
Art and Iconography of Surya in Art Heritage of Odisha

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Abstract: *The present paper immensely thrown light on the art and iconographic development of Surya images in art heritage of Odisha based on the field work carried out by the scholar. Along with Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaisnavism and Saktism, Saura cult flourished throughout the length and breadth of the state of Odisha and finally culminated in the 13th century AD when king Narasimhadeva of Ganga dynasty constructed the grand Sun temple at Konarak on the bank of the river Chandrabhaga in the eastern coast of Bay of Bengal in the district of Puri.*

Keywords: Surya, Iconography, Odisha, Padmasana, Triratha, Pancharatha, Saptaratha

Introduction

Right from the beginning Surya, the visible celestial luminary was being worshipped in two important forms i.e. abstract and figurative not only in Indian context but also in Odisha as well. The abstract form of Sun is evident from the prehistoric rock art, Harappan and Chalcolithic pottery paintings, Punch-marked coins of the early historic period followed by the Hero stones and copper plate grants of early medieval times. Though the artistic expression of Sun motif in Odisha is found in the prehistoric rock art panel of Gostimoda-I in Sundergarh district followed by the Chalcolithic pottery paintings of Nuagada and Manamunda in the upper Mahanadi valley and the silver and copper Punch-marked coins discovered from various early-historic sites of Odisha still then the basic concepts regarding the art and iconography developed after the Gupta period (Sahu 2011: 27-33).

In this context the description of *Matsya Purana* regarding the iconography of Surya is very much significant which has thrown light on the iconographic features of the Sun-god (Pandey 1971: 139). It states that the image of the Sun-god (who causes the lotus to bud) should be made as seated on a lotus with two hands holding two lotus flowers. The image of the Sun should be made with beautiful eyes, seated in a chariot and holding a lotus. There should be seven horses and one *chakra* (wheel) in the chariot of the Sun and decorated well with ornaments. His body should sometimes be shown covered with a bodice and two pieces of cloth. The feet should be made brilliant and two other figures, named as Dandi and Pingala, should be placed as guards with a

sword in their hands. Near the image of Surya, should be an image of Brahma holding a pen and the image should be surrounded by a number of *Devas*. Aruna, the charioteer of Surya, is resplendent like the lotus leaves and on both his sides are high spirited horses with long necks and well-bedecked. They should be shown as properly held by reins of snakes. The seven horses yoked to the chariot of the Sun should be tied together with the string of the serpent. The images of the Sun should be thus made either seated in the chariot or on the lotus and holding a lotus.



Figure 1: Standing image of Surya in Parasuramesvara temple, Bhubaneswar

Surya in Khandagiri Hill

One of the earliest figurative representations of Surya in Odisha has been carved in Anantagumpha in the Khandagiri Udayagiri hillock located in the western outskirts of Bhubaneswar, dating back to 1st Century BC (Mitra 1975: 54). Here Surya is depicted as

a turbaned royal personage wearing heavy *kundalas*, a necklace and bangles. He is seated under an umbrella, with a female figure holding a flywhisk on either side and driving a chariot drawn by four spirited horses. Above them are representation of moon surrounded by stars and the Sun which symbolize the stellar world. The left hand of the figure is placed on the waist and the right hand on the chest. A demonic pot-bellied dwarf holding a spouted water pot in his left hand and a banner in his right hand stand at the right end of the relief near the right wheel of the chariot. Another Sun-image is carved in the middle of the back wall of Tattvagumpha cave, lower down the Khandagiri hill which is not clearly visible. The twin hill is a holy place of Jainism right from the 1st Century BC to the present day. So the Saura cult was popular here along with this faith in this early age.



