

Revanta in Odishan Art and Iconography

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Abstract: *Revanta, the son of Surya and Sanjna is an important deity of Hindu pantheon according to mythology. Visnudharmottara Purana mentioned that he is to be shown riding on horseback like Surya and is to be placed on one side of the images of the Sun - god. In art, he always depicted as riding on horseback as a valiant warrior. Again, the deity is always holds either a sword or a spear in his right hand and whip in the left besides an attendant holding a chhatra on his back. This indicates that Revanta might have worshipped for victory in wars and expeditions. Odisha was stronghold of Saura cult and the grand Sun temple of Konarak is located in Puri district in the eastern coast of Bay of Bengal. The deity was not known to the scholars of Art History of Odisha up to 1990. P. K. Mishra for the first time published an article when he came across an image of Revanta in the collection of N. K. Sahu Museum of Sambalpur University. In the present paper an attempt has been made to show the art and iconography of this rare deity of Hindu pantheon. The survey yielded ten images throughout the state of Odisha with varying dimensions, date and iconographic features.*

Keywords: Revanta, Visnudharmottara Purana, Odisha, Visnu Puana, Brhatsamhita, Dasavatara, Somavamsis

Revanta in Literature and Epigraphs:

Revanta is an important deity of Hindu pantheon especially found in northern, central and eastern part of India. In *Visnu Puana*¹ sage Parasara has described the story of his birth and the *Markandeya Purana*² also gives an account of the circumstances leading to the birth of Revanta. According to *Visnudharmottara Purana*³ Revanta is to be shown riding on horseback like the Surya and is to be placed on one side of the Surya image. In art, he always depicted as riding on horseback as a valiant warrior. The *Agni Purana*⁴ describes him as a horseman. In medieval Sanskrit literature Revanta enjoyed special veneration of the kings and generals. In *Kuvalayamala Katha* Revanta, the king of Guhyakas was revered for delivering people from the terrors of forests, of enemies and robbers and for bestowing upon his devotees comfort, happiness, kingship, health, wealth and fame⁵. Again the deity is always holds either a sword or a spear in his right hand and whip in the left besides an attendant holds a *chhatra* on his back. This obviously indicates that Revanta was worshipped for victory in wars and expeditions⁶.

Since the *Visnudharmottara*, *Visnu Puana* and the *Brhatsamhita* of Varahamihira were the works of Gupta period it is quite reasonable to suggest that the worship of Revanta as a minor Brahmanical deity associated with Sun - worship came in to vogue in the Gupta period and the details of the iconography were laid down⁷. According to the 14th century AD a medical treatise of Abhinava Chandra who wrote *Asvavaidya*, Revanta was worshipped to cure the diseases of horse and the soldiers of the cavalry forces⁸.

Apart from the literature and iconographic texts, the Hulgur inscription of Vikramaditya VI (1077 AD), Mutgi inscription of Bhillama (1189 AD), Mulasthanesvara temple inscription (1130 AD), Kolar inscription of the time of Singhana (1210 - 46 AD), Halebid inscription of the Hoysala king Ballala I (1173 - 1220 AD) etc Revanta as a valiant warrior is vividly mentioned along with a comparison of the donor kings⁹.

The Kalachuris of Tripuri and Ratanpura were renowned warriors famous for their aggressive war policy. They had taken possession of South Kosala from the Somavamsis in

9th - 10th centuries and fought a long term battles against the Ganges of Utkala. A number of temples in the upper Mahanadi valley were constructed by them. The Seorinarayana statue inscription of 1146 AD (Kalachuri era 898) compares one Sangrama Sinha with Revanta¹⁰. The Pujaripali stone inscription of Gopaladeva (12th century AD) compares the donor king with Revanta mounted on a horse¹¹. The Kalachuris were great exponents of Sun worship and they even patronized the worship of Revanta for which several temples were constructed by them. Akaltara stone inscription of Ratnadeva - II also thrown considerable light on Revanta worship in central India.¹²

Revanta in Sculptural Art:

The earliest Revanta image was discovered from Nagari near Chittor in Rajasthan has been assigned to the 5th - 6th centuries AD. Three other images found at Newal in Uttar Pradesh, Bhagalpur and Gaya in Bihar have also been assigned to the same period¹³. Besides these images of Revanta were found from Kubaresvara temple in Ahmeda district, near Sun temple of Modhera, Sun temple within the fort of Chittor and Harihara temple no - I at Osian in Rajasthan, Sarnath, Mathura and Nalanda museum hailing from the adjacent areas. The above images are small in size as compared with the Sambalpur University Museum and crude in execution.

