
VISHNU ICONOGRAPHY IN KALAHANDI, ODISHA

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INTRODUCTION

The different religious faith of India appeared and prospered in different times. Odisha received them well and gave scope to flourish for some time until one of them supplanted the other. In Odisha each of them found a congenial ground to flourish with royal patronage and popular support in a period. Odisha had come under the Aryan religious system before the advent of Jainism and Buddhism in 6th century C.E. The *Varnashramadharma* brought some of the aboriginal people into its fold. However, the new religious movement which started in India against what is called *Brahmanic* model of *Varna* society. This made their entry into Odisha. The three important of them were the *Krishna-Bhagvata*, Jaina and the Buddhist religions. Whereas the *Bhagavatism* came through the western part of i.e., South Kosala – the other two developed in the coastal plains of Odisha. These three religions were in the nature of protestant movements in Odisha, where people wanted a simple religion, free from complex rituals, as elsewhere.

In modern popular Hinduism, Vishnu is one of the gods of Hindu Trinity, and is conceived to be responsible for the universal protection like that the other two gods, Brahma and Siva held to be responsible for the creation and destruction of universe.(Rao 1997: 73) Vishnu the “Preserver” member of the later Brahmanical triad, appears to have evolved from the syncretism of three god-concepts: the man- god Vasudeva-Krishna, the Vedic Sun- god Vishnu, and the cosmic god Narayana of the Brahmins. (Donaldson 1933: 1)

Historical Value of Kalahandi:-

Kalahandi literally means black-pot or pot of art. It is situated in between 19° 3' N and 21° 5N Latitude and 82° 20' E and 83° 47' E Longitude to the South-Western part of Odisha, surrounded by the districts like: Bolangir, Kndhamal, nabarangpur, Ryagada and Nuapada on the north, south, west and east respectively. It has also rich in cultural heritage. Many pre historic vestiges are being documented in Kalahandi. Old stone age culture, Mesolithic Culture and Neolithic Culture herald a dawn of civilization in Kalahandi.(Cobden 1982: 200-203). In Proto-historic, people were advanced and subsistence economy. The period from 6th century B.C.E to 6th century C.E has been designated as early or Ancient history of Kalahandi.

Kalahandi has designated various nomenclature in various segments. *Taitilaka Janapada*, (identified with middle Tel Valley) (Senapati 1980: 42), *Atavika*(L.N.Rangarajan 1992: 52-53) during the time of Ashoka the Maurya ruler. *Vidyadhara* during the time of Kharavela. (Sahu 1997: 145) Kalahandi constituted core area of *Mahakantara* kingdom, when Samudragupta invaded on it in the 4th century C.E, in course of his Deccan campaign. After

crossing the *Vindhyas*, he entered into South Kosala and then proceeded to *Mahakantara*. (Senapati 1980: 41-43). *Allahabad Prasasti* mentions that Vyaghraraj was a king of *Mahakantara*. Samudragupta subjugated him. The *Vrihat Samhita* (Sastri 1986: 61) of Varahamihira (6th century C.E) also mentions about the territory called *Kantara*. This *Kantara* or *Mahakantara* comprised modern Kalahandi, Koraput of Odisha and Bastar of Chhatisgarh state. It has been held that Asurgarh-Narla was tentative capital of Mahakantara at that time. (Mishra 2009: 28).

After departure of Samudragupta, Kantara was not the same again. It was divided into two halves. On part was ruled by the Nalas, (ruled over Koraput region comprising the upper Tel valley and the whole of Indravati Valley) . Whereas middle and lower Tel Valley to which belongs Kalahandi and part of Balangir district, remained under the so- called Parvatadwaraka dynasty, to which Raja Tustikara and Sri Nandarajdeva belongs during 5th/6th century C.E. (Mishra 2011: 94).