Figure 2: Seated image of Surya in Parasuramesvara temple, Bhubaneswar

Iconography of Surya in Temple Art

In general the Surya images of Odisha can be divided in to five broad categories i.e. (i) standing images without a chariot (Figure 1) (ii) seated images without a chariot (Figure 2) (iii) riding in a chariot (Figure 3) (iv) riding on his horse (Figure 4) (v) Surya in *lalitasana* (Figure 5). In the first two categories the earliest surviving images of Surya generally represented him in a simple standing or seated pose without any chariot or attendant figures. He holds the stalk of full blown lotus in each hand and assume a rigid frontal pose, either *samabhanga* or *padmasana*. He is usually dressed in a heavy,

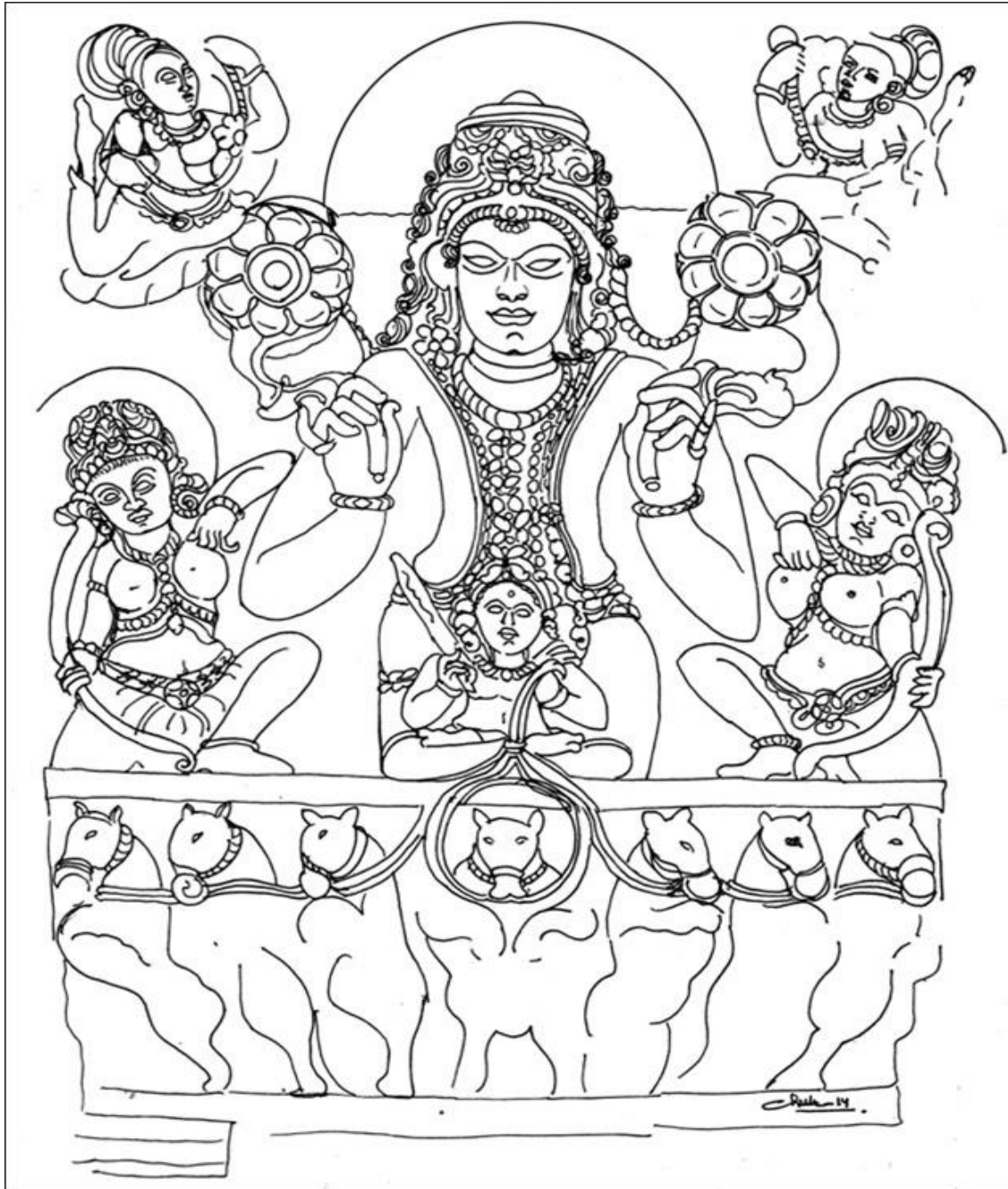


Figure 3: Surya with chariot in Vaital temple, Bhubaneswar

northern type garment and wears a truncated crown. A scarf frequently hangs from his shoulders and his feet are covered with boots. Standing images of this simple form exists at Chhatrapada, on the Lakshmanesvara, Parasuramesvara, Paschimesvara (Khanderpur) and Madhukesvara temple at Mukhalingam, with four such images appearing on the latter. Except for one example on the Madhukesvara, which has four arms they are all two-armed. In this lone exception the lower hands holds the loose ends of the waist cloth (Masthanaiah 1978: 68-70). Similar standing images of Surya are also included in the frieze motifs of the marriage scene of Siva (*Kalyanasundara* panel)

on the Svarnajalesvara and Parasuramesvara and on the later detached panel at Visnupur. A rare later example of this simple form of standing Surya appears on the southern *raha* niche of the Mahagayatri or Chhayadevi temple at Konarak. In this example he is flanked by a warrior on either side standing in front of a *khakhara-mundi*. All three figures stand on a *Visvapadma* cushion (Behera *et al.* 1998: 87-89).



Figure 4: Surya seated on a horse back in Konarak Sun temple



Figure 5: Surya in lalitasana in Somanatha temple complex, Bonga

Simple seated images of Surya appear on the small niches on the *gandi* of the Satrugnesvara, Svarnajalesvara, Parasuramesvara and in the compound of the Siva temple at Bankada. In most of the later phase temples, the *beki-bhairava* images were replaced by the images of Surya in the *beki* and sometimes the composite forms of the deity like Hara-Surya is found in the Meghesvara temple Bhubaneswar dated back to 13th century AD (Sahu 2013a: 