is a standing image of Surya (3'x1-1/2'). In both his raised hands he is holding stalks of lotus and has a *Kirita Mukuta* on his head. In both sides above his head are flying *Vidyadhara* couple with garland in hands. In his left and right sides are two standing female figures representing his wives, Rajni and Nikshubha. Seven front-faced horses in the galloping position are depicted on the pedestal. His charioteer Aruna with a whip in his right hand and the reins of the horses in his left hand is seen in between both legs of Surya, on the pedestal. Manomunda being a village just across the river Tel and situated on the opposite bank of Sonepur, it is presumed that this unique image of Surya might have been taken away by the villagers of Manomunda from Sonepur in the remote past.

From the Sonepur copper-plate charter of the mighty Somavamsi



Indra, Bahari Gopalji
Temple, Sonepur



Brahma, Ramesvara Temple Complex, Baud

king Mahabhavagupta Janmejaya, which was issued from Arama in his seventeenth regnal year, it is that the king donated Gettaikela village to the illustrious *Kamalavana Vanika Sangha*, who in turn bestowed the same village on the temples of Lord Kesava (Visnu) and Lord Aditya (Surya) for charity, oblation and offerings as well as for repairing wear and tear in the temples.

Now we get ample evidence of the existence of an early temple of Visnu at Sonepur from the loose sculptures of the Narasimha and Trivikrama incarnations of Visnu, at present kept in the *Jagamohana* of the Suvarnameru temple. The Surya image of the early temple is not found anywhere at Sonepur. Therefore, the Surya image of Manomunda might be the Surya image which was worshipped as the central deity in the temple of Aditya, of the Sonepur plates of Mahabhavagupta Janmejaya.

Inside the *Jagamohana* of the Siva temple at Kamsara - Majhipali, the broken base portion of one square-sized pillar is kept to the proper left of the *Sanctum* doorway. Four figures, namely those of a standing Nayika, Surya, dancing Ganesa and Uma-Mahesvara in *Sukhasana* are carved in all four sides of this pillar. The Nayika is standing in tribhanga with her right hand raised up and the left hand hanging in the *Katyavalambita* posture. A Ratikera scroll-work is carved as borders of this figure in all four sides. Surya is seen to

be standing in *Samabhanga*, holding the stems of two full-blown lotuses in both his raised hands. He is seen wearing a *Kiritamukuta* on his head and *Makarakundalas* in his ears. In both sides are two profiled female figures seen to be standing near his legs. They can be taken as his wives Rajni and Niskhubha. In the pedestal portion are carved seven horses with the diminutive figure of Aruna, the legless charioteer.

Another Surya image of utmost importance is kept near the Jagannath temple of the village Bhulia Sikuan, who is standing in *Samabhanga* holding two round lotus flowers in both his hands. He has a smiling countenance. A beautiful *Mukuta* is adorning his head. He is wearing long boots up to his knee-level. Two female figures are standing in both sides of his legs. Four horses instead of seven horses are depicted on the pedestal, which might be denoting four directions; east, west, north and south. In the central portion of the pedestal is his charioteer, the legless Aruna, who is depicted as front-faced, with both of his hands folded in obeisance. This sculpture is of the height of 30" and breadth of 18".

The Surya image is of the height of 18" and breadth of 15" approximately and depicts the two-handed Sun god standing in *Samabhanga* posture holding two full-blown lotus flowers in



Surya, Siva Temple, Panchgaon, Dist. Jharsuguda



Surya, Durga Temple,
Manomunda, Dist. Baud

both hands. Dandi (Yama) and Pingala (Agni), who are the door-keepers of Surya are sitting in both sides of the pedestal, while his charioteer the legless Aruna is sitting in the centre and seven running horses are carved on the pedestal.

Another important sculpture found here is the four-handed Surya, sitting in *Padmasana* and holding two full-bloomed lotus flowers in both of his lower hands while in the upper left and right hands are *Cakra* and *Kaumodaki Gada* (a kind of mace) respectively. As per iconography, it is the image of Aryaman, who is taken as one of the twelve forms of Surya (Adityas).