In the beginning of the 20th century when the Revanta images were discovered from Bihar were added to the archaeological galleries of the Indian museum, Calcutta, the authorities were wrongly identified as the images of Kalki - the future incarnation of Visnu. The images of Kalki are generally shown as a single figure in the Dasavatara panels or on the back - frame of a Visnu image riding on a horse and holding a sword in his uplifted right hand. But the dogs, pigs, musicians and the attendants which are generally shown in the sculptures of Revanta are invariably absent in the images of Kalki. Pandit B. B. Bidyabinod quoting a verse from Varahamihira's *Brhatsamhita* (ch.58, v.56) had correctly identified the above so - called images of Kalki as that of Revanta. Sometimes, the images of Revanta were also mistaken for the sculptures depicting the scene of the great renunciation of Lord Buddha, when prince Siddhartha

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had left the capital city of Kapilavastu on his horse Kanthaka preceded by the charioteer Chhandaka¹⁴.

Revanta though not a very popular god has yet found a plentiful depiction in Indian art. The available sculptures of the god are mainly of two types. In the first variety, he is shown as a single figure, riding on a horseback with attendants. In the second variety, the deity is shown in the centre as above, but preceded and succeeded by the horse riders, who may be identified as Danda and Pingala. As Revanta is the son of Surya, it is not surprising that his two attendants are also sometimes shown with him particularly when he is going for hunting in a forest¹⁵.

Revanta Images in Odisha:

Revanta images has been found from the Bhagabati temple in Banpur, Gramadevati temple in Kusun Nagar and Naikani temple near Agarpara of Bhadrak district, Rajyasri Dharmasala of Balangir town (now displayed in Sambalpur University), Simhanada temple in Baramba in Cuttack district, Trivenisvara temple at Madhipur near Konarak and two images from the Gangesvari temple at Bayalisbati, Poonesvara temple in the village Bhillideuli in the district of Puri. Out of ten images discovered so far the deity is found associated with six in Sakta temples and three in Siva temples and the one from Balangir town whose association is not known to us. The deity carved in the Simhanada temple of Baramba (Fig.1) is considered as the earliest one dated back to the 9th century AD on the basis of the architectural features of the temple and the image found within the Bhagabati temple is a product of the 14th century which was collected from the adjoining areas and reinstalled here within a niche of the recent build temple.

An image of the deity on horseback in the northern *raha* niche of the main Sun temple of Konarak, regarded as Surya by M. M. Ganguly¹⁶ and H. Zimmer¹⁷ However N. K. Bhattasali¹⁸ identified the image with Revanta (Fig.2). It is interesting to note that unlike Revanta, who is invariably shown on horseback, Surya at Konarak main temple and Chayadevi temple within the Konarak temple precinct has been represented as riding on his celestial chariot driven by seven galloping horses¹⁹. Similarly Revanta image kept in the Trivenisvara temple at Madhipur (Fig.3) near Konarak is superb in its execution. The sword of Revanta images in their right hand of the Naikani (Fig.4) temple and Kusun Nagar is not clear but the holding of *chhatra* by an attendant at the back is very peculiar whereas the holding of sword of the Revanta image at Gangesvari temple at Bayalisbati is superb. Another image of Revanta is also found in Podagarh, the capital city of the Nala dynasty located in Umerkote of Nabarangpur district.

The stone image of Revanta of N. K. Sahu Museum was previously lying in the premises of Rajyasri Dharmasala of Balangir town. N. K. Sahu collected it for the Department of History in the year 1974. The image is 182 c. m. in length, 55 c. m. in breadth with a thickness of 26 cm. It is carved on a huge block of hard granite. The image is two armed and in *sthanaka* pose with knees slightly bent forward. The deity has an oval face, broad chest and an attenuated waist. Unfortunately both the hands are broken, though the right arm and left arm are visible. The remaining part of the left

hand holds an unidentifiable object. The deity is bare footed. It wears a conical crown (*kirita mukuta*) on the head, *kundalas* on both ears, and two necklaces one small and beaded and the other designed with a locket at the centre. A sacred thread goes diagonally across the body, armlets and wristlets are beautifully shown on the hands. The deity wears a *dhoti* and a highly ornate girdle in the waist. Below the image are carved with seven horses along with Aruna, the charioteer. An umbrella is shown above the head of the god. He is attended by ten females, five on either side. No foreign attributes are traced in the sculpture. It is presumed that the image is of purely indigenous origin and belonged to the 12th - 13th centuries AD²⁰.

The present image is of the first type, mounting in a horse and is indicated by bent knees. It bears the indelible imprint of Kalachuri art and has striking similarities with the large number of Brahmanical sculptures of Pujaripalli. The image is artistically much inferior in standard and cannot be associated with Konarak for which it can safely take as the product of Kalachuri School of art flourished in the South Kosala region.

Since the image of Revanta are not very common in the Deccan and South India the above findings is a testimony of the prevalence of Revanta worship in and around South Kosala region. It might have been once upon a time, the presiding deity of a temple adjacent to Balangir. The occurrence of Revanta worship in coastal part of Odisha might have been brought by the Somavamsis in the 9th century AD and made popular to the Saura cult in the subsequent period²¹.

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Plates



Figure 1: Revanta in Simhanada temple, Baramba



Figure 2: So called Revanta in, northern *raha* niche, Konarak Sun temple



Figure 3: Revanta in Trivenisvara temple, Madhipur



Figure 4: Revanta worshipped as Naikani (Sakta deity) in Purusandha Agarpara