129). On the Surya *deul* at Konarak a seated Surya was inserted into the *beki* above each *raha*. Surya (Ravi) is also depicted in *padmasana* posture when carved on *navagraha* slabs over the door lintel. In a few cases a chariot is added on the pedestal of Ravi as noticed in the Sindhukesvara temple in Balasore district and a Navagraha slab found in the Ramesvara temple precinct of Baud.

In the third category the more complex images of Surya riding in a chariot can be divided into several modes depending on his pose (Donaldson 1987: 1139-1141). Surya is depicted from the hips up with his legs disappearing into the chariot. He holds a full blown lotus in each hand and charioteer Aruna seated on the front edge of the chariot. Except for a lone example at Shergarh where he is seated in *bhadrasana*, or a few examples where he is seated on the centre horse, Aruna is always seated in *padmasana*. He usually holds the reins in his left hand while his uplifted right hand holds a lash. The front edge of the chariot is generally straight and the seven horses are carved in a continuous row with the centre one facing forward and those on the sides facing away from the centre. They stand on their hind legs with their front paws uplifted and curled in towards the chest. In several examples, the centre horse is awkwardly rendered and appears to be squatting. In the two late examples at Kaupur the chariot has a *triratha* plan with the horses being divided into three groups. In an example inserted into a niche of the Kapilesvara temple compound in Bhubaneswar, the chariot has a *saptaratha* plan. In the earliest images of this mode, Surya is generally flanked by small images of Usa and Pratyusa dispensing arrows from a stringed-bow. On later images he is usually flanked by the standing figures of Dandi (Skanda) and Pingala (Agni), the upholder of justice and recorder of merits and sins, though their attributes are not standardized. In a few examples all four figures are present. Images in this mode appear on the Vaital temple in Bhubaneswar, Madhukesvara temple of Mukhalingam and Simhanatha temple at Baramba as well as at Manikesvara temple at Suklesvara, Biranchi-Narayana temple of Kaupur, inside the *jagamohana* of Siddhesvara temple in Gandharadi, Gramesvara temple at Lataharana, Somesvara temple of Mukhalingam, Somanatha temple at Ghoradia, Kundesvara and Tirthamatha in Jagatsinghpur district and within the Kapilesvara temple compound in Bhubaneswar.