However, it can be said that the Gupta influence after the Deccan campaign of Samudragupta was more cultural than political. Moreover the credit goes to Raja Tustikara of Parvatadwarak dynasty who supported the orthodox creed by patronizing temple building and temple art activity in Kalahandi after intervention of Samudragupta and first temple of Stabmheswari was built by him. In Terasinga copper plate he declared himself as *Stambheswari padabhakta*.

Though Sakti worship was prevalent since pre-historic period it geared up from Raja Tustikara of Parvatadwaraka family. (Mishra 2011: 94)

Kalahandi was also known as *Trikalinga* during the Somavamsi who came from Madhyapradesh to Kosoala region. Their contribution to culture and civilization especially in the field of art and architecture were very significant. They were the worshiper of Siva and Sakti. In fact the Somavamsi age ushered a new era in the history of Odisha. (Sahu 1980: 144).

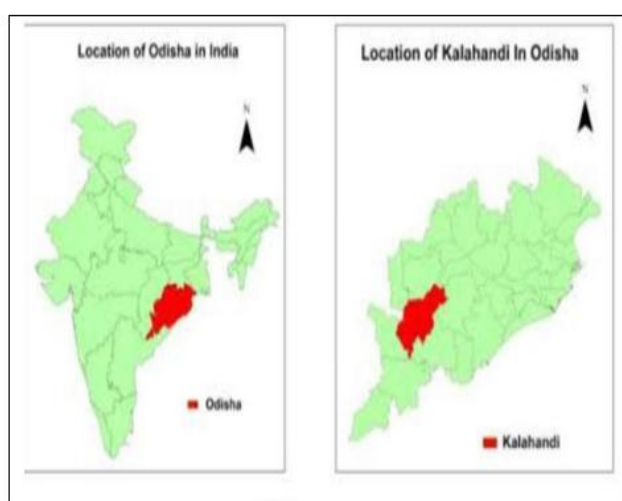
During the time of Gangas the territory is known as *Kamala- Mandala* which is known from the Siva temple inscription of Narla. When it was ruled by the Ganga governor Madan Mahadeva probably son of Chodagangadeva. Initially Gangas were worshipper of Siva. But in the later part of Chodagangadeva he became the worshipper of Vishnu after came in contact with Ramanuja who converted Chodaganga in Vaishnavism who declared himself as *Parama Vaishnava*. It was the direct influence of this Vaishnava Acharya that Chodagangadeva constructed the modern temple of Lord Purusottam at Puri. (Sahu 1980: 174)

The advent of *vaishnavism* in Odisha dates back to the 5th century C.E. In Western Odisha, the Nalas of Puskari were supplanted by the Sarabhapuriyas who patronized *Vaishnavism*. Somavamsis were initially follower of Vishnu, later on they had patronized Siva worship but the revival of Vishnu worship appeared in Ganga period during 12th century C.E. Number of

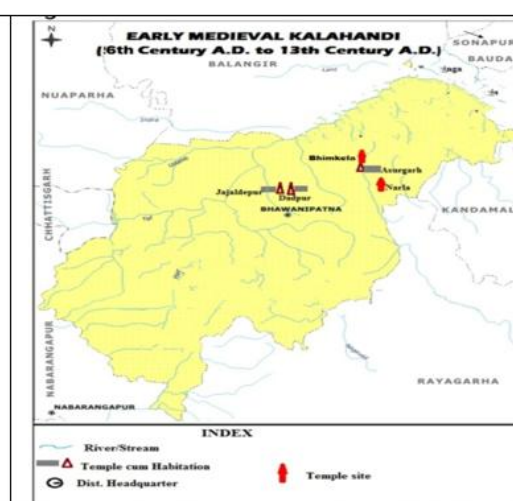
temples and temple art detected from various parts of Kalahandi belonging from 5th century C.E to 13th Century C.E. under Somavamsis and Gangavamsis. The image of Vishnu in Bhimkela and Nilakantheswar temple at Dadpur in Kalahandi corroborate the fact.(Patel 1990 : 234). Two sites has been documented in Kalahandi district: 1. Bhimakela 2. Dadpur.

