Genesis of Sun Worship
The Sun Gods of Tribal Orissa

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“O Mahāprabhu, below is Bismotin, above is Dharam DeotÁ. O Mahāprabhu Singi-Arke, be witness! I salute you with ten million salutations. If I stole and anyone saw me, let my eyes be blind, my arms and legs break, my crops be ruined.”

A Bondo man¹

Introduction

Sun worship is the most ancient faith in India. Scholars broadly agree that Sun worship in India started in Neolithic period and its worship by means of symbols continued to be an integral part of the proto-historic people.² V.C.Srivāstava holds the view that it was historically incorrect to begin the story of Sun worship from the Vedic period. He considers the Sun god to have played an important role in the eschatology of the proto-historic cultures of India.

The tradition of Sun worship in Orissa is more ancient than what it seems to have been accounted for. It reached its glorious climax in the form of a monumental Sun temple at Konārak. However, Sun worship in Orissa continues to be a living tradition. The concept of Sun worship in Orissa in general, and at Konārak in particular, seems to have had a multiple layer of influence from different sources since pre-historic times. K.S.Behera traces Sun worship in Orissa back to the early Vedic period. He relies rather on the probable Vedic nexus of a Rishi namely Dirghatamas, who, according to the mythical accounts of the Purāṇas, was considered the first ancestor of Prince Kalinga. However, there are enough evidences to consider an indigenous tradition of Sun worship, which probably preceded the Vedic Sun gods, among the primitive tribes of Orissa.

Sun Images in Rock Shelters

The Sun images found in rock shelters in certain parts of Orissa provide material evidence to the antiquity of Sun worship. In a shallow rock shelter in Chhengapāhaé area in Sundargarh district, we find circular images reminiscent of Sun. This shelter is located opposite to ChichidĀkōl at about 200 ft above the forest road. The mural is placed towards the center of the shelter wall and the images averaging 20-26 cms in diameter are well defined and executed in red ochre tones. The circular representations of ‘Sun’ form
two concentric circles, the space within which is filled with red ochre. One of the circles is not filled solid. The images have straight strokes, much like ‘Sun rays’ at intervals around the outermost circle. The images are staggered on the wall surface.

Assigning a definite date to rock paintings is a difficult job. The observation that the rock paintings contain a few symbols, which are conventional representations of Sun, and hence, their evidences may be taken for throwing light on the question of the beginning of Sun-worship would be a relevant guideline. In that sense, the Sun images found in the rock shelters near ChichidAkol definitely reveal the antiquity of Sun worship in Orissa. The red ochre tone given to the images is a characteristic feature of the rock-paintings of India. The observation of V.C.SrivAstava on such rock paintings that the use of red color may have been inspired by the redness of Sun and red color being a symbol of life had its origin in such images may be a relevant point to note.

In Jogimath near the village Sagada of NuApad district, we come across, in a rock shelter, the images of a stick-like human figure, humped and hump-less cattle, a few geographical motifs and patterns along with a Sun motif. Again, there is a motif of Sun in a rock shelter at Manikmod near Himgir in Sundargarh district. ChichidAkol images date back to Chalcolithic period. The images found in Manikmod and Sagada have also been assigned to the Chalcolithic period based on super-imposition and color pattern and by correlation of such motifs found in Chalcolithic potteries in the form of graffiti marks. At NuAgarh on the left bank of MahAnadi in Sonepur district, potteries with graffiti marks of Sun have been recovered from the stratified deposits of 7th century B.C as established by C14 determination. Hence, it can be said that the practice of Sun worship was in vogue in Orissa as early as Chalcolithic period.

Vedic tradition recognizes the existence of a few Sun-worshipping tribes such as Daradas, Suhas, PuÁdras and the Barbaras. Another Sun worshipping tribe called Umaábaras was known during later Vedic period itself. The MahÁbhÁrata recognizes some Sun worshipping tribes of non-Aryan origin such as the Siddhas, the CÁranas, the Gandharvas, the Yáks, the Guhyakas and the NÁgas, the A sąras and the RÁkÁosas. It may be noted that Sarna, which means ‘sacred grove’, is the collective term used to denote the tribal religions of Chotanagpur area in Chhattisgarh and Mayurbhanj in Orissa and these tribes venerate Singbonga, the Sun god as their supreme god. If that is so, we can probably afford to suggest that the CÁranas mentioned in the MahÁbhÁrata, as a Sun worshipping non-Aryan tribe is most likely the Aestro-A siatic group such as Mundas and Santals. Again, taking the A sur legend of Mundas into consideration, we can suggest that the Asuras mentioned in the MahÁbhÁrata are probably of Mundarian origin. Incidentally, A sur is the name of a tribe in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and in western and north-western Orissa. It may not be out of the place to mention here that in Bengal, the Varman and Sena rulers, called themselves ‘Saura’, that is worshippers of the Sun god.

In the light of the above, this paper attempts to investigate the tradition of Sun worship among certain tribal groups in and around Orissa, who speak languages of Aastro-A siatic
family and intends to assess their possible contribution to the evolution of Sun worship in Orissa with a focus on Konarak, the nerve center of Sun worship. Austro-Asian tribes are considered more ancient than the Dravidians in eastern India and hence, obviously pre-Vedic as well.

**Singbonga, the Supreme Spirit**

In Austro-Asiatic languages such as Ho (Kol), Mundari, Santal, Kol (Singhbhum), Bhumij, Gadaba and Remo, Sun is called Singi. In Mundari, sing or singi also means ‘a day’, and ‘the period from sunrise to sunset.’ Sun god, the supreme spirit of Santals, is called Singbonga. The Mundari-speaking tribes of the adjoining areas in Jharkhand venerate Singbonga as the Supreme God, ‘all good, omniscient and omnipotent; maker, master and fosterer of all things living or inanimate.’¹² In Mundari and Santali, bonga is a generic term to denote ‘a spirit.’ The Bondos, in their Remo language, designate Sun god as Singi-Arke. The use of such compounds containing sing to denote the Sun god is common among the tribes speaking the languages of the Munda family. Apart from Mundas and Santals, tribes such as Hos, Birhors, and Asurs also call their solar deity as Singbonga. Santals describe the Sun god as Sing-Chando as well. The Mundas maintain that Singbonga, who existed in the remotest times, continues to exist forever.

It is imperative to understand the spirit world of Mundarian tribes in order to assess the relative position of Singbonga in their religion and the possible influence of concept of Singbonga in the mainstream Sun worshipping tradition of Orissa. Any spirit conceived as wielding good or evil influence over men and their affairs is called bonga. A study of Mundari-Santali spirit world reveals that apart from Singbonga, the master of the universe, there are certain lesser and tutelary spirits, who go by the generic name bonga. Mundas believe that the soul of a deceased person returns to its former home and dwells in the store-room. Hence, the former ho (man), who has now become a bonga (spirit), is called ohabonga, meaning ‘a domestic or house spirit.’

According to the Asur legend of Mundas¹³, when Singbonga descended to the earth as an itch-covered youth to destroy the rebellious Asurs and to restore order, the despairing wives of the vanquished Asurs clung to the clothes of Singbonga as he re-ascended. At that stage, Singbonga extracted a promise of obedience from them and gave them in return a right to receive sacrificial offerings from the Mundas and shook them off. All those women fell on the mountains, ponds, fields, forests and became protecting spirits of those places. Those protecting spirits are also known as bongas. Thus, the spirit that dwells in a mountain is called burubonga (buru=mountain) and the one that lives in a pond or a tank is known as ikirbonga (ikir=pond).