In the less popular second mode, of which a few 10th century examples exist, Surya is seated in *padmasana* on the chariot. In examples at Khiching and Chaurasi, Surya is seated in *Viswapadma* cushion with Aruna carved on its face (Banerjea 1956: 428-445). The seven horses are depicted standing on their hind legs beneath the cushion. At Chaurasi, the charioteer is represented down to his waist only while at Khiching and on a small image on the compound wall of the Muktesvara he is seated in *padmasana*. On the more elaborate sculpture at Chaurasi Surya is flanked on the right and left by

Dandi and Pingala respectively. If the palm-leaf drawing produced by Boner is correct, then the *puja* image from the Sun temple of Konarak was seated in *padmasana* on a chariot (Boner et al. 1972).

In the third mode of this class, from the 11th century through the 13th centuries, Surya is depicted in full length standing in his chariot. He is in the *samabhanga* pose and holds a full blown lotus in each hand as in the other modes. The northern dress is abandoned except for the boots and in some examples even these are discarded. Aruna is placed at his feet, seated in *padmasana* on early images while depicted down to the waist on later works, with the seven horses carved on the face of the pedestal. Surya is flanked at the base by Dandi and Pingala with Usa and Pratyusa also included in some of the works. In many images from Konarak, a warrior representing time, is added on either side and in some cases replaces other figures. The black-slab becomes increasingly elaborate, as on other cult images, with a trefoil *torana* framing the head of Surya. Attendant female figures are added above the *mundis* on either side of the base and, on the *parsvadevatas* of the *Surya deul*, a small image of Brahma is added at the base of the *torana* on the right and one of Siva or Visnu, are added on the left to form a trinity with Surya. King Narasimha and his guru are added by the feet of Surya while dancing musicians are inserted above the horses and pedestal and around the *torana* borders. Images in this mode appear in the Lingaraja temple compound, on the Valukesvara and at Khiching, Paikapada, Shergarh, Champesvara and Konarak. At Champesvara, housed in a small pavilion next to Surya, is a standing female who possibly represents Chhaya, one of the consorts of Surya. She stands in a *tribhanga* pose holding a dart in her right hand and a mirror in the left hand.

In the fourth group of images, Surya riding on his horse, only two examples are now available. They are both at Konarak and serve as *parsvadevatas* in the north *raha* niches of the Mahagayatri and Surya temple. They are two-armed and most likely held a full blown lotus in each hand though the hands are now broken off. Surya is flanked by a warrior on either side while in the more elaborate image from the *Surya deul* the image of Dandi, Pingala, king Narasimha and his guru, four consorts are added.

Only one example Surya in *lalitasana* pose is found from the monolithic temple of Somanatha temple precinct of Banga in Puri district (Sahu 2013b: 26-27). The Sun image carved in the sanctum at the rear wall of the temple and the deity is two armed holding lotus in either hands and seated on lotus pedestal in *lalitasana*. The figure wearing the garments like the images of Surya depicted in the formative phase temples of Bhubaneswar. The temple is unique of its kind in terms of architecture and iconography of Surya. In addition to these conventional images of Surya, there is *Caturmukha* Biranchi Narayana temple at Palia, a reconstructed temple with its *deul* pierced by four doors. The image is crudely carved, however, in much later in date than the other sculptures at the site. There are also two bronze *Utsava murtis* of Surya preserved in the Jagannatha temple at Puri. They are standing images with Surya holding a lotus in each hand.