Bhagavata or *Vaishnava* cult entered into Odisha in the Gupta age. The Nalas in the Kosala-Ka ntara region and the Matharas in Kalinga region were followers and patrons of the cult. The Nala king Skandavarman has praised Hari(Vishnu) and Mathara king Ananta Saktivarman and Prabhanjana varman have described themselves as “Narayana Svami-Padabhakta and Bhagavata-Svami-Narayana- Padanudhaya” respectively. (Sahu 1980: 56)

Fig-1-Physical Feature of Kalahandi



Fog-2-Research Area of Kalahandi



Origin:-

It is widely known fact that Vishnu possesses thousand names by which he is praised. The *Vishnu-Sahasra nama* is found mention in *anusasanaparavan* of the *Mahabharata*. Among these thousand significant names praise relating to Vishnu, twenty-four are considered to be the most important and are daily repeated by many Brahmanas in their daily prayers. Vasudeva Krishna, the *Satvata* hero, was at the root of the Bhakti cult, that came to be designated as Vaishnava as comparatively at the later stage in its growth. (Banerjia 2002: 386) At the root of this evolving Bhakti Cult, who was later designated as Vasudeva – Krishna(Devaki nandan) was a *kshatriya* chief. He along with Sankarshana, (his elder brother by Rohini), Pradyumna, (his eldest son by Rukmini), Samba, (his son by Jambavati), Anirudha(son of Pradyumna) came to be deified as hero-gods, the holy *panchaviras* of the *Vrisni* clan. After that Samba was eliminated. The detail description of the four heroes mentions in *Vshnudharmottara*.(Donaldson 1933: 1) The concept of *chaturvyuhas* appears to have been formulated by the second century B.C.E though number of *vyuhas* later increased to twenty four (*chaturvimsati murti*) in the Gupta period by the *panchratra* theologians.

The Besnagar and Nagari inscription of pre-Christian era corroborate the fact that there was the existence of *Bhagavata* shrine in the ancient towns of Vidisha and Madhyamika. The principal tenets of Bhakti cult centering round Vasudeva-Vishnu-narayana and essential knowledge was required to better understanding of the different ideologies underlying the various types of Vishnu icons. The central idea behind the tenet was monolithic. An intelligent *Panchratra* devotee would find in all the varieties of the icons that is devadeva Vasudeva of the Besnagar inscription of Heliodorus and his different manifestations. The *Narada Pancharatra* mentions that, Hari is always worshiped in the form of image but sometime other objects are also to be worshiped in this purpose and the best example is *Salagrama* stone which is the celestial form of Hari.

Temple art:-

A good piece of art developed only in an economically and culturally an organized society. Usually it is economically self sufficient state that could sustain monumental architecture and art.(Gupta 1980: 9). The greatness of a culture is often judged by its art tradition. The artistic activity of mankind was manifested in stone age culture, when man was in hunting and food gathering position. Art is anterior to script and language in the evolution of civilization and culture. Hence the evolution of the Art tradition in the concerned landmass may be traced from stone age culture up to early medieval period.(Mishra 2015: 261). As early as Pre-historic painting at Gudahandi of Kalahandi district were reported by S.N Rajguru. The said painting exhibits hunting scene, enigmatic diagram, rectangles and quadrangles, a small warrior portrait and the fertility motif etc..(Rajguru 1950: 243)

The classical concept in Indian sculpture was manifested in the Gupta age. (Saraswari 1975: 191). The human figure played a pivotal role in the art composition. The notion was soon reflected in the divine image conceived in rounded shape because of anthropomorphic conception that developed at that time.

The human figure of the divinity is called as *Pratima*. All Hindu gods and goddesses are there shown as perpetually young. So the Gupta artists preferred the youthful form. The face is smooth and egg shaped, forehead like of bow, eyes are like wagatal tail based on according to the mood of god. To have the smooth and void shape of an egg, the forehead like of a bow and the eye brow, the eyes are to resemble a wagatal (Khanjana) tail, a deer's, a saphari fish, a lotus petal according to mood.(Saraswati 1975: 191). Asana, Mudra, Ayudha and Vahana of god and goddess were prescribed during this cultural epoch, that is the Gupta age.