Likewise, any mysterious being, which is deemed powerful on account of its benevolent or mischievous character and obtains worship, is also called bonga. For example, the spirit that is considered responsible for poisoning is called najombonga. In
Encyclopaedia Mundarica, the term bonga has been defined as ‘any being endowed with intelligence and free will that is independent of matter, either by nature or by reason of death.’ This sums up the concept and character of bonga.

The supreme position of Singbonga in Munda religion is very clear. Singbonga is often identified with Haânam ‘the old one.’ The men of Ho tribe begin their sacrificial formula with the words Oca Singbonga. It is customary among the Mundas to offer daily salutation to Singbonga at Sunrise. They believe that Singbonga alone is not in need of any food. Therefore, in the formulas of all sacrifices, except those offered to Singbonga the spirits are invited to eat the victim and partake the sacrificial drink. Mundas believe that at the time of childbirth, Singbonga writes down not exactly its fate, but the course, events and length and nature of life he grants to it. The Mundas often remark that death inevitably comes in consequence of a decree of the ‘old one’ and that one may not ascribe it to any ill will on his part.

**Characteristic Features of Singbonga**

Singbonga dealt with the fallen men in a second primordial movement. He punished all men and caused destruction through ‘Rain of Fire.’ Having destroyed men, Singbonga helped re-raising the Munda tribe through a couple, who are believed to be the first couple, the progenitors of the tribe. Singbonga called the first couple ‘grand children’ and they called him Tata, meaning ‘grand father.’ Calling the Sun god ‘grand father’ is a practice prevalent in many primitive communities. For example, in Osage Indian myth, the Sun god is called ‘the great grand father.’

The idea of Sun-cure is deeply embedded in the practice of Sun worship in many communities. Singbonga is the saviour of Munda tribe. In the ‘Rain of Fire’ myth, when the child of the first couple falls ill, Singbonga saves the child and thereby the tribe, by introducing a sacrifice. Mundas consider illness or misfortune as a warning or punishment given by Singbonga directly or through the agency of a bonga for some misdeed committed. Remedy is identified with the help of a diviner and Singbonga is propitiated with the sacrifice of a white fowl or a white animal, for cure.

Singbonga is a symbol of fertility and fecundity. Mundas believe that Haânam, the Supreme being created rice and millet as he created all other plants. According to the Asur legend of Mundas, it was Singbonga who multiplied their rice under the guise of the itch-covered boy. They further believe that Singbonga has superadded a roa (the magic fertility) to the organic qualities, which preexisted in any good and healthy seed. It is pertinent to note that in Mundari, the term roa is generally used to denote the innermost self of man. Singbonga distributes this blessing over the grains of all farmers in fairness and justice, though not to all in equal measure. The sacrificial rituals of the Mundas associated with Batauli (thinning of the sown-paddy and ritualistic-weeding) and kolam-sing (festival held at threshing floor at the time the paddy begins to ripe) also establish the fertility and fecundity orientation of Singbonga. In a typical sacrificial prayer on the
occasion of Flower Feast, the Pahan (sacrificer) invokes Sun god saying, ‘Singbonga’ on high, King, you created everything and made it grow.”¹⁸ According to Munda mythology, the God of Creation (Ha’am, who is identified with Singbonga) brought the first human couple to act as man and wife. After the ‘Rain of Fire’ during the second primordial movement, Singbonga repeated the same thing with the only surviving representative of the tribe and thus saved the Munda tribe.

When Singbonga rained fire on the fallen men, all except a young man and his sister, died. The tribe must continue and therefore the persons who represent the tribe must indulge in acts of procreation. Hence, Singbonga had to take the initiative. He taught them the art of preparing rice-beer and made them drink the same. He induced them to go to sleep, and while sleeping, he removed the husking-pole kept between them and the young couple under the influence of the intoxicating beer, behaved like man and wife. The next morning, when they said to Singbonga that they had done something wrong, Singbonga replied to them that there was nothing wrong in it.

For Mundas and other sister tribes such as Santals, marriage has important religious connotations. A marriage cannot take place against the will of Singbonga. They consult omens, which are considered signs of Singbonga’s will, before finalizing a marriage proposal. The ritual symbolism involved in the marriage ceremonies of Mundas remind the primordial marriage, which the Creator had brought about. Thus, the fertility symbolism with regard to crops as well as humans associated with Singbonga is obvious.

Singbonga is the God of truth. He is revered as ‘the One who sees and hears everything.’ He stands witness to promises made and contracts entered. Oaths taken in the name of Singbonga cannot be broken. While taking oaths in village panchayats, Mundas say, Sirmare Singbonga, otere mūe horoko meaning ‘in heaven Singbonga, on earth the five men (panchayat).’ When a marriage between a boy and a girl is finalized by the village elders, on the occasion of bala (official betrothal), oaths are taken to give a public status to the contract. In this ceremony, a village elder or a respectable person of the village represents the bride’s side and another such person the groom’s. Both of them take an oath, which has been documented by Albert Van Exem as follows:

‘On whose behalf do we clasp hands?’
‘On behalf of (names of groom and bride).’
‘Who made this hand?’
‘Singbonga.’¹⁹

The above account brings home the role of Singbonga in maintaining the solemnity of the promises made.

Singbonga is the fountainhead of authority. The Mundas believe that Singbonga exercises much of his authority on earth through the panchayat.²⁰ In Munda society, all authority flows from tradition; tradition itself derives from Singbonga. In the hymns of praise
Chanted by Pahan or Deoui, Singbonga is described as Daibi Raja (Divine King).\textsuperscript{21} In the Asur legend, Singbonga is described as sitting on a golden throne, holding a golden scepter, in the company of his wife. The saying ‘In heaven is Singbonga, on the earth are the five men (village panchayat)’ shows that the seeds of rule of law and dispensation of justice and other rudimentary aspects of polity and governance within the traditional system of the Mundas flow from Singbonga.

Santals associate their Sun god with the east while performing rituals.\textsuperscript{22} The sacrificial altar meant for Singbonga faces east; Among the Mundas the Deou, while sitting for divination to find out the identity of the spirit that caused illness to the remedy-seeker faces east.\textsuperscript{23}

**Singi-Arke, the MahÁprabhu of Bondos**

The Bondos, who designate themselves as Remo, meaning ‘men’, are considered the most primitive among the tribes of Orissa. They speak an Austro-Asiatic language called Remo. Bondos identify the Creator with the Sun. The proper name of this Supreme Being who is considered the ‘president of immortals’ is Singi-Arke or Sih-Arke. In Remo, Arke means ‘Moon’ or ‘month.’ In Gadaba, another Austro-Asiatic language spoken in the vicinity of Bondo Hills, Arke means ‘Moon.’ However, Verrier Elwin records that in Gadaba, Arke means ‘star.’ Whatever the case may be, the occurrence of the term Arke in combination with Singi deserves attention in view of the fact that the place name KonÁrak, the seat of Sun Temple, has traditionally been interpreted as the combination of two words, kona and arka.