Composite Forms of Surya

The worship of divinities in individual or composite forms had been prevalent in India, from the early times in various forms and shape. The genesis of the syncretistic divinities could be traced back to the Harappan times as evident from a number of sites of this culture yielded numerous examples of composite *Linga-yoni* motifs. These objects are believed to be the combined form of Siva and Sakti, the male and female principle in a symbolic form. The syncretism became popular after Gupta period due to the Tantric influence in which the multiplication of deities both in Buddhism and Hinduism started (Nagar 1989). Within the Hinduism multiplication among the various Gods and Goddesses were also carved in the formative phase temples of Odisha. The following composite figures of Surya are displayed in various museums and carved in the temples of the state.

Hara-Surya: A chlorite image of Hara-Surya displayed in the Konarak museum is notable for its iconography. Another beautiful sculpture having the images of Jagannatha, goddess Durga and Sivalinga are on one platform to which the King who is the builder of the Sun temple paying homage to the deities shown the religious assimilation of Odisha in 13th Century AD. This image is also displayed in the same museum (Padhy 2008: 199-202). The image of Hara-Surya stands in *samapada* position on a *triratha* chariot drawn by seven horses. Aruna, the charioteer sits in front of the feet of the deity and drives the chariot. The God has four hands, the upper two hands are missing but they evidently carried two lotus flowers which can be seen above his shoulders. He holds a trident in his lower right hand while the lower left hand is in the *varada* pose. The god wears boots, girdle, high crown necklace and other ornaments. He is flanked on either side by an attendant holding sword and shield. At his back there is an elaborate trefoil arch, on the sides of which are four female figures holding garlands and *chamaras*. At the top of the arch, there is a *kirtimukha* flanked by two *gandharvas* bearing conch shells. At the top corner of the slab are two *vidyadhara*s flying with garlands. The image in question definitely syncretistic image of Siva-Surya as Surya is often identified with Siva. The *Ekamra-Purana* identifies Siva with Surya while prescribing prayer to Bhaskaresvara Siva of Bhubaneswar. The *Adityahridaya* declares that there is no difference between Aditya and Siva. From the passage of *Ekamra-Purana*, the identification of Siva with Surya is evident and the same notion may have been at work in carving this sculpture of Konarak.

Surya-Narayana: Surya has been variously described in the *Rig Vedic* hymns. Sometimes he was called as the beautiful celestial bird "Garutman" or a "white brilliant steed brought by "Usas". From these descriptions of the concepts of Garuda- the vehicle of Visnu and Tarakshya, the horse mount of the Sun-god originated. This further led to the development of the idea of the Sun-god moving on a chariot driven by seven horses so frequently found in the post *Vedic* texts. Visnu on the other hand enjoyed a prominent position in the *Vedic* literature. There is a school of thought which believed that Visnu who became popular in the Brahmanical cults in vogue during the period contemporary to the beginning of Christian era was different from *Vedic* Visnu

(Banerjea 1956: 385). The feet associated with him in *Vedic* literature relates to his having traversed the whole universe in three strides. These three steps in course of time developed in to myths on the dwarf incarnation of *Puranic* Visnu. Sakapuni, one of the *Vedic* commentators, interpreted these three steps as a course of solar deity, through the three divisions of the universe, the god being manifest in three fold forms, as Agni on earth, Indra or Vayu in atmosphere and Surya in the sky. Both the deities namely, Surya and Vishnu are very much inter connected and there should be no surprise if both of them are projected in composite form of iconoplastic art. Similar types of images are carved on the exterior wall on the later temples of Odisha. Besides there is a bronze image of Surya-Narayana seated over a horse displayed in the Orissa state museum located in Bhubaneswar. In the Biranchi-Narayana temple of Buguda of Ganjam district Surya and Narayana worshipped together.

