



Myths, Facts and Controversies Associated with the Sun Temple of Konark

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Analysing different texts appearing in journals, magazines, newspapers, books and epics, sculptural objects, visual references like old and new pictures, paintings, sketches, and the opinion of local residents of Konark and then applying personal judgement an effort has been made here through this article to clear the controversies, bust the myths, bring out the facts associated with the Sun Temple of Konark and also to differently define the two ruined temples located at the south-west corner of its compound.

When an object, alive or dead, an event or something comes under the limelight and its perception to the common people goes beyond their intellect then usually it gets shrouded with many myths created by the people around. Gradually these myths cover up the facts tightly from all sides and then, after some time, the common man starts believing in those myths. The case with the world famous Sun Temple of Konark is not any different. Even after 743 years of its construction by the legendary King Langula Narasingha Deva many controversies and myths about it are still doing rounds in different media. The controversies and myths are mostly about (A) the existence of the River Chandrabhaga and its location, (B) who built the present Sun Temple

and when, (C) whether the Sun God was ever worshipped in the temple or the temple collapsed before its completion, (D) the various legends associated with it, (E) the supposed Buddhist origin of the temple and (F) identification of the two now-ruined temples at the south-west corner of the complex.

(A) The Sun Temple at Konark was built close to the sea at the mouth of the River Chandrabhaga after filling its gorge with heavy and huge stone blocks. However, some scholars say that, at Konark the River Chandrabhaga did not exist at all and if it ever did, there was no need for the King to so painstakingly fill it up to build the temple when so much vacant land was available nearby and at various other important towns in his kingdom. The controversy arises as the River Chandrabhaga has dried up completely and vanished since long having no trace of it, not even of its dried up bed. Today it is, people say, represented only by a small pond near the seacoast. The sea has also receded almost three kilometres from its original location at the temple site. Now let us analyse certain important opinions of scholars expressed at different times.

A1. Bishan Swarup, the engineer in-charge of restoration work of Konark Temple carried out by the British-India government says that, the



River Chandrabhaga flowing in Maitreya Vana (Maitreya Forest), where Shamba, the cursed son of Lord Krishna observed a penance praying the Sun God, was not located in Konark; rather, it was the River Chandrabhaga (Chenab) in the Punjab. He thinks so as Dwaraka, the home of Krishna is closer to Chenab, and since Konark is situated on the sea beach it would not have been possible for a huge and deep forest like Maitreya Vana to have grown at such a sandy location.¹

A2. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, citing the instances described in many epics of different ages, says that the episode of Shamba happened at the bank of the River Chandrabhaga located in Maitreya Vana which was, in fact, the ancient name of Konark.²

A3. Karuna Sagar Behera mentions that, though Shamba Purana, an important text on Sun worship, does not specifically mention Konark; it tells the traditional story of Shamba and about erection of the first Sun temple at Mitravana on the bank of Chandrabhaga (Chenab) in the Punjab. However, in the interpolated chapters 42-43, it mentions that Tapovana is located on the shore of the salt ocean.³

Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra says Bishan Swarup is as wrong as can be. In the ancient age distance was not a criterion for the saints to choose a place for observing penance; they rather depended on the sanctity and the suitability of the place for their purpose.⁴ Again, Brahma Purana and other epics mention that Maitreya Vana was close to the sea. There is no seacoast in Punjab.⁵ Referring to Bishan Swarup's opinion regarding impossibility of a dense forest growing in a sandy location, even today we find a moderate forest named Balukhanda, a reserved forest as declared by the government, present in the area extending from Konark to Puri running along the beach.

Near Konark at the present village of Golara once existed a dense forest of the same name with a fort named Golara Garh inside, where, in the medieval period, the soldiers were living in hiding and taking commando training. Pandit Mishra states, in fact, the deep forest of Maitreya Vana, over a period of 4000 years, starting from the days of Shamba, gradually transformed itself to the contemporary township of Konark.⁶

Shamba Upakhya states since the mythological period of Shamba, Sun worship is continuing at Maitreya Vana on the bank of River Chandrabhaga. This fact has been repeatedly stated, though under different names for the place, in Brahma Purana, Skandha Purana, Prachi Mahatmya, Bhabishya Purana, Shamba Purana, Kapila Samhita, Madala Panji, Sarala Mahabharata and in Baya Chakada, a 73-page palm leaf document dealing with construction activity of the present Sun Temple in detail and believed to be of its contemporary period. It is not possible for all these epics and documents belonging to many different periods totally go wrong. Hence, we may safely assume that a river named Chandrabhaga was once flowing in Konark, i.e. the Maitreya Vana of the mythological period. Konark has also been identified as a place in Odra country by various scholars like the Arab geographers Abul Faraj (9th century) and Gardizi (11th century), Albiruni (11th century), Mitaksar (1080-1199 A.D.) and by P.V. Kane, the famous Indologist.⁷ Many legends point towards presence of large water bodies near the temple, like the legend about Dharmapada who jumped from the top of the temple into the sea to save the lives of 1200 craftsmen, about Goddess Ramachandi instructing Sibe Santara to fill up the gorge starting from the bank of the river, about the interaction of Kalapahada with Goddess Ramachandi and finally



the legend about the magnet placed atop the temple drawing towards it the ships sailing nearby. The visual evidences like the 1837 AD painting of James Fergusson,⁸ a 1890 AD photograph taken by William Henry Cornish that is displayed in the British Gallery and a very old sketch drawn on nine palm leaves preserved in Bharat Kala Bhawan of Banaras Hindu University that show water body in the background of the temple.⁹ Most importantly, apart from being described in epics, legends, literature, pictures and sketches, the existence of the River Chandrabhaga at Konark along with other water channels have also been recently established by applying scientific procedures like, remote sensing, satellite imagery, ground penetrating RADAR, GIS, etc. The research conducted by William Mahanty with his team from IIT, Kharagpur establishes the presence of the River Chandrabhaga, along with other water bodies near the Sun Temple of Konark.¹⁰ More than a hundred years ago, in the year 1919, Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra stated the same fact, that River Chandrabhaga, was flowing by the side of Konark Temple as a very large and turbulent river carrying a lot of water from the River Prachi through the River Kadua, and Kushabhadra (Liyakhia) and other tributaries to finally meet the sea. He also said that the last part of the River Kadua was known as Chandrabhaga and people used to call it Kadua Jhara meaning the stream of Kadua.¹¹