In Sanskrit, Arka means ‘Sun.’ Verrier Elwin suggests that the Arke in the compound ‘Singi-Arke’ is not the Remo word at all, but the Sanskrit Arka, and is a sort of ‘echo-word’ to strengthen the sense. However, we have reasons to differ. To presume that a primitive tribe like that of Bondos has borrowed the term Arka from Sanskrit to designate their own Sun god as Singi-Arke, whom Verrier Elwin himself describes as ‘God of gods and Lord of lords’, appears untenable. The Sun god of Bondos is not a later adoption but the fountain head of their faith and belief-system.

**Characteristic Features of Singi-Arke**

According to creation myths of Bondos, the original world, which was submerged in a great deluge, was recreated by Singi-Arke, the Sun god. Bondos have a variety of recreation myths. In most of these myths, the Sun god is credited with stimulating the only surviving pair to copulate and procreate in spite of the fact that they were indeed siblings. In one story, MahÁprabhu (Sun-god) takes the brother and sister out of the gourd, in which they had taken shelter to escape deluge and changes their appearance by giving them smallpox so that they do not know each other, and make them live like man and wife. In another story, the Sun god gives the surviving man and woman some pills to
excite them and teach them how to copulate. He also gives the girl medicine to induce menstruation in order to make her fit to bear children. According to another Bondo legend, the Sun god gives the girl squint and makes her brother a leper and institutes their marriage.

Bondos believe that the world that the Supreme Being created was at first a “singularly imperfect one; it lacked the solace of beer, its inhabitants had no idea of the pleasures of sex, there was very little to eat.”

It was Singi -Arke who discovered ardent spirits and taught men how to smoke. It was he who instructed men and women in the art of copulation.

In the creation myths of Bondos, Singi-Arke, in the post-deluge scenario, sees the two surviving children crying for food. He sends a wild boar to the underworld, which brought earth along with seven kinds of trees including mango, sago palm and mahuÁ.

There is a legend involving Ramai-Bhimai (the Sun-Moon duo). Bondos identify the legendry Bhimai with Singi-Arke, the solar deity, creative, fertilizing and supreme.

The association of this solar deity with grain is an important aspect of Bondo faith. Verrier Elwin records:

In the olden days, rice had wings and could fly about. Once it said to men, ‘I am going to eat you.’ They said, ‘Eat us if you will. But first let us count how many names we have. How many have you got?’ Rice told its names; there were many of them. Men told their names, and found they had one more. Then rice was afraid; it thought, ‘I am weaker than men; they will devour me.’ But the millets said, ‘Don’t be afraid; we will help you.’ But all the same rice decided to run away. Bhimai told it not to go, but it took no notice. He drew his sword and cut off its wings. Since then men have eaten rice.

What is the significance of the story? What does the winged rice symbolize? What could be the significance of Bhimai cutting the wings of rice? Let us take some input from modern science. Almost half a century ago, the Jeypore tract of Orissa (the area where Bondo and many other Austric and Dravidian tribes are living) was identified as “another independent center of origin” of rice. Subsequent researches have established that the broad geographical region comprising JhÁrkhand, Chhattisgarh, western Orissa and Jeypore tract of Orissa satisfies all the basic requirements to claim as the center of origin of cultivated rice.

It is pertinent to note that scientists have collected as many as 1750 accesses of cultivated rice varieties from Jeypore area. However, S.D.Sharma holds Jeypore region to be a primary center and assigns an ‘incipient domesticated origin’ to the rice crop in that region. Considering the occurrence of the progenitor wild paddy of both perennial and annual varieties and diversity of domesticated paddy occurring in the area, he holds a view that Proto-Austroloid tribes of Orissa probably domesticated the rice.
This input read with the Bhimai myth quoted earlier provides interesting insights to us. This author is of the view that this story should be understood in the context of the process of domestication of rice thousands of years ago. The concept of ‘rice having wings’ signifies the wild nature of paddy. The nature of wild paddy, which was not confined to a particular place unlike the cultivated paddy, probably led the Bondos to believe that the paddy had wings. Then the act of cutting the wings of the rice signifies the advent of domestication of paddy, which was attributed to the role of the Sun god in fertility and seed germination.

A similar story regarding rice and millets sharing the burden of feeding the early humans is prevalent among the Mundas as well. If that is the case, the credit for identifying the Sun god with fertility and productivity should be understood as a part of universal wisdom of early farmers and be shared with the primitive tribes of Orissa.

Sun has been considered a symbol of royalty and authority in many a civilization. People took Kings to be the representatives of Sun on the earth. The Bondo socio-religious concept is no exception to this. Verrier Elwin has documented a story on the remaking of the world, which can be cited as evidence. In this story, the Mahaprabhu (Singi-Arke) lives in a golden palace in the sky. Even before the origin of religion and demigods, before priests and shamans came in, the ‘bright and dazzling’ Singi-Arke was in direct correspondence with his subjects, observes Verrier Elwin. And on that basis he applies the title, ‘God of gods and Lord of lords’, which is consistent with the Bondo worldview.

Sun, with his ‘all seeing eyes’, is considered a divine witness. People do make promises and enter into contracts keeping Sun as the witness, for the promises made in the name of Sun can never be violated. This tradition can be traced back to the primitive religion of the tribes. In Bondo Hills, it is believed that Sun stands as a witness to vice and virtue, and oaths are taken in his name. Bondo men invoke Singi-Arke to punish those who give false evidence. Singi-Arke may also be invoked to prove one’s innocence.

Singi-Arke is also not always benevolent. He can be invoked to punish an enemy. Singi-Arke may give high fever and has been known to make a child cry itself into convulsions. Because of this, Bondo mothers do not allow their children to lie on their backs in open gazing at the sky, for this tempts the Sun to attack them.

Bondos have many stories involving Sun and Moon. One of those stories mentions of Sun and Moon as brother and sister. In another story, they are depicted as lovers. In a third one, Sun and Moon are portrayed as man and wife.

In one of the myths of Bondos, Sun is depicted to have wandered on earth in the form of a black-bull. This Sun-bull symbolism deserves our attention for its parallels in ancient civilizations flourished elsewhere. In Egypt, Osiris in whom the solar element was mixed up in his capacity as the earth dweller was worshipped in the form of the bull called Apis. Bull-worship in general is considered to be representing theriomorphic aspect of Sun
worship. There is a view that the unicorn bull so profusely represented on the Indus seals might have been a symbol of Sun god.30

**Uyungsum or Uyungboi of Saoras**

The Saoras are one of the most primitive tribes of Orissa. Though small in number, their geographical spread within the State of Orissa is really amazing. However, their concentration is in Gajapati (earlier, a part of Ganjam district) and Rayagada (earlier, a part of Koraput district) districts. The Saoras are considered having racial affinity with the Proto-Austroloids and holding linguistic affinity with the South Munda division of the Austro-Asiatic language family.