Surya-Narasimha: To the north of Narasimhanath temple, on the foot of Gandhamadan hills at Paikmal in district Bargarh, there is a modern structure which enshrines the figure of Surya-Narasimha, one of the unique of its kind (Chauley 2004: 84). Carved in high relief in grey sandstone, it depicts Narasimha as standing on a *triratha* (three projections) pedestal in *samapadasthanaka* (erect) posture, flanked by two female attendants, one to the right holding a lotus and the other to the left a flywhisk. The four armed lion- faced god exhibits in his upper right and left hands a lotus and a conch and in the lower right and left hands a *gada* and the *varada* pose. He is sparsely ornamented in addition to his usual *vanamala*, wears armlets, bangles and necklaces of simple designs and a short dhoti (cloth) reaching up to the knee. But what is most striking is the pair of gumboots the ends of which reach up to the knee and their ends are conical at the centre. This particular feature makes this image unique, because among the Brahmanical deities, it is only the Sun-god who wears boots and that too only in the north Indian art (Majumdar *et al.* 1981: 885). The other image, also of Narasimha, can be seen on the lintel of the entrance doorway of the Gangadharesvara at Kotakola near the Buguda town in the district of Ganjam. And like the previous one this is also unique. This is high relief, made of stone, the god is seen engaged in killing Hiranyakasipu by his normal pair of hands standing on a platform of a *ratha* drawn by seven horses, by his left leg, which is slightly bent, trampling another demon, apparently the demon of darkness, the emblems in the upper hands are not clear, but the one in the left may be a lotus. Here again the solar element is articulated in the seven horsed chariot, a never failing feature of the iconography of Surya in north-Indian art.

Dress and Ornaments of Surya Images in Odisha

Surya, the god of light and lustre is richly bejeweled and wears a cuirass or coat of mail. Apart from boots and northern dress, which are frequently prescribed, the most distinctive ornaments are his ruby-studded crown and his ornate girdle (Donaldson 1998: 211). In the earliest surviving image of Khandagiri hill, he wears a turban, heavy *kundalas*, necklace and bangles. In the earliest structural temples he wears a heavy northern type tunic. Apart from boots and cuirass, which are optional in character, he

wears indigenous garments and ornaments similar to those worn by other deities (Donaldson 1987: 1139-1141). On the late 6th century image of the Laksmanesvara temple he wears a jeweled diadem at the base of a truncated, inverted bowl-shaped crown, a necklace, cuirass, bangles, pearl-string *udarabandha*, a pearl-string girdle with a floral-medallion clasp, and boots.

On the early 7th century images found within the compound of the Lingaraja temple he wears a truncated, *mitre*-type crown, a pearl-string diadem with projecting crests, four-petalled floral medallions at the helix of his ears in circular type, multi-petalled floral-studs hanging from each ear-lobe, a necklace, cuirass, *udarabandha*, girdle and rimmed pearl-string bangles. This truncated *mitre*-like crown also appears on an image on the Parasuramesvara temple and remains popular throughout the 8th-9th century, though it becomes ornate later on. On the image of the Vaital *deul* there is a pearl-string diadem at the base with projecting crests. The top of the crown has a double-string border with festoons looping between the projecting crests, rather than hanging straight down like *kirita-mukuta*.

Further elaboration appears in the 10th century as the crown increases in height. On an image at Kaupur there is cable-type diadem at the base with projecting jeweled crests. The crown is divided into two registers by a rimmed, beaded-string. At the base of the upper registers are additional crests which alternate in alignment with those of the diadem which project up the height of the lower register. An *alambika* motif of *kirtimukha* masks dripping festoons is placed at the top of the upper register. The upper register is terminated by a rimmed, beaded string border surmounted by a slightly rounded lotus finial. In the late 9th-10th century examples the crown becomes more conical in shape and ornamented as noticed in the Surya images of Shergarh, Caurasi, Khiching and Paikapada. In second image at Paikapada the conical crown consists of horizontal rows of large gems. By the 11th century, however, the design generally approximates the *kirita-mukuta* with large upward projecting crests alternating with pearl-strings hanging straight down from the top. One of the best examples appeared on an image in the compound of the Lingaraja temple.