Having proved the existence of the River Chandrabhaga some scholars disapprove the fact that the temple was built inside the river, on its gorge filled with stone blocks. Why was it necessary for Langula Narasingha Deva to so painstakingly fill up the gorge of such a large and turbulent river to build the temple against choosing any other location elsewhere or the vacant spots available nearby? To answer this question one

has to study the location a bit. The temple built by Narasingha Deva was not the first Sun Temple built at the site. In fact, he built a new temple just to replace the existing old dilapidated Sun Temple once built by Purandara Keshari at the same location.¹² Here we are not concerned about if he is Puranjaya or Purandara; we are only interested in the fact that a previous Sun Temple did exist there. Since ages, the place was already established as a sacred zone for Sun worship. Nobody knows which generation or version, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th and so on, the present temple belongs to. As stated in the epics, after being cured of his cursed disease Shamba built a temple on the bank of River the Chandrabhaga inside Maitreya Vana and installed the image of Sun God there.¹³ From that day it became a prime destination for the Sun worshippers. If we believe in this mythological story then it would be considered as the first Sun Temple at this location. After this event, knowing nothing about it, we come to the historical period of Purandara Keshari building a Sun Temple at the same spot in 9th century.¹⁴ However, since Shamba's temple would not have survived for so long, till the days of Purandara, it is possible that with his new construction he also replaced an older Sun Temple built much later than that of Shamba. Hence, the present Sun Temple can be assumed at least as the fourth Sun Temple built at the site, Purandara's being the third, though it may be of a much later version. Again, either at the time of Purandara Keshari in 9th century or in 13th century when Langula Narasingha Deva started building the temple, Konark was not an isolated or deserted place inside the forest as it was at the time of Shamba. Over the years Maitreya Vana had already evolved to a bubbling township of Konark, taking the form of a prime religious destination, a famous maritime port, a residential



township and a trading centre. According to the Chinese visiting scholar Hiuen Tsang, even in 7th century AD the place had many towering structures. Wise and rich people of all faiths like the Hindus, the Buddhists and people of other religions and sects were living together in harmony.¹⁵ The 2nd century AD Greek geographer Ptolemy refers to Konark as Kannagar, a famous maritime port. In some Indian texts it has been mentioned as Kainapara, a significant trading port existing since the ancient time. Man Mohan Ganguly says, “according to Prachi Mahatmya the banks of River Prachi had flourishing towns and villages having massive temples.”¹⁶ There was a shipbuilding centre at Khalakathha and a major trading centre at Junei known as Daha-Upar.¹⁷

The above facts suggest, it was reasonable for Narasingha Deva not to move out of a prosperous and already established religious site for Sun worship for building the gigantic and the most beautiful Sun Temple of Odisha in particular and of Bharatvarsh in general.

King Narasingha Deva had a grand plan to build a gigantic and the most beautiful temple for the Sun God and convert it to a prime religious destination in Bharatvarsha. As planned it was built with huge blocks of various types of stone. For example, the stone blocks were so huge and heavy that after collapse of the temple, even in the 20th century it was not possible for the British Administration to move the dislocated Nabagraha Block even after slicing it to one third of its thickness, up to the seacoast to carry it further to the Indian Museum in Calcutta (now Kolkata) by ship. Now, think of the Amalaka Shila and the Gaja-Singha which weigh 200 and 45 tons, placed at heights of 200 feet and 170 feet respectively.¹⁸ How did they carry it to the temple in 13th century and then raised them to such

heights to place atop the temple walls? None of the types of stone like, Chlorite, Laterite and Khondalite used in construction¹⁹ were available nearby and had to be brought in from far off places. At the time to carry heavy and large objects waterway was the best option and the Odia sailors at the time were the masters of the sea and the rivers. In Utkal (ancient Odisha, also known as Kalinga) huge size ships and boats known as Hati Boita were available even to transport elephants along with a large number of passengers to distant lands.²⁰ Fa-Hien (399 – 411 AD) mentions that he travelled from Tamralipta down to Ceylon, then to Java and finally up to China in a merchant ship of Kalinga. The eastern sea was then named as Kalinga Sagar because of the dominance of Kalinga ships. Later it was named by the British as the Bay of Bengal after they established their centre in Bengal.²¹ Hence, for easier transportation of heavy stone blocks, sculptural materials, equipment and iron beams to the temple site they were being made by the riverside or at the seacoast. Bullock carts, elephants and manpower were being used only to transport over short distances and also to move smaller blocks. Another water channel was also running as a tributary to Chandrabhaga, known by the locals as Pathara Buha Nala (stone carrying channel) starting from Tintiar near Bedpur to Junei.²² The craftsmen lived along the bank of this Pathara Buha Nala for the entire period of construction of the temple and worked right there to carve the stone blocks and send the finished sculpture by rafts or boats right up to the temple site through this channel. The fact is supported by presence of the channel in small patches and many unfinished carved stone blocks found lying in its bed even now.²³ Sibi Santara was living at the upper end of Pathara Buha Nala at Bayalish Bati in Erbond, Gop, near the temple of



Gangeshwari.²⁴ The gorge of Chandrabhaga was filled-up with stone blocks can also be physically proved by drilling one hole at a safe distance from the temple inside the compound and another away from the compound at the east side and then comparing the soil samples collected in both cases from different similar depths, say from 100 to 200 feet.²⁵ Since the two now-ruined temples at south-west corner of the compound pre-existed the present Sun Temple, the filling of the gorge must have been started from the west progressing towards the east up to a certain point leaving a portion of the River Chandrabhaga still flowing into the sea.²⁶

Hence, it is inferred that the Sun Temple was built in Konark near the old dilapidated Sun Temple after filling up the gorge of a large and turbulent river named Chandrabhaga.