Saoras are among the few tribesmen who are mentioned by early western geographers. “There can be little doubt that they are the Suari of Pliny and the Sabarai of Ptolemy,” asserts Verrier Elwin.31 “There seems good reason to believe that the Savaras were formerly the dominant branch of the great Kolarian family,” says Cunningham.32 In Sōmadeva’s Kathā Sarit Sāgara, the name Savara seems to have been used as a synonym for Puliāda and Bhilla tribes as well.33 There is a view that the tribe mentioned as Surae by Megasthenese34 could be identified with Sauri in Sanskrit, a word used for Sun worshippers.35 The names of Vedic authors such as Abhitapas Sauryaí, Cakūh Sauryaí, Vibhrat Sauryaí reveal the intimate connection between the title Sauryaí and Sun god. These authors have not been connected with any other god in the Vedic and in all these cases they have been called as the son of Sūrya.36

In Saora language, Uyungan denotes ‘Sun’ and the most popular names for the Sun god are Uyungsum and Uyungboi. The Saora people pronounce the name of the Sun god in several ways. Saoras of Puttasing area call him Oingom, while in Serango and Mohanā areas the name is pronounced as Oingo. Usually, the suffixes sum and boi are used by Saoras to designate male and female deities respectively. However, when it comes to Sun god, both the suffixes are used indiscriminately. Darammaboi, Lankasum, Gadelsum, Gadejangboi and Marandakakumsum are the other names of Sun god. It appears that Uyungboi denotes the morning sun and worshipped in the morning, while Darammaboi denotes the evening sun and is worshipped in the afternoon. Uyungsum is regarded the greatest of gods, and according to Saoras it is he, ‘who gives and takes away’ and ‘birth and death are in his hands.’ 37

Saoras worship Sun god as a great promoter of human fertility. The nature of Uyungsum is a blend of benevolent and malevolent tendencies. “As a mother gives milk to her child, Uyungboi draws milk from her breasts and gives it to men in the form of rain,” the Saoras believe. When he is displeased, he gives fever and headaches and often leprosy. For Saoras, Uyungboi is the supreme deity and sacrificial offers of fowl and pig are made on all the important occasions like ‘fresh fruiting festival.’ In all rituals and prayers Sun (Uyungboi) and Moon (Angai) are propitiated.
Eye is a symbol of Sun god. Saoras sometimes consider Uyungsum as the eye of Kittung. Uyungsum has a number of gods subservient to him and it is said that when sacrifices to all other deities have failed, the Saoras approach the Sun god for redressing their grievances.

Saoras venerate the Sun god as the witness of ‘goodness, fate and sin’ and it is believed that he punishes the sinners with leprosy or epilepsy. Oaths are regarded very seriously. They are usually taken in the name of Uyungsum (morning Sun god) and Darammasum (evening Sun god). A man who takes oath, takes some salt, puts it in on a piece of dry cow dung and stands facing the Sun. He says, “O Uyungsum Maháprabhu, you are in the sky; you are in the east.” He turns westward and says, “O Darammaboi, you are in the sky; you sink in the west.” He touches the ground and says, “O Labosum, you are witness that I am telling the truth. If I lie, let me melt as this salt melts in water; let my body be consumed as this cow dung is consumed by fire.”

Saoras consider Moon as the wife of Sun. Moon is deified as Angaiboi and stars and planets are considered to be her children. Sometimes Angaiboi is also called Sandraboi. Singbonga the Sun god of Kol-Munda-Santal tradition is not unknown to Saoras for they worship him occasionally in the same sense. ‘He lives above, above all, and he sees all,’ the Saoras say, but the use of the name Singbonga is very rare, reports Verrier Elwin. The knowledge of Singbonga among the Saoras of southern Orissa can be an indicator of the fact that the worship of Singbonga as the Sun god was part of the common heritage of the Kol-Munda-Santal tribes in the remote past before their division into various language and dialect groups.

Common Grounds and Connecting Threads

The Abode of Ancestors

We may now trace the probable signs of nexus between the Sun-centric primitive tribal beliefs and faiths on the one hand and the popular temple-based Sun worship on the other.

In the Āgveda, the highest point of Sun is spoken of as the abode of ancestors, and the forefathers are united with Sun and are connected with the rays of Sun. The later literature also continues to hold Sun as the abode of the ancestors. V.C SrivÁstava suggests that this concept may have had its origin in the belief and faith of pre Vedic primitive people of India. Hence, the very concept of Sun god being venerated as a spirit in the name of Singbonga among the Santals and Mundas should be reviewed in this light. We may recall, the Mundas call the Sun god Tata, meaning ‘grandfather.’
Leprosy-cure Myth

Puranic traditions trace the origin of temple-based Sun worship to the Samba myth that credits Sun god with the cure of leprosy. The nexus between Sun-god and leprosy is a universal phenomenon. It is feared by Bondos that Singi-Arke may give leprosy for not offering sacrifices to him regularly. Bondos, belief in Sun’s ability to cause leprosy can be understood, for in their post-deluge re-creation myth Singi-Arke gives leprosy to the only surviving male in order to conceal his identity from his sibling. The fear arising out of Sun’s leprosy-causing tendency is prevalent among other tribes. Uyungboi, the Sun god of Saoras, affects those, who offend him, with leprosy. In the tribal world, the first and foremost step in seeking remedy for any illness or misfortune is to identify the source of such illness and to propitiate that particular spirit or deity to provide cure. If that is the case, the cure for leprosy has to lie only with Sun god, who is capable of giving leprosy. The Samba myth associated with the Sun temples in India including the temple at Konârak that credits Sun god with leprosy cure should be understood against this background.

It is significant to note that no mention has been made of leprosy being cured by Sûrya, the Sun god in the Gveda and the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda appears to be familiar with the leprosy but it is some plant, not Sun that is said to be the curer of the disease. However, in the Puranic Sun worship, leprosy cure became an important theme. While analyzing this development, V.C.Srivastava traces the origin of this trend in the Black Yajurveda (Krishna Yajurveda) and the BrâhmaÆs. According to him, “They [the people of Vedic period] developed a belief, though not very logical, that leprosy takes place if the Sun is too much removed from them and it can be cured by a rite of twenty-one days.”

If that is so, where from the Yajurveda, BrâhmaÆs and Puranic traditions unearthed the Sun cure for leprosy as emphasized later through Samba myth? Most likely, the source lies with the primitive faith of the tribes of India. It is pertinent to note that leprosy is associated with Sun god mostly in myths and folklore of tribes. If we study the development of the personality of Sûrya as a healer, we will find that his healing aspect was developed in fuller form only in the Atharvaveda, though the Gveda touches upon his healing power. Atharvaveda is a later Veda, probably compiled after the Vedic seers coming in contact with the concepts of magic charms and herbal cures practiced by the aborigines and other primitive tribes of India. We are not suggesting a specific tribe as a source of influence but are underscoring the possible interaction between the Vedic people and the Sun worshipping tribes.

In the specific context of Konârak, the association of the Sun temple with the leprosy cure is not merely based on the Samba myth. Even now, on Magha Saptami, the seventh day in the bright fortnight of the month of Magha, when the gods are taken in a procession to the river Chandrabhágâ, a person in the guise of a leper walks along in the
company of others, who also dress up themselves in various forms. This could be a remnant of the past.

**Symbol of Contract**

In later Vedic literature, Mitra, the Sun god, is identified as a god of contracts and agreements. The all-seeing nature of Sun god must have earned him such position. The tribal concept of having Sun god to stand witness to contracts and agreements and taking oath in the name of Sun god has sufficiently been documented in this article. Sun-oath is not a metaphysical concept; it is a matter of practical faith. Even now Aruṇā Stamba (Sun pillar) stands in many a temple in Orissa as a witness to promises made. Making promises by touching the Sun-pillar is a cultural practice that has a contemporary relevance. Hence, the genesis of faith in Sun god as a symbol of truth deserves to be evaluated in the light of the tribal practice of taking oaths and making promises in the name of Singbonga, Singi-Arke and Uyungsum.