Description of the image:-

In the earliest surviving images of Vishnu, in South India as well as North India, all four of the emblem are not present.

Description of images in pre-Gupta period:

Invariably in North Indian images, the lower right hand is in *Abhaya or Varada* while left hand is placed at the hip of *Katyabalambita* the hand sometimes holding a *sankha* while uplifted hands hold *gada* and *chakra*, while in South Indian images the uplifted hands hold *chakra* and *sankha*. The figure is roundish, with a short bust, and there are few ornaments.

Pose in later Gupta Period:-

Pose:- The principal image of Vishnu temple is generally represented in one of three attitudes. (Singh 2017: 49) In the *Vaikhyanasagama* mode of grouping, the main image of Vishnu in to three. These are:

Standing	Sthanaka murti
Sitting	Asana murti
Reclining	Sayana murti
Other pose of the God	Sama Bhanga, Dvi Bhanga, Tri-Bhanga(Triple flexion), Ati- Bhanga

The image of in each of the three positions again classified into: *yoga*, *bhoga*, *vira* and *abhicharika* in consequence certain differences in their descriptive characteristics.

Vahana/Mount:-

Name of the Divinity	Vahana
Shiva	Bull
Vishnu	Garuda
Kartikeya	Peacock/Hen
Ganesa	Mouse
Indra	Elephant
Brahama	Swan
Yama	Buffalo
Syrya	Chariot

Like Brahama, Surya and Siva, the Garuda mount of Vishnu also placed at the pedestal of the god or pillar, either within Jagamohana or in tall pillar. Generally he is posed kneeling on one knee and his hands folded in front of his chest, the hands holding a lotus rather than the *amrit ghata* mentions in the texts. However he has occasionally bird like facial feature but most part he depicted in human form except for his wings.

Ayudhas/Atributes:-

Destructive- Trident(<i>Trisula</i>), Mace(<i>Gada</i>), Sword(<i>Khadga</i>), Fire(<i>Agni</i>), Circle(<i>Chakra</i>), Shield(<i>Dhal</i>), Loop(<i>Pasha</i>), Goad(<i>Ankusa</i>), Bow(<i>Dhanush</i>), Vann, Beater(<i>Mushal</i>), Power(<i>Shakti</i>), Thunderbolt(<i>Vajra</i>), Thadanka, (<i>Khatwang</i>), <i>Shaktayudh</i>), <i>Parasa</i> (Axe), <i>Khetaka</i> , <i>Danda</i> (Stick), <i>Mudragar</i> are described as major weapons in several texts.	Musical Instrument:- <i>Sankha</i> (conch), <i>Damru/mridanga</i> (Hourglass Percussion and <i>Ghanta</i> (Bell) are important
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Head Dress/Mukuta:-

Types of Mukuta	Kirita Mukuta, Jata Mukuta, Karanda Mukuta, Ratna Mukuta.
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By the late Gupta the uplifted back hands are lowered so as to rest on their weapons, the *gada* and *chakra* on the right and left respectively. (Donaldson 1933;7) There are twenty four images of Vishnu in the early and late medieval period, are very difficult to distinguish from one another. The four emblems placing in different ways in four armed of god : *Sankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and *Padma*. (Banerjia: 388). *Brihat Samhita* mentions that , two, four and eight-armed Vasudeva-Vishnu-Narayana were well known in 6th century CE or even earlier. By the end of Gupta period *Ayudhas* of the back lowered hands are represented in personified form, the *gada* being female and the *sankha* being male while the *chakra* and *padma* are neuter. (Donaldson 1933: 8) According to *Vishnudharmottara gada-devi* should be placed on the right and *chakrapurusa* on the left. (Bhattacharya: 243) , where as this text mentions that *chakrapurusa* should have pot-belly. In *Rahguvamsa* of Kalidasa it indicates that he has a dwarfish form. (Sivaramurti 1955: 128). According to Gopinath Rao the *Ayudha-Purusas* should have a *karunda- mukuta* and they should display in in *Anjali Mudra*. (Rao 1997: 188-89). Hence the placement of *gada-devi* on the right side of Vishnu and *chakra-Purusa* on the left side is not only popular in Gupta period but also consistently followed by all Periods. The *Trivikrama* form of *chaturvimsati-murti* was popular in the said period, which has mentioned in the *Vishnudharmottara*. (Begley : 44)