B. The next major controversy is about who built the present temple and when. Though there are many evidences available to prove that the present Sun Temple at Konark was built in 13th century AD by Ganga King Langula Narasingha Deva many scholars at different times in the past have stated otherwise and do so even today.

B1. According to Madala Panji the temple of Konark was built in the year 1278 AD by Langula Narasingha Deva.

B2. Baya Chakada, a 73-leaf document written in old Odia Karani Script on palm leaves, carrying the details of the 12-year long construction period of the temple of Konark and supposed to be of the contemporary period, states that the temple was started in 1246 and completed in 1258 AD.

B3. Abul Fazl, the medieval historian in Emperor Akbar's Court, who visited Odisha in the year 1580 AD states in Ain-i-Akbari that the

temple at Konark was built by Narasingha Deva 730 years before his visit to Odisha,²⁷ i.e. in the year 850 AD.

B4. Andrew Stirling, the Persian Secretary to British - India Government visited Konark in 1820 AD. He mentions that Konark was built in 1241 AD by Langula Narasingha Deva. He says, "The present edifice, it is well known, was built by Raja Langora Narsingh Deo, A.D. 1241, under the superintendence of his minister Shibai Santra."²⁸

B5. James Fergusson, a famous archaeologist visited Konark in 1837. Believing in Abul Fazl's statement, "Konark temple was built in 9th century," he agrees with Abul Fazl.²⁹

B6. Rajendra Lal Mitra, a famous historian and archaeologist visited Konark in 1868. He, accepting the statement of Madala Panji says, Madala Panji "corroborates the copper plate inscriptions of the Ganga kings wherefrom we learnt that the temple of Konark was built in the 18th year of reign of Narasingha Deva."³⁰

B7. Two years later, in 1870 W. W. Hunter visiting Konark states, the temple of Konark was "Built, according to the most trustworthy records, between 1237 and 1282 AD."³¹

B8. Then after a long gap, in 1910 Bishan Swarup says that, the main temple of Konark was built by Purandara Keshari in the first half of 9th century.³²

B9. In 1912 Man Mohan Ganguly, taking the cue from Rajendra Lal Mitra that Konark was built in the 18th year of reign of Narasingha and studying the Ganga copper plate inscriptions, agrees with Madala Panji as he calculates it to be 1276 AD, which almost matches with Madala Panji's figure of 1278 AD.³³



B10. In 1919, Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, going by Madala Panji, is of the opinion that Langula Narasingha Deva built the present Sun Temple in the year 1278 AD.³⁴

B11. K. C. Panigrahi assumes that though the temple was built by Narasingha Deva I it was not in 1278 AD. Its construction started after his successful military expeditions against Muslim Bengal in 1243 AD to 1247 AD.

B12. In 2005 Karuna Sagar Behera writes, "The climax of Sun worship, however, was reached when king Narasimha-I, built the Sun Temple of Konark in the mid-thirteenth century." "He came to throne in 1238 AD."³⁵

B13. Now in 2021, Sanjay Kumar Baral states in his book "The Real History of Konark" that Konark was not built in the 13th century by Langula Narasingha Deva; rather, it was built in 9th century, before 850 AD by a king belonging to the Buddhist Tantrayana.³⁶

Now we have so many dates for one event and the right one is to be determined. I wish someone finds the correct one by using modern scientific methods to date the metals used in construction of the temple and the fossil trapped in between stone slabs.

Continuing with our analysis, out of all the names mentioned above only the statements made by Madala Panji, Baya Chakada and Abul Fazl can be considered as eyewitness statements of the golden days of Konark. However, unfortunately many scholars do not strictly assign any historical importance to Madala Panji, Baya Chakada is yet to be recognised as a historical document and Abul Fazl's statements are riddled with confusion as he personally did not visit the temple and depended on the statements of his local representatives.

As per Madala Panji, since the days of Shamba Sun worship is continuing in a temple on the bank of River Chandrabhaga. After a long gap of many ages, Purandara Keshari built a new temple there, installed the image of Sun God, and for continuation of worship, established eight Brahmin villages in Konark. Again after a long gap, Langula Narasingha Deva appointed his minister Sabei Santara to build a new temple to replace the dilapidated temple of Purandara. Madala Panji says, "After the rule of Anangabhimha Deva his son Langula Narasingha Deva ruled for forty-five years up to Sakabda 1204 or 1282 AD. He built a temple at Arkakshetra (Konark) for Konark Deva (Sun God). It was written under the signature of the King that, the temple of Anshumali (the Sun) was built by the Master of the World Langula Narasingha Deva in Sakabda 1200 or the year 1278 AD." His wish was duly fulfilled, the new temple was built and the image of Suryanarayana (Sun God) from Purandara's old temple was reinstalled in the new temple.³⁷ Katarajavamsavali, a Sanskrit text also states the same facts. Then Abul Fazl, assimilating what he could from his agents' information, agrees to the fact that Narasingha Deva built the temple, but in the year 850 AD not in 1278 as mentioned in Madala Panji. He gave the right name of the builder but assigned him to a wrong period. Around 850 AD Purandara Keshari was ruling in Odisha, not Narasingha. It seems he got confused with the respective builders of the two temples, Purandar's and that of Narasingha Deva. He also made some very wrong statements regarding the measurement of the temple, Arun Pillar, compound wall, etc., that indicate he never visited the site. Perhaps he did not visit the sacred zone personally respecting the Hindu sentiment as the temple was live at the time. However, it is said that Tughan