**Sun Friendship**

Contracting a ritual friendship is a prevailing custom in many parts of India. In Orissa, Mahāprasād friendship is popular. Sangāta is the name of another such ceremonial friendship. In common parlance, this concept is known as maitra. Such friendship is also called Sūya maitra (Sun friendship) or Sūya bandhu (Sun relationship) as well. This very expression would reveal the connection between the concept of Sun worship and that of ceremonial friendship.

Against this background, this author would like to draw the attention of scholars to one of the most interesting cultural concepts of Orissa, which is being practiced more religiously in the remote Bondo hills than anywhere else. Among Bondos, such friendship by a solemn covenant is called moitur. According to Verrier Elwin, moitur friends have a lifelong mutual obligation. One remains a firm ally and supporter of the other. These two have an obligation to make ceremonial gifts at marriage functions in each other’s families. Moitur friendships are entered on in a ceremonial function keeping the Mahāprabhu as the witness. The Sīsā (the presiding priest) makes the proposed moitur friends to stand near the specially made altar and addresses the god:

O Mahāprabhu, O Pāt Khanda Mahāprabhu, these two have somehow or other come together in a surprising friendship. Let this friendship never be broken. Let their affection for one another be equal. Let there be no deceit between them. If this friendship should ever break, then let my own eyes be broken. After this, the priest performs some rituals and makes the friends offer a cup of liquor to each other and the moitur friends exchange gifts, which marks the end of the ceremony.
The concept of Mahāparasād friendship has been diluted to a great extent in the so-called civilized plains now, whereas it is a serious matter among the Bondos. It is pertinent to note that such a practice is widely prevalent in the tribal areas of Orissa and Chhattisgarh. Besides, it sounds logical to hold that such Sun-centric concept of friendship might have originated among the primitive tribes for whom Sun is the supreme god. If agreed, the term mōitur itself will deserve our further attention.

Mitra, the Vedic Sun god, is considered the ‘friendly Sun god.’ The āgvedic expression Mitrasya priyatamsya Nri describes him as the dearest friend of the people. It is held that the term is derived from the root mīt meaning ‘to love.’ The Vedic Mitra, who is compared with Iranian Mithra, is basically a benevolent god. The friendly nature of Mitra was based upon his gift of food and wealth. Here, we may recall the primitive tribal concept of mōitur and the ritual exchange of gifts, which seems to be an essential aspect of the concept of mōitur. What does it connote? The concordance between Mitra and mōitur seems to be deep-rooted. While Mitra seems to be a highly elevated concept of friendship personified, the mōitur is a living tradition practiced by a primitive tribal group in the remote hills. The similarity does not merely relate to the similar sounding terms. The very basics of both the concepts are in agreement.

Does it point towards a possibility of a shared values and traditions among the ancient people in a very remote past? Does it take us to a period of human interaction, not necessarily to be traced and proved within the geographical confines of India? Can this be a marker for the ancient Indo-Aryan and Austro-Asiatic interactions?

It is relevant to note that Kuiper has identified as many as 300 possible ‘foreign words’ in the āgveda, which according to Witzel “bears ample testimony to the influence of the local substrate on the lexicon of the speakers of Indo-Aryan, and even on the hieratic language of the RV poets.” Scholars like Kuiper assert, “...the speakers of āgvedic Sanskrit knew and interacted with speakers of various languages including Dravidian, Munda...”

Whatever the case may be, the common ground beneath the concepts of mōitur, sangāta and sūrya maitra on the one hand and Mitra on the other is certainly worth studying further. This would, at the least, make the association between the mainstream Sun worship tradition and tribal traditions obvious.

The Fertility Aspect

As discussed earlier, the primitive tribes of Orissa celebrate the fertility aspect of Sun god. Sun worship might have had its origin at the dawn of the farm culture. The hunters and food gatherers had not been as much weather-dependant as the early farmers were. When man understood the rhythm of changing seasons and the Sun’s role in plant
growth, he probably, came to realize the fertility aspect of the Sun god and venerated him.

In the Gṛvēda, Viśvēu represents Sun's rays. The solar god Viśvēu is a great source of fertility, procreation and vegetation. He is primarily the god of fertility. In the Taittrīya Saṁhitā, he is associated with the plants and the food. The creation myths and legends and Sun god related rituals among the tribes such as Mundas, Santals, Bondos and Savaras discussed in this paper would reveal that the fertility aspect of Sun god is one of the fundamental aspects of Sun worship. The language of Vedic poets and their dictum may be different. But, when it comes to the understanding of Sun god’s role in fertility, the primitive tribes and Vedic seers in a way stand on the same platform. The Aṅmans, the light-giving and fertility-producing aspects of the Sun of the Vedic tradition are considered placing the productive germ in all creatures and generate fire, water and trees. Similarly, the Mundas believe that it was Singbonga who multiplied their rice and superadded a roa (magical fertility) to the organic qualities, which preexisted in any good and healthy seed. One cannot miss the parallel.

Sun the Stimulant

Savitri represents the stimulating aspect of Sun in Vedic literature. The works of impulsion, vivification, instigation and stimulation are characteristically attributed to Savitri. If the personification of Vedic Savitri could be the result of a deep understanding of the fundamentals of nature and biology, the veneration of the tribal Sun god as a stimulant seems to stem from a pure and simple pragmatism and a day-to-day utilitarianism. The role of the tribal Sun god in ensuring the continuity of the tribe by inducing the progenitors of the tribe to behave like man and woman is direct and physical, whereas the impulsive and stimulating nature of Savitri seems to be quasi-spiritual and metaphysical. However, when the Vedic literature eulogies the ability of Aṅmans to ‘give the wife of an eunuch a child and make the barren cow yield milk’ the characterization reminds us of the similar skills of the tribal Sun gods. “In India, a barren woman desiring a child was advised to stand naked in water facing the sun; and even today it is a common sight to see childless women go to the well-known Dharma temple in the Burdwan district, West Bengal, hoping that a drop of fertility sun-water will fall on their heads while an effigy of the solar deity Dharma Thakur is being bathed in the holy water of the river.”

In fact, the abundance of the erotic images and sexual symbolism in the Sun temples in general and the Sun temple at Konark in particular should be evaluated against the background of such native and primitive understanding and other influences rather than in the light of later religious concepts and interpretations, which tend to superimpose a heavy philosophical and didactic overload on a very simple faith.
The White Colour Symbolism

In India, certain colours are designated to be the favourite colours of specific gods. White is supposed to be the favourite colour of Sun god. In the Vedic texts, the offering of a reddish white bullock has been identified as the fee for invocation to Savitri, who is directly identified with the Sun because the Sun is reddish white in colour at Sunrise and Sunset.\(^{58}\) The *Pancavi\(\dot{\text{a}}\)* Da Br\(\acute{\text{a}}\)hma\(\acute{\text{a}}\) informs that the white colour was sacred to the Sun-god and was employed as his symbol.\(^{59}\) Generally a white horse or a white cow or a white round skin is employed to symbolize the Sun. These symbols served as fetishes of the Sun-god.\(^{60}\)

According to Hindu tradition, the favorite flower of Sun god is *Arka* (*Calotropis gigantea*). There are two varieties of *Arka* flower, one is purple in colour and the other white, and the latter is considered the most auspicious and favourite of Sun god. In the Sun temple located at Suryanarkoil (‘temple of Sun’) in Tamil Nadu, there is an *Arka* (known as *Erukku* in Tamil) plant in the temple premises, which is considered auspicious. At Kon\(\acute{\text{a}}\)rak as well, *Arka* flowers along with other flowers are offered to Sun god during the Maga Saptami fair.