By the late 11th century *kirtimukha*-medallions are introduced and become standard decoration on the crown of Surya images. On the 12th century image from Konarak in the National Museum at New Delhi *kirtimukha* medallions are placed at the base of each crest on both registers of the crown and on the diadem. On the *graha* Surya image in the British museum the broad centre band of the diadem contains similar *kirtimukha*-medallions though there are no *kirtimukha* motifs on the crown itself, only a medallion at the base of the crests of the second tier. The crown is near identical in a standing Surya image in the British museum except the loose ends billow up like ribbons after being channeled through the projecting *talapatra* ornaments. The *kirtimukha*-medallions also appear on the crowns of the Parsvadevata image of the north and west on the Sun temple of Konarak while the image on the south has his hair arranged in a stupa-shaped chignon (Gangoly 1956). Although the *kirita-mukuta* continues to be worn on

later images the *kirtimukha* motifs are usually absent as the decorative program diminishes in elegance and becomes overlay repetitive in detail.

The earrings worn by Surya are usually circular-studs with beaded borders or *puspa-kundlas* with flower-cluster terminals. In late images the terminals often spiral upward to join with the dropping *asoka* leaf ornament. The necklaces are similar to those worn by other deities and reflect the prevailing tastes of the period and site, with the elegant examples of the Ganga period often having a fringe of oblique pendants. The cuirass on early images extends down the centre of the chest from the necklace to the *udarabandha* or the girdle. It is frequently decorated with rows of floral motifs, crisscrossing horizontal or vertical rows of beads, or simple cross-hatching. On later images the decoration becomes nearly diaphanous and the cuirass eventually disappears. The *yajnopavita* is introduced on images of Surya in the 10th century and is invariably of the beaded-or pearl-string type (*ratnapavita*) and hangs to the hip. By the 12th century, as on images of other deities, the length is shortened and it reaches only to the waist.

The girdle, though often singled out in textual descriptions, is similar to that worn by other deities and follows a similar evolution in respect to fashion. On early images it is quite plain, usually of the chain-link or cable type. In the 10th century, as on the image of the Ramesvara temple at Paikapada, a *kirtimukha* mask is added beneath the jeweled clasp. Festoons of pearls dripping from its mouth loop onto the thighs while the *urumala* hangs straight down. A similar *kirtimukha* is attached to the clasp of an image in the compound of the Lingaraja temple though there are no hanging festoons, only the *urumala*, which is fastened to the *yajnapavita* at its lowest point. In several examples at Khiching the *urumala* falls below the *yajnapavita* with the side strings splaying out to loop around the thighs.

In the 12th century, as at Champesvara, hanging festoons from a lower fringe and become standard adornment, as on images of other deities, while the *kirtimukha* mask appears on most of the large images from Konarak, the *urumala* hanging straight down to the knees. Details are exquisite as evident even in the textile pattern of his lower garment. In a few images, including the standing images in the British museum and a 14th century image at Durga temple of Motia, a *vanamala* is added as adornment.

Conclusion

Finally, the Saura cult began to disintegrate after 13th century AD in Odisha possibly due to the lack of royal patronage and Lord Jagannatha became the supreme God because of the advent of Bhakti saints like Ramanuja and Caitanya. The cult finally back footed to such an extent that the Sun-god depicted at the base of the doorjamb of Batalokanatha temple in Puri. Though the more number of Surya images are found in the formative phase temples of Odisha still then the more decorated images were carved out in the Ganga period temples which are unique in terms of Odishan art and iconography. So more and more research is required to find out the peculiarity of

Surya images in Odisha and the factors responsible for the disintegration of the cult which was its golden age in 13th century AD.

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