Khan, the then Governor of Bengal invaded Narasimha Deva, the ruling King of Odisha in the middle of 13th century only to be defeated by him losing a huge amount of wealth, elephants and soldiers. Konark Temple was built to mark the triumph of Narasimha Deva over the Muslims. Hence, Abul Fazl's opinion regarding the builder is accepted but not its time. Accepting Narasingha Deva as the builder and contradicting Madala Panji regarding its time, Andrew Stirling mentions that the temple was built in 1241 AD by Langula Narasingha Deva. However, Stirling contradicts himself by mentioning that Narasingha Deva ascended the throne in 1236 AD implying that the temple at Konark was completed within five years which is absolutely impossible.³⁸ Hunter says, "Stirling, in his account of the temple, is less trustworthy than the other portions of his valuable essay."³⁹ Hence, it is also not accepted. Next comes James Fergusson, a great scholar and a famous archaeologist, who believed in Abul Fazl's statement regarding time only and writes that Konark Temple was built in the 9th century but not by Narasingha Deva. To justify his opinion he has depended on a wrongly conceptualised theory of development cycle of Odisha sculpture. While determining the time of construction Fergusson says, "After the erection of so degraded a specimen of the art as the temple of Puri (AD 1174) the style ever could have reverted to anything beautiful as this (Konark Temple)."⁴⁰ He considers Konark to have been built when the cultural skill cycle was at its peak and before the Puri Temple, which he considers an edifice of much lower craftsmanship. However, the theory of Fergusson has been strongly opposed by Rajendra Lal Mitra and Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra. Reacting to Fergusson's comment about the lime paste covered Puri Temple Rajendra Lal Mitra says, "I shall say nothing about the absence

of grace as it is an intangible quantity dependent a good deal on fancy and I must in that respect yield to the learned archaeologist though it would not be amiss to ask how far that absence is due to the covering up the details, and how much to want of taste in the architect."⁴¹ Man Mohan Ganguly says, "The slab recovered from Konark shows the image of Jagannatha which clearly indicates the temple of Konark was built after 12th century Puri temple was built."⁴² Ganguly continues, "The argument of Fergusson seems to me fallacious; the abstract theory of evolution or involution has not a universal applicability without any consideration for circumstances."⁴³ Hence, Fergusson's assessment is also not accepted. Rajendra Lal Mitra agrees with Madala Panji and confirms that the Sun Temple was built on the 18th year of reign of Langula Narasingha Deva in around 1278 AD, and Hunter, agreeing with Madala Panji and Rajendra Lal Mitra, says that Konark Temple was built between 1237 and 1282 AD (during the reign of Narasingha Deva). Then comes Bishan Swarup who borrowing a string from Stirling and another strand from Abul Fazl and then giving it a twist applying Stirling's opinion states, "The temple of Konarka was built by Purandara Keshari in the latter half of 9th century though its Natamandir was constructed in 1241 AD by Raja (Nagroo) Narasinha Deva of the Gangetic dynasty."⁴⁴ He further states, "It may be noted that the date given in the seal (viz 1200 Saka or 1278 AD) which is quoted by Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra and so much relied upon by him is utterly incorrect."⁴⁵ Man Mohan Ganguly in agreement with Mitra says, "I do not understand the cogency of the reason which has led Mr. Bishan Swarup to reject it as 'utterly incorrect'."⁴⁶ Swarup is of the opinion that Madala Panji cannot be trusted as it was rewritten whimsically and not with facts after it was burnt by Kalapahada who



attacked Puri temple in the second half of 16th century. However, according to Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra the Panji is not kept in the temple, it is kept in the house of Deula Karana, its writer, and there is no proof that it was burnt by Kalapahada. Man Mohan Ganguly says, "According to Babu M. M. Chakravarti, Nrisinha Deva I ascended the throne in 1160 Saka and reigned up to 1186 Saka, i.e. from 1238 AD to 1264 AD; hence the construction of the temple is dated in the year 1256 AD."⁴⁷ He further says that, according to Ganga copper plate inscription Narasingha Deva ascended the throne in 1258 AD and Rajendra Lal Mitra states that Konark was built on the 18th year of reign of Narasingha Deva, i.e. in 1276 AD (1258+18), that almost matches with the date (1278 AD) given in Madala Panji. Hence, he agrees with Madala Panji. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, has devoted a complete chapter (Chapter IX) in his Odia book "Konarka" to analyse the dates given by Madala Panji, copper plate inscriptions and opinions of many scholars to finally infer that the Sun Temple at Konark was built by Langula Narasingha Deva in the year 1278 AD.

Very recently, in the year 2021 Sanjay Kumar Baral some way restates the opinion of Fergusson and that of Abul Fazl related to its time frame. He says that Narasingha ascended the throne at a very troublesome period. Hence, it would not have been possible for him to build such a huge temple as he was under constant threat from outside enemies, and was extremely busy in fighting battles and fortifying the defence system of his kingdom by strengthening certain border forts and arranging military power. So, Sanjay Kumar Baral is of the opinion that Konark was not built in 13th century and also not by Narasingha Deva. However, considering the

environment and policy of the time it is not right to say so. The day to day administration, maintenance of law and order and internal security in Utkala or ancient Odisha was fully decentralised being vested on a council of ministers under the leadership of an able person.⁴⁸ Though the king was heading the council he was usually always out on military expeditions either to expand the boundary of his kingdom or to subdue other kingdoms to collect wealth and valuables to fund philanthropic activities in his own kingdom. In 1244 AD and again in 1245 AD Langula Narasingha Deva attacked Bengal and looted a huge amount of wealth from there. Again between 1247 and 1258 AD the Sultan of Bengal attacked Odisha three times and was defeated every time by Narasingha Deva, losing a lot of wealth and a number of soldiers and elephants.⁴⁹ Hence, on the contrary to the opinion of S.K. Baral, the kings fought battles to construct temples. It was more visible during the Ganga and latter periods than that of the peace loving Kesharis. K.C. Panigrahi, regarding Narasingha Deva and Konark Temple, observes, "His victory over the Muslims of Bengal and his acquisition of the Southern districts of West Bengal must have enormously raised his prestige in the eyes of contemporary Hindu rulers, and augmented his resources which in all likelihood enabled him to undertake the construction of a stupendous structure like the temple of Konark, designed to exhibit his power, prestige, opulence, devotion and perhaps to commemorate his victory also."⁵⁰ Presuming, according to K. C. Panigrahi, that the construction of the temple to have started after Narasingha's final victory over the Muslims, as it took 12 years after that for completion and some more years must have been spent in pre-planning and preliminary work, brings the completion time closer to 1278 AD, the date given in Madala Panji.