The genesis of this white colour symbolism with regard to the offerings to Sun god can be traced to the primitive religions of tribal India. According to the myths of Mundas, Singbonga, appeared to the progenitors of the Munda race as ‘an old man, with snow-white hair, with a white beard- a beard like a Yak’s tail- and dressed in snow-white clothes.’\(^{61}\) Singbonga also appears this way in dreams of Mundas, sometimes sitting on a white horse.\(^{62}\)

Singbonga, the Sun god of Mundas and Sing-Chando, the Sun god of Santals, have a marked preference for white. They accept the offerings that are only white in colour. Hence, while propitiating Singbonga with sacrificial offerings, the Mundas choose white fowls, white goats, etc., besides white cloth, sugar, milk and white *gulainchi* flowers as offerings.\(^{63}\)

The formula to dedicate a white fowl to Singbonga ends with this prayer.

“Look heavenly Singbonga, divine King, you feel no craving for our offering, you do not hunger for it. Yet in your name I give and offer you a white fowl and I ask and pray you: Please take and accept my offering...” \(^{64}\)

Among Bondos, we come across a ritual dictum that when Sun attacks a child, he needs to be propitiated with the sacrifice of a white hen. Hence, we can hold that the marked preference for white colour victim in the offerings to Sun god and the symbolism therein has an uninterrupted continuity.
In several cultures, Sun is considered both male and female, such as the Hebrew Sun, Shemesh, as well as in eastern Indonesia where the Sun is said to be bisexual. In most cultures, the Sun and Moon are conceived as brother and sister and as the progenitors of humankind. The Japanese Sun goddess, A materasu’s parents Izanagi and Izanami are brother and sister and the Sun goddess herself begets children from her brother Susanowo. The Egyptian god of light and air is called Shu and his twin sister cum wife is known as Tefnut. In the Indian mythological context, Y ami (the River Y amuna) is said to have prevailed upon her twin brother Y ama to perpetuate humankind by cohabiting with her. Y ama and Y ami are the children of Sun god. A Sumerian goddess Inana or Ishtar, the sister of Shamash, is also the consort of the Sun god of the Semitic pantheon. "Cohabitation between sister Sun and her brother Moon is echoed in the native American mythology as far away as the region between Greenland and the Mackenzie River in northern Canada and in the Andean culture the Moon deity M ama-Kilya is the sister and consort of the Sun god Inti." Ancient Indonesian archaeological remains reveal the depiction of S Ûrya the Sun god, often together with Chandra, the Moon god. This coupling can be seen in the largest Hindu-Javanese temple complex, Lara Jonggrang established in the ninth century.

In Orissa, Saoras believe, Angaiboi the Moon is the wife of Sun. According to a Sun-story documented by Elwin, Uyungsum the Sun god “has a flower, strong and beautiful, in his hair. When he wears it and goes to see the Moon, the world gets very hot, for it means Sun is on heat. When he couples with the Moon, sweat falls from his body. He fans himself, the wind blows and the world grows cold again.”

There is a story prevalent among Bondos, in which the Sun and the Moon are portrayed as brother and sister. The story recorded by Elwin goes like this:

The Sun and Moon were brother and sister. At first they lived under the water. The Sun’s name was Tunku. Sun and Moon came to the surface of the water and made the earth and lived upon it. One day when the Moon was husking millet, the Sun took his bow and arrow to the forest to hunt. It was hot and the Moon removed her cloth and was husking naked. The Sun saw her and shot an arrow at her to warn her of his coming. The Moon saw him coming and said to herself, ‘My brother has seen my whole body; can I ever look him in the face again?’ The Sun too thought, ‘I have seen my sister’s body; we can not live together any longer.’ So they separated and never appear at the same time.

There are myths among Bondos, in which Sun and Moon are portrayed as lovers and in another story Sun and Moon are portrayed as man and wife. In these myths, Sun is portrayed as a lustful male who would not leave his wife the Moon alone anytime. According to this story, Mahāprabhu, the Supreme Being, had to intervene to deal with this everlasting ‘heat’ of Sun in the larger interest of the world. Moon’s inability to deal with the lustful ‘heat’ of the Sun can be compared with the Puranic tradition that the wife...
of Sun namely MÁyÁ, not being able to bear the ‘heat’ of Sun made a replica of her (ChÁyÁ) and ran away leaving the replica to handle him. It is pertinent to note that in Bondo stories, even when Sun and Moon are portrayed as brother and sister the ‘fear of incest’ turns out to be a dominant image. The above accounts make it clear that the concept of Sun-Moon duo is very much a part of a primitive tradition in Orissa as in the case of many other cultures.

Again, in the context of KonÁrak, we can trace the concept of Moon in association with Sun. ChandrabhÁgÁ is the name of the river associated with Sun worship in KonÁrak. On MÁghasaptami day, thousands of Sun worshippers take a holy dip in ChandrabhÁgÁ. The river name ChandrabhÁgÁ is associated with the Sun temple at Multan (now in Pakistan) as well. Bhaga is one among twelve Ádityas (the solar deities) enumerated in early texts and in ViÁEi PuraÁEi. The Bhaga of Indian tradition is compared with Bhaga or Bhago of Parsi’s Zoroastrianism. In the Achaemenian inscription at Persepolis and elsewhere, the epithet BagÁ (corresponding to the Vedic Bhaga) is used to denote Ahuramazda, the supreme being in the Zoroastrian religion. One of the admirals of Alexander the Great, known as Nearcbus is said to have cast his anchor near a promontory called Bagia, which the people of the place considered sacred to the Sun god. We come across Bagha as a mono-word place name in Puri district of Orissa, where the famous Sun temple of KonÁrak is located. The existence of river name ChandrabhÁgÁ in Multan in Pakistan and in KonÁrak in Orissa in the context of Sun temple and occurrence of Bagha as a place name in Puri district may not be read in isolation but in the context of the common thread that connects both the locations conceptually, that is Sun worship.

We are in no way trying to suggest any Orissa-connection to Bagia testified by Nearcbus. However, in view of the fact that this author has identified identical place name clusters that is common to Puri district of Orissa and Iran (SÁkaldwÁlp of Samba myth), which includes the place name KonÁrak, there exists valid reason to suggest that the probable common ground between the river name ChandrabhÁgÁ of Multan and ChandrabhÁgÁ of KonÁrak to be evaluated in the light of Bhaga the Áditya and his counterpart Bhaga of Parsis. If this suggestion is agreed, we may hold that the river name ChandrabhÁgÁ in KonÁrak is a clear reflection of the concept of Sun-Moon duo (Chandra= Moon; Bhaga = Sun).

This concept of Sun-Moon duo, which has a sound foundation in the primitive myths of Orissa, has its reflection on the geographical names of Orissa, particularly in the areas known for Sun worship since ancient days. For example, in the Savara heartland of Gumma region we come across hills named as Udayagiri (hill of raising Sun) and Chandragiri (hill of Moon). In Puri district, where KonÁrak Sun temple is located, we come across many villages named after Chandra such as Chandra Dhadi, Chandra Kota, Chandradeipur, Chandra Madipur, Chandra Mara, Chand Pur, to cite a few examples. Among the Austro-Asiatic tribal groups as well, the term Chandra is in currency. Savaras call Angaboi, the Moon, as Sandraboi as well. Santals call the moon as Chando and the Sun god himself is called Singchando, indicating the concept of Sun-Moon duo. There is
an interpretation relating to Remo word Singi-Arke in which the suffix Arke is considered to be denoting ‘moon.’