The earliest surviving Vishnu images in eastern Odisha belonging to late 6th century C.E and early 7th century C.E, conforms to this *Adi-murti Vasudeva* iconographic form popular through out northern India, mostly in Bengal and Bihar. The head of Vishnu is also farmed by large decorated and undecorated halo which invariably serves as the upper part of the back slab, which suggests that images were probably place within a sanctum, or out in the open space , rather in an exterior niche of a temple. (Donaldson 1933: 8)

Mudra/Hand pose:-

Types of Mudra	<i>Varada mudra</i> , <i>Abhaya Mudra</i> , <i>Danda Mudra</i> , <i>Katihasta Mudra</i> , <i>Bhumisparsa Mudra</i> , <i>Anjali mudra</i> .
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There are so many hand poses rendered to the gods and goddesses. Mostly the gods and goddesses are possessed in *Varada Mudra* and *Abhaya Mudra*. (Saraswati 1975: 191)

Description of the image:-

In *Vishnudharmottara* the description of four Viras has been mentioned. Each has one face and four arms. Vasudeva has a complexion like that of cloud laden with water He has richly ornamented, wear *vanamala* (garland of wood flower) exhibits the *kaustuva* (jewel) on his chest and has a *kiritimukuta* on his head. (Banerjia 2002: 386) The earth goddess *Bhudevi* is placed in his left leg while *Sridevi* is placed in the left leg of the god. In *Brihatsamhita* he has four armed showing *gada* and *Varada mudra* in his right while in his left hand he holds a

chakra and *sankha*. (Banerjia 2002: 386). In the *Matsya Purana* there are two descriptions: 1. He holds *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padma*, 2. Where people worshiped for desire of wealth and opulence he should hold a *gada* and *padma* in the right hands while the left hand carry *sankha* and *chakra*. Earth is to be located between his feet while *garuda* kneels on the right. Lakshmi should be placed on the left while those who desire prosperity should place *garuda* in front of him and *Sri* (Lakshmi) and *Pusti* (Saraswati) adorned with lotus on either side of the image" (Donaldson 1933: 3)

Area of Research in Kalahandi:-

Bhimkela:- It is situated , at the west corner of Ancient Asurgarh metropolis.

Village Bhimkela is situated near Asurgarh-Narla. Asurgarh-Narla is 30 km away from district head quarter Bhawanipatna. Here one Vishnu icon has been detected. The original temple is fallen. The villagers now built a flat roofed single chamber to install the image.

Vishnu Icon Bhimkela: -

The god is standing in *samabhanga* posture with dropping eye lids. It is carved on a red sand stone, on a high pedestal. He Wears *kirtimukuta* on his head, round face, wears *kundala* in his ears and decked with rich ornaments.

Hands: He has four hands.

Left hand: In his upper left hand he holds *chakra*.

His lower left hand rests on a *gada*.

Right Hand: His upper right hand is considerably erased.

His lower right hand is in *Abhaya mudra*.

The god wears *Kaustubha* mala on his chest and *vanamala* which is hanging up to his knee. He also wears wrist bangle in his hands. Two female figurines are carved in low relief on either side of the god. His *vahan* *Garuda* is sitting in kneeling posture with folded hand at the right leg.