Moreover Narasingha Deva's passion was to build temples. He built temples at Srikurmam, Varaha Narasimha temple at Simhachalam, Siva temple at Kapilas and Gopinatha temple at Remuna. Hence, in his lifetime he fought many battles to acquire funds, and to expand and establish his power in all three directions, north, south and west.

Therefore, it may be assumed that the temple construction was started after Narasingha Deva's final victory over the Muslims who did not dare to attack Odisha again within the next 200 years. The temple construction was completed around 1278 AD.

C. The next controversy about the Sun Temple at Konark is if Suryanarayana (Sun God) was ever worshipped there or the temple collapsed even before its completion.

C1. According to Madala Panji the temple was completed and worship of Suryanarayana continued there for many years.

C2. Abul Fazl has not mentioned anything in Ain-i-Akbari about the ruined condition of Konark Temple. Hence, it may be assumed that, in 1580 AD it was in good condition.

C3. M. H. Arnott believes that the temple collapsed while removing sand from inside the temple just after completion of construction. The temple was never consecrated or worship started.

C4. Rajendra Lal Mitra was initially of the opinion that the temple was never completed but changed his opinion later and said that worship was going on in the temple.

C5. Hunter following Rajendra Lal Mitra said that temple was never completed, but later changed his opinion and stated that the worship of Suryanarayana was going on there.

C6. Bishan Swarup, finding some wear and tear marks on the throne, believes that worship was going on in the temple for quite a long time.

C7. Man Mohan Ganguly believes that the temple was completed and consecrated.

C8. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra says that the temple was completed and Suryanarayana was being worshipped there for almost 300 years.

C9. Percy Brown finding some parts of the temple belonging to the top lying unscathed on the ground says temple was never completed as these parts were never raised to the top.

C10. Alice Boner says that the first worship in the temple was started on a specific Chandrabhaga Snana Yatra day that occurred on a Sunday.

C11. K. C. Panigrahi, disagreeing with M. H. Arnott and Percy Brown says that the temple was completed and Sun God was worshipped in the temple.

C12. Karuna Sagar Behera also believes that the temple was under worship.

Madala Panji describes in detail about the distribution of responsibilities and increased allotment of funds by the King for various daily rituals and festivals conducted in the Sun Temple and for the other sacred deities in and around it. Had the temple collapsed before its consecration the King would not have done so. In 1580 AD, while writing about Konark Temple in Ain-i-Akbari Abul Fazl has not mentioned anything regarding its damaged condition. Rather, from his description it seems that the temple along with other structures in and around the campus were in perfect condition, or if some part was damaged it did not hamper its general appearance or activity. Hence, it may be inferred that during Abul



Fazl's visit to Odisha the temple was alive, being under worship, for which, not to hurt the sentiment of the Hindus, Abul Fazl did not visit the temple personally. In 1568, twelve years before Abul Fazl's visit, Kalapahada had attacked the temple. Hence, as believed, Kalapahada did not carry away the Kalasha and the Dhvajapadma with him otherwise the worship would not be continuing then. With the weapons, tools and explosives of that age and at that height Kalapahada could not have removed the super heavy crowning parts of a huge temple like Konark. However, he could have inflicted severe injury there for the temple to have gradually shedding its stone blocks over time finally leading to its collapse. After 48 years of Abul Fazl's visit and 60 years of Kalapahada's attack, in 1628, when King Narasingha Deva (1622 – 1646 AD) visited the temple the Kalasha and the Dhvajapadma were missing from the top though the temple was still standing there with the image of Suryanarayana still around. He had to carry the idol to Puri temple as the temple was already abandoned. It seems, after continuing worship for almost 300 years the temple was finally abandoned and hence started to disintegrate rapidly towards the very end of 17th century.

M.H. Arnott thought that the temple was constructed with a heap of sand filled inside and it collapsed immediately after completion when the sand mass was removed. He states, "The weight above was not great enough to resist the inward tendency of the corbelling to fall in."⁵¹ Like Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, Bishan Swarup also does not agree with Arnott that sand filling was done to construct the temple. He thinks the use of levers, pulleys and simple machines to raise heavy material was known to them.⁵² Bishan Swarup found some wear and tear marks on the throne which indicate the temple was in worship.

Observation of so many festivals like, Rath Yatra on Full Moon day in Phalguna (February–March) on Dola Purnima, Chaitra Yatra on the 8th day of the bright half of Chaitra (March–April), and Magha Saptami Chandrabhaga Snana Yatra in Magha (January–February) also prove that the temple was in worship.⁵³ Though Rajendra Lal Mitra, and being advised by him W. W. Hunter initially believed that the temple collapsed before worship started, later after further study they changed their opinion and supported continuation of worship. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra says, "Had the temple collapsed before completion then the throne would not have been inside under a heap of stone as was seen during renovation as it could not have been built inside the sand filled temple."⁵⁴ Karuna Sagar Behera says, "A plate inscribed with names of in-charge of stores recovered from Konark and now available at the Indian Museum, Kolkata," and "The Brahma Purana and other epics of the 13th, 14th, 15th and the 16th centuries describing either the procedure for Sun Worship or descriptions of the temple of Konark indicate its completion and continuation of worship."⁵⁵ He further states that the depressions on the throne at its eastern edge, the defaced lovely lotus petals on the topmost moulding, two small yupa or sacrificial pillars next to a small platform between Jagamohana and Natyamandapa and the construction of the Jagamohana and the Natyamandapa itself and that of so many subsidiary temples including the kitchen inside the campus indicate that the temple was in worship. "Reference made in Kenduli plates of Narasimha Deva IV of the Saka year 1305 (1384 A.D.) shows that at that time the monument was in a perfect state of preservation and the presiding deity was under worship."⁵⁶ According to Alice Boner the first worship of Suryanarayana at Konark was conducted on a



Magha Shukla Saptami (7th day in the Waxing Moon Period in the month of January-February), i.e. on the day of the Chandrabhaga Snana Yatra that happened on a Sunday.⁵⁷ However, Percy Brown believes that the temple collapsed before its completion as the heavy stone blocks atop the walls could not be properly put into position and the foundation began to give way. He says, "Its colossal grandeur outstripped the means of execution, for its materialisation was beyond the capacity of its builders, its scale was too great for their powers, and in the construction part they failed." K. C. Panigrahi does not agree with Brown. Considering the opinions of scholars, engineers, archaeologists and some circumstantial evidences mentioned above, it seems, Percy Brown's opinion does not hold steam.