**RÁma chandi, RÁmma and RÁmai**

Against this background, this author would like to draw the attention of scholars to a holy place namely RÁmachandi at about 8-k.m southeast of KonÁrak. It is said that RÁma came and worshipped goddess Chandi, the presiding deity of this temple, and hence the place came to be known as RÁmachandi. In fact, Oriya MahÁbhÁrata by Sarala Das seems to be the source of this myth. The traditions embodied in Oriya Dandi RÁmayaÁs written by Balaram Das claim that the goddess was previously known as Bulaichandi and was renamed RÁmachandi by RÁmachandra. Notwithstanding these folk-etymologies, there is scope and need and justification to review the concept of RÁmachandi in the context of Sun worship in KonÁrak and not in isolation.

The shrine at RÁmachandi seems to be having an ancient association with the concept of Sun worship. This can be established through an intermediate layer of influence of Buddhism. On the eastern niche of the RÁmachandi temple an image of Marichi has been fixed. Marichi is the Buddhist counterpart of SÚrya, the Sun god. While SÚrya is a god, Marichi is a goddess. It is significant to note that SÚrya is also known as Marichimali in the Brahmanical tradition. While SÚrya’s chariot is drawn by seven horses, the chariot of Marichi is drawn by seven pigs and in spite of such deviations the solar character of Marichi remains unaltered. It is held that the concept of Marichi also represents the solar aspect of Devi or ÍaktÍ, and it might have originated out of the ideology of syncretism between the cults of the SÁktas and of the Sauras. Marichi, the solar deity, being a female goddess need not be a surprise. In many culture, the Sun god is sometimes treated as a god and is oftentimes as goddess. In the context of Orissa as well, we find Saoras designating the Sun both as Uyungsum (Sun god) and Uyungboi (Sun goddess) with absolute indifference to Sun god’s gender. Now, a question arises as to whether the antiquity of Sun nexus of RÁmachandi should be traced only within Marichi and Chandi or beyond. Here, we need to examine the place name Rama chandi, which seems to be the name of the deity as well as the name of the place. Associating the RÁma of RÁmÁyanÁ seems to be a ‘folk etymology’ prompted by the prefix ‘RÁma.’

We are tempted to analyze RÁmachandi in the light of composite forms of solar deities. If we approach the toponymy of RÁmachandi as a plain and simple place name, we need to take note of the fact that the terms such as Chand, Chandra, Chando and Chandi though used in almost all parts of Orissa, their occurrence in the place names of tribal areas is maximum.

The prevailing concept of Sun-Moon duo among Austro-Asiatic tribes and the use of composite names such as Sing-Chando; Singi-Arke, etc cannot be ignored. The Savaras concept of calling the Sun as a male or female as Uyungsum (He-Sun) and Uyungboi
(She-Sun) and the tribal concepts of treating Sun and Moon as brother and sister or man and wife should be seen in the context of primitive world and not from the later puranic or modern view point.

Ramai and Bhimai are important legendary heroes venerated by the Bondos of Bondo Hills. In this composite god, Ramai-Bhimai, Elwin identifies Bhimai as solar deity who is none other than Singi-Arke. However, legendary gods such as Bhima, Bhumul, and Bhimsen are generally identified with rain god by the tribes of Central India. Rama and Bhima are considered by the Saoras as their progenitors who live in Mahendra Mountain. Whatever the case may be, the composite identification of Sun god and Moon god and the composite identification of Sun along with another natural phenomenon like the earth become evident.

The religion of Saoras throws further light on this issue. Saoras venerate Ramma (Rama) as a Kittung (Saora word for god). Ramma is always mentioned as a part of the compound expression, ‘Ramma-Bimma’ (like ‘Ramai-Bhimai’). The composite divinity of Ramma-Bimma is of great importance, for it was from them that the Saora tribe was born. ‘Ramma is but another name for Labosum; he is the earth, while Bimma is the sky. Ramma-Bimma established Saora custom and taught the people how to live; they taught men and women how to love; they discovered fire; at one time they ruled the world,” reports Elwin. However, the later traditions bring RÁmá, the hero of RÁmÁyanÁ, into picture. Tradition avers that RÁmá and SitÁ visited the country of the Saoras during their exile; Sabari hospitably received them and RÁmá treated her with honour. Doubts have been raised about the identification of Ramma with the RÁmá of RÁmÁyanÁ. Drawing support from M.M.Chakravarti’s observation, Elwin holds the view that the cult of RÁmá was not that popular in this part of India those days and points out that the Sitboi of Saora tradition is also a Kittung (Saora native god) and the Sitboi is the sister of Ramma and not his wife. It is pertinent to note that in the Ramma-Bimma expression, Ramma is always coupled with Bimma, the former is treated as the brother, the sister or the wife of the latter.

Equipped with this information, if we analyze the concept of RÁmachandi in the context of KonÁrak we will gain a prima-facie case to see RÁmachandi in a different light. If there is valid ground to hold the Ramma as a Kittung and different from the RÁmá of RÁmÁyanÁ, can we not hold a similar view about ‘Rama’ in RÁmachandi? If we consider ‘RÁmá’ as Ramai (of Bondo) or Rammai (of Saora), meaning ‘earth’ (or as personification of earth), the ‘Chandi’ would fit in as ‘sky’ (or personification of sky). It is worthwhile to recall here that the ‘Chandi’ in RÁmachandi through its association with Marichi signifies solar character of the Goddess or Doví. Besides, it is pertinent to note that even the Sun god proper is being called Sing-Chando by the Santals. This explains the composite concept of godhood, the interchangeability of sex of ancient gods. This would also explain the later tradition of RÁmachand or RÁmachandra, the compound expression of solar and lunar principles. After all, RÁmá has always been identified with
Viṣṇu, the Vedic solar god, and Rāma is considered the lord of Raghukul, the solar dynasty.

It may be summed up that the shrine at Rāmachandi and the concept of Sun worship at Konārak are interconnected and hence should not be viewed in isolation. The genesis of the prefix ‘Rama’ in Rāmachandi can be traced to the composite solar gods of the tribal world. Even if we continue to hold the traditional view of connecting Rāma of the Rāmāyanā with Rāmachandi, the Sun nexus will still be intact for Rāma himself is a solar deity.