On the pedestal other figures are also carved in low relief. The



	
God wears <i>kirtimukuta</i> on his head, dropping eye lids and wears <i>kundala</i> in his ears, oval face.	He is decorated with rich ornaments like: <i>vanamala</i> , <i>kaustuvamala</i> , necklace rounded his neck which are faintly visible.
	
Upper right hand is considerably erased. Hence the object he holds is not clearly identified.	In upper left hand he holds <i>chakra</i> (disc)
	

Lower right hand is in <i>Abhaya</i> mudra.	His lower right hand is placed on <i>gada</i> (mace)
	
At the right leg in upper a female is standing in <i>triibhangi</i> pose(triple fixation). Her left hand is probably places on her head. Below her the vehicle garuda is sitting in kneeling posture with <i>anjali</i> mudra.	At the right leg a female figurine is standing in <i>smabahnga</i> pose. Which is faintly visible.

Dadpur:-

Village Dadpur is situated 10 km away from district head quarter Bhawanipatna. Here one Vishnu icon is worshiped within the premises of Nilakantheswar temple. The village Dadpur is a medieval fort area and habitation site. The geographical feature ensures it's importance in early medieval period and it might have served as the of head quarter the Gangas to which they named as *Kamalamandala*. The Narla Siva temple inscription throws light that a Ganga governor general named Madan Mahadeva (Probably the son of Chodagangadeva), built the Siva temple at Narla and this site is hardly 10 km away from Dadpur. In this context Dadpur has been identified as the vice regality of the Ganga province, *Kamalamandala*. The temple Nilakantheswar was built by the Gangas. During the Nagas another temple was built on the original structure of the old temple. Some of the cult images are still worshipped within the premises of the temple. The Vishnu icon is one of them. (Mishra 1999: 346)

This icon is identified with Madhaba another manifestation of Vishnu.. According to Rao mentions about the distribution of weapons in his four hands like: *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padma* and should carry *chakra* and *gada* in his right upper and lower hands respectively. Similarly *sankha* and *padma* in his left upper and lower hands respectively. (Mishra 1999 :

348) Suggesting feature is that, the images are probably placed within a sanctum, or out in the open, rather than in an exterior niche of a temple.

Vishnu Icon Dadpur:-

The god is standing in *samabhanga* posture. He wears a *kirtimukuta* on his head, studded with precious gems. Tilak is applying on his forehead. A lotus pattern Halo (*prabha*) is carved at the back of his head, which is invariably serves as the upper part of the back slab. The icon is carved out on a black chlorite stone.

Hands:- The god has four hands.

Right Hand: In upper right hand he holds *chakra* (disc)

In lower right hand he holds *gada* (mace)

Left Hand: in upper left hand he carries *sankha*.

In lower left hand holds *padma* (lotus)

His face is round in shape with open eyes, thick chin, eyebrow, eye lids and mouth which are sharply carved out.

His ears studded with disc like *kundala*, and nose is flat in shape.

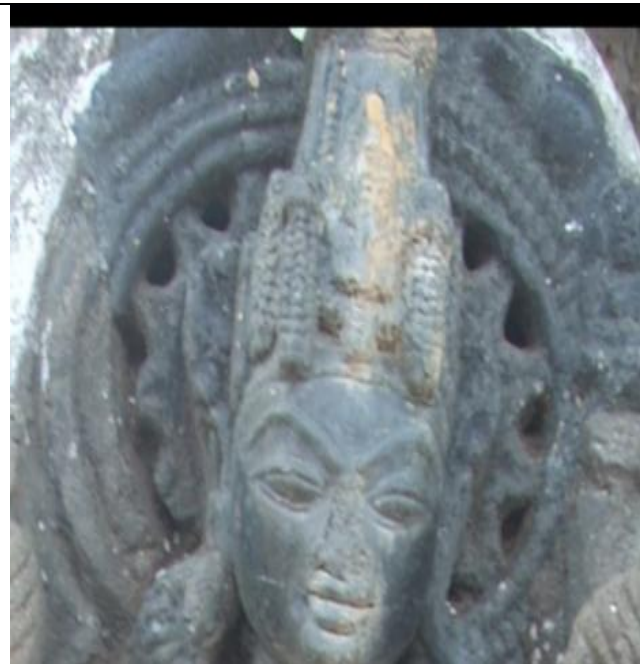
His chest is covers with *kavacha* partly by *kaustuvamala* and also *vanamal*. Beaded necklace and *keyura* rounded the neck of the deity. The image is also decorated with other ornaments like: armlet, wrist bangle, girdle etc..