Some hand drawn rough sketches and descriptions from the old diaries of sailors sailing by Puri and Konark coastline also indicate that the temple of Konark was standing tall during those days and served as a landmark for the navigators in the deep sea. In 1676 Sir Streynsham Master, Governor of Fort St. George, Madras saw Konark and Jagannatha temples while sailing past the coast and recorded it in his diary. In 1679 a sketch of the Black Pagoda in an unknown sailor's diary shows the main tower and the porch. In 1680 the logbook of Captain Talbott of the ship 'Berkley Castle' shows two sketches of the Black Pagoda showing both the main temple and the Jagamohana with relative perspective. However, the topmost part must have been missing as it was not there in 1628 AD. In 1756 sailors gave similar descriptions of the temple. In 1764 a French map prepared by Croisey shows Konark as 'Pagoda Noir.' In 1780 Dunn wrote about Black Pagoda resembling like a large ship under sail. Probably with its survived portion of the fallen tower still standing, as seen by Fergusson in 1837, it looked

like that. All these references point to the fact that the temple of Konark, both the main temple and the Jagamohana, were standing tall almost till the end of the 17th century without much damage to the structures excepting the crowning parts at its top.

All the facts stated above proves that construction of the Sun Temple at Konark along with all the subsidiary temples inside and outside the campus were completed and worship of Suryanarayana, known as Biranchinarayana also, was going on there almost for 300 years.

D. Legends get associated with the subject in the form of folk tales, folk songs and folk plays when its phenomena or the acts go beyond the intellect of the common people. Though legends do not receive any importance from the historians, I believe, "Every story has a core of truth," how thin be it may. Recognising its core definitely helps in discovering the history about the subject when no direct records are available.

D1. The Legend about Shamba and Maitreya Vana: According to Karuna Sagar Behera the legend about Shamba was originally associated with Mitravana located at Multan in the Punjab. However, the 15th century epic Kapila Samhita mentions about Shamba, Maitreya Vana and River Chandrabhaga⁵⁸ indicating that by 15th century the legend was gradually dissociated from the original Mitravana and got fully associated with Maitreya Vana at Konark. As the epics of different periods state that Maitreya Vana was located at the seacoast Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra and other scholars strongly believe that Maitreya Vana and River Chandrabhaga did exist at Konark. The wide practice of Sun worship in Odisha since the ancient times is also proved by a 6th century inscription, the Sun images present in temples of Parsurameshwara, Vaitala,



Mukteshwara and Lingaraja of 7th, 8th, 10th and 11th century respectively and some separated images found at various places. Though, initially there were five different sects of Hindus like, Saiva, Vaishnava, Soura, Shakta and Ganapatya, under the influence of Jagannatha cult except Saiva and Vaishnava all others have practically disappeared. Nevertheless, even today every Hindu, irrespective of his sect, worships the Sun everyday, signifying the popularity of Sun worship in Odisha. It being a mythological story there is no way to prove the legend as true than to depend on epics. True or not, the legend establishes the importance attached to Sun worship in Odisha and recognition of the Sun as a healer.

D2. Legend about Ramachandi and Sibe Santara: The beautiful story about Ramachandi appearing before Sibe Santara in a stormy night, offering him shelter for the night and dinner of hot porridge, and then instructing him to eat the hot dish from the side, not like Sibe Santara filling the gorge starting from the centre. Eating from the centre would burn his fingers. Goddess Ramachandi was located on the bank of River Chandrabhaga, a large and turbulent river. Sibe Santara was trying to fill up a portion of the gorge to build the temple of Konark on it. However, he was unsuccessful as the stone blocks dropped in to the river gorge at its centre were being washed away by its strong current. Since Goddess Ramachandi was seated at his worksite Sibe Santara used to pray her everyday for blessings to succeed in his project. One day, being worried of his failure in filling the gorge he was on his way to meet the king when a sudden rainstorm appeared from nowhere and he had to take shelter in a hut for the night. To save him from disappointment Ramachandi appeared as an old lady and instructed him on how to do his job.

The local people mention, what they heard from their seniors generation after generation, that Sibe Santara used to pray before two goddesses every day, one near his residence, i.e. Gangeshwari, and the other at his worksite, Ramachandi. Unless Ramachandi was near to his worksite Sibe Santara would not have prayed before her everyday. To pay his obeisance Sibe Santara built temples for both the goddesses on successful completion of his project. The legend implies that Ramachandi pre-existed the present Sun Temple on the bank of River Chandrabhaga and the temple of Konark was built after filling up its gorge under supervision of Sibe Santara.

D3. Legend about Dharmapada: A legend similar to that of Dharmapada or Dharama is also associated with the temple of Varaha Narasingha in Simanchalam though with a different name, says Karuna Sagar Behera. He further states that the name Dharmapada was assigned to the protagonist only recently by Pandit Gopabandhu. It is true that there was immense pressure on the craftsmen to complete the temple as the target date was advanced by the king to consecrate the temple on the Chandrabhaga Snana Yatra day that was occurring on a Sunday. For the sculptors it must have been very difficult and time consuming to lift the huge and heavy Amalaka Shila, Kalasha, etc. to the top and install there. When this stupendous task was completed after much difficulty guided by someone's skill and intellect somebody must have given it a dramatic touch and the legend evolved. The legend carries no truth. From the legend, apart from the fact that the temple was located by the side of a water body, we learn that 1200 craftsmen were working continuously for 12 years to complete the temple staying away from their homes and families for the entire period of construction.