Besides Surya images, independent images of *Astha Dikpalas*, the guardians of eight directions like Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirriti, Varuna, Vayu, Kuvera and Isana are found in various temples.

Not a single Indra image has been discovered so far amidst loose sculptures or *Parsvadevatas* / *Avaranadevatas* of any of the early temple *in situ* or ruins. But in temples belonging to the later period images of Indra are found fitted in the *Parsvadevata* niches. In the southern side, in the truncated *Pidhamundi* design near the *Anuratha* portion of the *Uparajangha* in the vestibale (*Antarala*) corner of the Nilakanthesvara temple at Papadahandi, there are figures of Indra seated on the elephant and a goddess (most probably Indrani), also seated on the elephant. The

Nilakanthesvara temple belongs to the fourteenth century A.D.

Another four-handed Indra image, seated on the back of a profiled figure of his *Vahana* elephant is housed in a *Parsvadevata* niche of the Bahari Gopalji temple at Sonapur town. A broken image of Agni, of the height of around fifteen inches and breadth of eight inches, is found in the temple precinct of the Kapilesvaratemple at Charda in the Sonapur district. Flames of fire are carved behind his head. This four-handed image is standing in a *Tribhanga* posture.

A beautiful image of Varuna has been wrongly identified as *Dvarapala* by noted art historian Prof. Thomas E. Donaldson. It is a beautiful image, with an exquisitely carved head-gear having a *Kirtimukha* head in the centre of it. A semi-oval *Prabhavali* is behind his head. His right leg is broken, while the left one is firmly placed on the ground. He is wearing *Haras*, *Keyuras*, *Kankanas Katisutra* and *Yajnopavita* etc. His *Vahana Makara* (crocodile) is carved very distinctly in the proper right side, being depicted as descending to the pedestal. A youthful male, whose head is adorned by a *Mukuta* is sitting in *Lalitasana* on a high platform besides the left leg of Varuna on the pedestal. This image of Varuna is having the iconographic features of the sculptures of the Panduvamsi period, i.e. circa 8th century A.D.



Surya, Sauntpur. Now in
Sambalpur University
Museum

In the *Dharma* section of the Teresingha copper-plate grant of king Tustikara, belonging to the 5th-6th century A.D.



Agni, Kapilesvara Temple,
Charada, Dist. Sonepur

gods like Aditya (Surya), Hutasana (Agni) and Sulapani (Siva) have been prayed - *Adityo H u t a s a n a Purogamah / S u l a p a n i s c a Bhagavanabhinandati Bhumidam //*

Similarly in the copper-plate charters of the Bhanjas of Khinjali

Mandala and Somavamsis of Suvarnapura-Yayatinagara fame, belonging to the 8th-9th and 9th-11th centuries A.D. respectively, gods like Aditya (Surya), Varuna, Visnu, Brahma, Soma (Moon), Hutasana (Agni or fire) and Sulapani (Siva) have been prayed in the *Dharma* Section. - *Adityo Varuno Visnu Brahma Soma Hutasanah / Sulapanisca Bhagavan Abhinandati Bhumidam //*

It is proved from the mention of names of minor gods like Surya, Brahma, Candra, Varuna and Agni in the copper-plate charters belonging to the period from 8th to 11th centuries A.D. that their worship was extremely popular among the common populace. Even from the 5th-6th centuries A.D. the worship of Aditya (Sun) and Agni (Fire) gods was prevailing in the upper Mahanadi valley from the ruling period of the Parvatadvaraka dynasty. Solar eclipse was so auspicious that many land grants were given to the Brahmins to earn religious merits of king's parents as well as for himself and his family members by the kings of the Somavamsa who were ruling west Orissa in the 9th-10th centuries A.D. These are the reasons that images of minor gods are found amidst sculptures in the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa.

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