The god is also **assisted by other female** divinities on his either side. Two such standing images are adorn either side of the god. They are carved in low relief, standing in *dvibhanga* posture.. They might have been represent *Rukmini* and *Satyabhama* (in earliest Odisha in four armed Vishnava iconography *Bhudevi* (Prithvi devi) and *Sridevi* (Laxmi devi) has noticed as his consort. But in subsequent period they were replaced by *Rukmini* and *Satyabhama*). (Mishra 1995: 114) At the bottom of left leg (near the female figure) another female divinity is shown in kneeling posture with *Anjali* mudra. Similarly on the right edge bottom of the god (below the female divinity) *Garuda* (the vehicle of god) is carved in kneeling posture with folded hand. At the remote left of *Garuda* other two female figure are carved which is faintly visible. At bottom pedestal some other female figurines are also carved out.

Icon measuers: 127cm X 66cm.



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Decorated Halo on the upper part of back slab



Kiratimukuta on his head



Face of the god is round, flat nose, open eyes,



God has richly ornate with

eyes bows, lips mouth and chin sharply carved. Wears <i>kundala</i> in his ear. The god is in grace full mood.	<i>Kaustubhamala</i>, <i>vanamal</i> , beaded necklace, and <i>keyura</i>. Chest is covered by <i>kavacha</i>
	
Upper right hand holds <i>chakra</i>.(disc) which is a destructive weapon used by both gods and goddesses	Upper left hand holds <i>sankha</i>(konch) which is a musical instrument holds by both god and goddesses in Indian religious treaties
	
Lower right hand holds <i>gada</i> it is also a destructive weapon	Lower left hand holds a <i>padma</i>(lotus) with stem.



At the right leg in upper part a female divinity is standing in *dvibhanga* pose . wears some ornaments. Below is sitting garuda in kneeling pose with *anjalimudra*.

At the extreme left of *garuda*, two other females are also standing in parallel which is faintly visible.



At the left leg in upper part a female divinity is standing in *dvibhanga* pose . wears some ornaments. Below is sitting another female in kneeling posture with *anjalimudra*.

Conclusion:-

Kalahandi was a core area of Mahakantara. After samudraguptas southward campaign it was bifurcated in to two halves. One part was ruled by Nalas on Koraput and another part was ruled by Parvatadwaraka on Kalahandi region in 5th century C.E, where started the dynastic history of Kalahandi from Parvatadwaraka. Since then many dynasties were exercised their power over this landmass. First temple construction was started by the Parvatadwarakas. This activity was spear headed by the Somavamsis. But the *Vaishnavism* entered into the landmass

because of the influence of Nalas. Towards 5th century C.E. more over it is popularize only after the rise of Gangas in 12th century C.E. Although *Vaishnava* temples and images which can be dated earlier than the 15th century C.E, there are a surprising number of detached images, mostly from the 12th/13th century C.E, which testify to the widespread popularity of *Vaishnavism* from the Ganga period.(Donaldson 1987: 1119) *Vaishnavism* was in full swing from 12th century C.E. Gangas in first part were follower of *Saivism*. It continued up to the middle of Chadagangas rule. Later on he became the *Vaishnavism* because of influence of Ramanuja. Evident is that the gigantic temple of Jagannath at Puri.(Sahu 1980: 174) This cult widely prevalent and popularise duting the Suryavamsi Gajapatis where they believed on *Vaishnavism* Which is still Continued in Odisha. Some parts of the image has been repaired by the temple community of Dadpur because of damage.

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