D4. Legend about Ramachandi and Kalapahada: The story about Ramachandi making a fool of Kalapahada and escaping from his clutch on the plea of fetching some water from the river on promise to return to him, only to break her promise, is just a myth having no truth in it. Karuna Sagar Behera says that the same story with a different name for Kalapahada character has also been described in Odia Mahabharata of Sarala Das which precedes Kalapahada's story at least by a century. The legend indicates that the temple of Ramachandi was located inside Konark campus and was attacked by Kalapahada. It also suggests that a river was flowing nearby and Ramachandi, after her temple was destroyed, migrated from the compound of Konark to the present location at the mouth of River Kushabhadra.

D5. Legend about the Magnet placed atop the temple: It is said that a very powerful magnet in the form of a crowning stone (Kalasha) placed atop the temple was attracting ships sailing in the sea towards it and was disturbing their navigation equipment. Once some affected sailors came and took away the magnet after removing it from the top which later caused the temple to collapse. However, it is impossible for a stone-magnet or magnetite of that size and placed at that height of Konark temple to act in that way. Had it even the power of the strong modern rare-earth magnets it would not have been possible for it to attract the ships sailing in the high sea; it would not have affected even their magnetic navigation instruments. Had it been so, life of the people living nearby would have been miserable as the magnet would have snatched away all of their agricultural equipment, implements and weapons, etc. made of iron. Since at the time, the abandoned temple was overgrown with shrubs and trees and was infested with snakes, lizards

and wild animals, and the dreaded Portuguese pirates operating at the eastern coast made it their den, local people were scared to come near it. Every passing day the temple site was growing more and more mysterious for them. Hence, the people living nearby being curious, started to create stories in their minds. It is true that the temple was attacked many times by the Muslims which might have given an impression to the locals that some sailors arrived at the shore one day and took away the magnet from the temple-top that was bothering them. Man Mohan Ganguly says, "In 1825, Andrew Stirling mentioned the story of the Kumbha Pathar or loadstone, lodged on the summit of the temple. When it was removed in the Mughal times, by the crew of a ship, the priests, at the violation of the sanctity, removed the image of the god to Puri temple and from that time the temple became deserted and went rapidly to ruin."⁵⁹ However, the loadstone was missing even in 1628 AD and the idol was removed then. Though it is a myth the legend implies that the temple was close to the sea and curious sailors being attracted by its beauty from the distance often came sailing near the beach for a closer view of it and in the process sometimes got stuck in the shallow water.

D6. The installed image of Suryanarayana was suspended in air: It is said that the image of Suryanarayana was installed suspended and kept in equilibrium above the throne without any support from any side, floating in the air by a balanced magnetic force applied on the idol from all sides. It is just a myth having no truth in it. The idol of Suryanarayana was not made of any magnetic material and no magnets were placed around it. The idol was made of stone and is now installed along with Indra in Surya Temple, inside Jagannatha Temple compound in Puri. Again, the throne now available inside the



ruined main temple shows some wear and tear marks that suggest that the idol was placed on the throne, not floating above it. For portability, a Chalanti Pratima or the representative idol of much smaller size, made of Astadhātu or an alloy of eight metals is worshipped along with the main deity and taken out only on festival days. Astadhātu is not a strong magnetic material. Hence, it is just a myth originated to create mysticism around the Sun God. Suspended or seated on the throne, the legend proves that the idol of Suryanarayana or Sun God was being worshipped in the temple.

E. Is the Sun Temple at Konark of Buddhist origin? In 1910 AD Bishan Swarup explains that the Sun Temple has its origin in Buddhism. The concept has been strongly opposed by Rakhil Das Banerjee and Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra [Konarka (Odia) –Chapter XI]. Pandit Mishra says, though adjacent to Konark was a Buddhist centre as described by Hiuen Tsang, Konark is not a Buddhist temple. His statement is proved after the excavation at Kuruma.

E1. To Bishan Swarup right from the origin, location, the temples, the sculpture, the festivals and rituals and even the idol of Suryanarayana of Konark appear to be of Buddhist origin. He says Maitreya is one of Buddha's different names and Maitreya Vana is named after him. The Arka Bata in Konark is imitated from Bodhidruma, a banyan tree under which Buddha was enlightened. According to Hiuen Tsang there were many Buddhist monasteries at Konark, hence Bishan Swarup says Konark temple is one of them. The festivals like Rath Yatra or car festival is imitated from Buddhists. He further says that the idol of Suryanarayana is Buddha and the temple at south-west corner of the compound is the temple of Maya Devi, Buddha's mother. The scenes

displayed on the temple walls are Buddhist and the use of elephants profusely in sculpture is a Buddhist tradition as elephant is one of the symbols of Buddhism. Strongly opposing Bishan Swarup Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra says that no scene in the temple wall is Buddhist in nature and elephants are also invariably used by the Hindus in religious drawings and decoration and even identified with certain gods and goddesses [Konarka (Odia) Ch. XI]. Rajendra Lal Mitra says that unlike Hindu temples the compound walls of Buddhist stupas are invariably beautifully decorated whereas no such decoration is found at Konark and other Hindu temples. Hindu temples are vertically divided into ten stages and have no openings at any stage unlike the Buddhist stupas which have ventilation windows at all stages. As per Bishan Swarup the worship at Konark was observed according to Buddhist practices. Here Bishan Swarup contradicts himself as he says the temple was built by a Saiva Keshari King. The Saivas were very strict about their religious practices. In fact Saivas aggressively eradicated Buddhism from India. Everything at Konark, as Bishan Swarup says, was not imitated from Buddhism. It was rather the other way. According to E. B. Havell and Rhys Davids Buddhism is not entirely a new concept in India; over the time it evolved out of Hinduism. Hence, Bishan Swarup is not right; Konark is definitely not a Buddhist temple.

F. Now to our last controversy, "Whom the two ruined temples, one brick temple and the other an exquisitely carved stone temple, located at the south-west corner of Sun Temple belong to?" As per Archaeological Survey of India the brick temple is a 10th century Vishnu temple and the other to Chhaya Devi, the consort of Sun God. I would like to humbly disagree and discuss about both the temples briefly to identify them differently.



F1. Identification of the ruined stone temple: The ruined stone temple located at south-west corner of the compound of Sun Temple is densely and very exquisitely carved with the same style as that of the Sun Temple. The temple is identified by (1) Bishan Swarup as the temple of Maya Devi, the mother of Buddha, by (2) Baya Chakada as that of Maha Gayatri Devi, as (3) the old Sun Temple of Purandara Keshari, (4) Chhaya Devi Temple by K. C. Panigrahi and Karuna Sagar Behera, (5) some say it is just a model built to pre-visualise the upcoming structure and finally as (6) Ramachandi Temple by Man Mohan Ganguly and Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra.

Bishan Swarup identifies it as the temple of Buddha's mother Maya Devi as he is of the opinion that the Sun Temple at Konark is a Buddhist temple and hence an ancillary temple constructed inside the compound for Buddha's mother as the administrator of the complex seems quite logical. He is proved absolutely wrong by Man Mohan Ganguly, Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra and others. The identification of it as Maha Gayatri Temple also is not accepted as there is no justification in bringing in Maha Gayatri to this location rather than other popular goddesses. According to K. C. Panigrahi and Karuna Sagar Behera it was the pre-existing sun temple of Purandara Keshari which was later converted to the temple of Chhaya Devi, the consort of Sun, after the idol of Sun God was transferred to the new temple. Karuna Sagar Behera further says that the style of sculpture in this temple differs from that of the new Sun Temple and rather matches with that of 11th century. Here we must remember that, Langula Narasingha Deva built the new Sun Temple as the old one was in dilapidated condition. Hence, this temple must have been also rebuilt by Narasingha as it was

included in the cluster inside the compound. So how the style could be different to be classified as belonging to a different age? The marginal difference observed might have been due to its construction by a different group of sculptors. Placing it in a different century would be like committing the same mistake again what Fergusson did while dating the Sun Temple. According to Vastu Shastra and Hindu tradition the wife is seated at left side of husband and hence we find the consort of the Presiding Deity of a temple complex is always located at left side corner of the Presiding Deity, like we find in Lingaraja and Jagannatha temples. Moreover the left side is mostly the north-west corner and according to Vastu it is designated for the subordinate and the south-west for the administrator.⁶⁰ So, only the Administrator Deity of the complex, like the temple of Goddess Vimala in Puri Temple, is located at the right side corner of the main deity. Hence, it just cannot be the old sun temple or the temple of the consort of Sun, Chhaya Devi. It could be the temple of Administrator of the complex Ramachandi. There may have been a temple dedicated to Chhaya Devi at the north-west corner which is not seen now like many other temples once existing inside the compound. Considering the other alternative, it seems too big and too elaborate for a model built for pre-visualisation and most importantly it was not built like a chariot. The last alternative, i.e., the temple of Ramachandi, as proposed by Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra and Man Mohan Ganguly seems to be right which is supported by the fact that Ramachandi pre-existed there. May be the Goddess was the guardian deity of the place and the idol was installed in a small temple or just under a tree or in the open against stone slabs as we see in some remote areas. Since Sibi Santara was offering prayers to the goddess and



also to Gangeshwari daily for smooth execution of his project he built temples for both the goddesses to show his obeisance. For the images of the Sun used as Parshwa Devatas or auxiliary deities on the temple walls, it can be said that Narasingha Deva, while rebuilding the temple, just to stay with the theme of the campus, used sun images as Parshwa Devatas like it has been done in Lingaraja Temple in Bhubaneswar, presenting all the major gods within the compound, like Vishwakarma, etc. as Lingams. The legend about Ramachandi and Kalapahada also supports the presence of Ramachandi inside the temple campus and migrating later to the river mouth of Kushabhadra.

F2. Identification of the ruined brick temple: The brick temple at south-west corner is referred to by Man Mohan Ganguly as “some unknown unfinished temple made of badly burnt bricks,” is identified as a 10th century Vishnu temple. I think it is partially true. The Hindus regard the Sun as the first avatar. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra says, “At first the Sun was considered as one and the only God. Then with progress of culture and development of knowledge the Sun was repositioned as one of the many gods worshipped then. The Sun was given the same status as that of Vishnu.”⁶¹ Rajendra Lal Mitra says, “Vishnu was being considered the same as the Sun in the Vedas.”⁶² According to R. D. Banerjee, “Some scholars think that Vishnu has been evolved out of the Sun-god,…”⁶³ Bishan Swarup says, “As preserver of earth Sun can be represented as Vishnu.”⁶⁴ Hence, the identification of the brick temple as a temple of Vishnu is partially true because it could also be classified as a Sun temple, Vishnu being an avatar of the Sun and artefacts of both types of temples being the same. So, I presume it to be a Sun Temple,

the Sun Temple of Purandara Keshari. Had it been just another Vishnu temple Narasingha Deva, who was so concerned with the design, architecture and beauty of the campus must have had rebuilt the temple with beautifully carved stone blocks as he did with the other temples both inside and outside the compound. Why did he not rebuild the ruined temple belonging to so important god? The reason is, it is the old Sun temple of Purandara Keshari which he replaced with the new temple. Hence there was no need to rebuild the old one. Therefore, I would rather reasonably identify it as the old Sun temple of 9th century built by Purandara Keshari and not just a Vishnu temple of 10th century.

Myths, facts and controversies may have enveloped the Sun Temple; irrespective of that we have to conserve whatever of it exists today for the posterity. We definitely do not want to see the beautifully ornamented and profusely sculpted temple to be renovated with plain and polished stone blocks. In such case, may be after five decades, we will get to see a plain and shiny Konark Temple standing there without any grace. In Odisha the legacy of fine stone carving is still continuing and we have craftsmen who can do the job of replacing the damaged original blocks. To maintain transparency and be honest to the original 1200 craftsmen, Sabei Santara and Langula Narasingha Deva a huge display board indicating the replaced sections may be placed at the site. Just think, if a painting of Van Gogh, Picasso or Leonardo da Vinci gets somehow damaged should we mend it with a big plain white patch or use the best technology and skill available to fix it to look like almost the original? However, it is neither easy nor the responsibility of only the Odias or the Indians. It is the responsibility of all



who have the fascination and the resources to take initiative and make it happen.

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