**Sūrya Image at Mahendragiri: A Case Study**

This author during his field visit to Saora areas in Gajapati district found a Sūrya image, broken and lying on a compound wall of Kunti Mandir. On the backside of this image, an image of Garuḍa is carved. All the temples in Mahendragiri, though locally identified as Yudhiṣṭhira Mandir, Bhima Mandir, Kunti Mandir, etc., named after the Pāṇḍavas and their mother, are indeed Īhiva temples, for we find Īhivalingam worshipped in all these temples. However, we have reasons to believe that the deepest layer of faith, which prevailed in this sacred mountain, was indeed Sun worship. The Savaras and the Puliyādas are believed to be the early inhabitants of Mahendragiri region. The association of Saoras with the Sun worship is obvious as discussed earlier in this paper. The presence of a Sūrya image in the Saora dominated Mahendragiri will provide material evidence for the continuity of the tradition. Beneath the superstructure of the present tradition lays an obvious foundation of an aboriginal faith. Above all, the priest at Kunti temple, where people assemble in large number on Īhivarātri, is himself a Saora. How is it that a Hindu temple of a considerable antiquity, continues to have a Saora priest till date? When this author enquired about this, a local man, who happens to be the son of the temple priest, clarified that long ago the king of Mandasā tried to introduce a Brāhmaṇ priest in this temple and that was followed by a sudden outbreak of cholera. On realizing the reason, the king had to reverse his decision and restore the tribal priesthood. Thus the stake of Saoras in the temples of Mahendragiri is obvious, notwithstanding the correctness or otherwise of the above account. The continuing role of the Sun worshipping Saoras in the temples of Mahendragiri can be taken as an indicator of the earlier layer of worship in the area. Even now, when devotees assemble on Īhivarātri, the emphasis is on seeing the sunrise from the bewildering heights of Bhima temple located at the highest point of the mountain range. While the temples identified as the Yudbiṣṭhira temple and the Kunti temple faces west, the Bhima temple faces east. Of all the temples in the Mahendragiri complex, the most difficult one to reach and the one that is held in high esteem is the Bhima temple. Who is this Bhima and what is his connection with the local aborigines? As a legend would have it, there lived two brothers namely Rāma and Bhima, on the Mahendra Mountain and they were the progenitors of the present Saora race. Rama-Bhima duo (Bondos call them as Ramai-Bhimai) are venerated by Austro-Asiatic tribes
such as Bondos and Saoras. Verrier Elwin holds that the Bhimai of Bondos is none other than the solar deity.

If that is the case, we have reason to hold that beneath the legacy of Bhim temple there is a layer of Sun worship practiced by the natives of Mahāndragiri. The naming of the temples after the five Pāṇḍava brothers and their mother Kunti was a subsequent development. Associating the geographical areas and structures with the characters of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata is a tradition in many parts of India.

It is pertinent to note that the native Saoras of the area attribute the construction of the temples at such a height to some supernatural beings rather than giving the credit to any mortal ruler. Whether we are able to establish the nexus between Bhimai, Bhim and Sun or not, the priesthood of a Sun worshipping tribal man in a mainstream Hindu temple of antiquity cannot be dismissed as insignificant. Had there been no stake-holding, the priesthood could not have been assigned to the Saoras and that stake holding was probably associated with their Sun worship. Mahendragiri can be adduced as a valid case study to understand the process of assimilations and amalgamations that marked the acculturation process involving tribes and non-tribal societies. In fact, the genesis of Sun worship in other parts of India including Konārak should also be evaluated in the light of such interactions between tribal and non-tribal cultures.

**Toponymic Evidence**

“Naming a place for a god, with the idea that the god will then be favouring, constitutes one of the commonest manifestations of commendatory naming,” says George R. Stewart. According to him, with the dominating religiosity of the culture, India is an outstanding example for commendatory naming. The names of the Sun are no exception. In India, we find various designations of Sun gods appearing as parts of place names occurring at a number of places. Hence, a study of the occurrence of names of Sun gods discussed in this article as place name materials in Orissa may throw light on the central theme.

In Mundari and in Santali, sing or singi means ‘a day’, or ‘Sun.’ In Saora language, sing or singi means ‘a house’, ‘a living place.’ A search for ‘singi’ a place name suffix yields 126 occurrences in Orissa. It is surprising to note that out of these, except three place names in Puri district, namely Angisingi, Saralasingi, Kesasingi, all other names occur only in the tribal areas, particularly in the undivided districts of Koraput, Ganjam, Phulbani and Mayurbhanj. Considering the fact that most of these place names occur in the Saora speaking areas of Gajapati (earlier, part of Ganjam) and in Gunupur area of Rayagada (earlier, in Koraput district), the Austro-Asiatic connection of the suffix can confidently be suggested. Its occurrence in Mayurbhanj district populated by Austro-Asiatic tribes would further strengthen our suggestion. Then, how are we going to reconcile such occurrences with the fact that in Saora. Sing/singi mean ‘a place’ whereas
in Mundari and Santali the same terms mean ‘a day’, ‘a Sun’? It is pertinent to note that Singbonga being one of the many names of Sun god is not something totally unknown to Saoras. Verrier Elwin reports that the name Singbonga is occasionally used by Saoras. Hence this author is inclined to suggest a root-level and conceptual nexus among the ‘Sun’, the ‘day’ and the ‘place.’

The Spirits, Sacred Art and Place of Living

A study of rituals and symbols involved in the Saora wall paintings provides an insight into the perceived connection between the spirit world and place of living of the humans, and thereby clarifies the conceptual depth of the term sing or singi.

There exists a close connection between the Saoras and their supernatural entities. The supernatural entities and spirits in Saora pantheon show a great deal of inclination to live with the living humans through the depicted images of icon. “The icons are drawn up round the idea of a house, square or circular or rectangular in shape. The icon represents the uni-dimension of the house.” Saoras perceive the spirit world to be the same as that of the living beings. Some deities and ancestral spirits do not like isolation or loneliness. They demand an icon-house inside the house of somebody. If this demand is not complied with, they cause severe illness. It is said that some spirits get tired while passing by the village and want to halt there. They cause fever to someone in the village and demand an icon-house for them. In that sense, the Saora icons stand for space within the space or place within the place. If the supernatural beings of the Saoras express their desire to live with the living humans in their houses and the Saora wall paintings serve the basic purpose of accommodating the spirits in the house, then there is no wonder that in Austro-Asiatic languages the term singi designates a celestial body or a ‘supreme spirit’ as well as ‘a living place.’

As observed by N.K. Behuria and J. Dash, among the images of deities of Saoras, Uyungsum the Sun god is found most frequently. Sun god is represented by two concentric circles. In the icons, Sun is mostly painted at the center. This is explained saying that Sun at the center connotes that he is the witness to all that happens to the human and supernatural beings as depicted in the icons. The wall painting itself is called idising (sometimes anital) by the Saoras of Serango area. The artist who makes these icons is known as Ittalmaran, who enjoys a special position in the society. Whenever a new Ittalmaran takes over charge, the Kudan (Shaman) sacrifices a buffalo and offers meat with liquor to Sun god informing him about the new appointment of the sacred artist. This confirms the central position enjoyed by the Sun god in the concept and execution of the sacred space that is shared by the living beings and the supernatural beings as depicted in the icon. The icon stands for a house within the house. It signifies a close interaction between the living and the dead ancestors and their co-existence. It calls for a powerful witness and moderator. That is Sun god. We may not be ready with a
definite etymology for the term sing or singi, but the conceptual nexus between Sun-god, spirit world and place of living of humans seems probable.

Such concepts seem to have existed and seem to exist in other cultures and linguistic families as well. In Telugu, the term nÂû means ‘a day’, ‘a village’, ‘country’ and ‘place of living.’ In old Tamil, nÂû means ‘a living place’, ‘country’ and ‘paradise.’ Besides, in Tamil the term vÎô stands for both ‘house’ and ‘paradise.’

‘Singi’ as a Place Name Material

As mentioned earlier, ‘Singi’ as a place name material is used in many parts of Orissa. A search for ‘Singi’ as a place name prefix reveals 39 occurrences in Orissa. In the place names such as Singibari, Singimundia, Singipur (Puri), Singibahal (Sambalpur), Singimara (Mayurbhanj), Singisari, Singiput (Koraput), we find ‘Singi’ to be a clear prefix occurring in the company of various generics.

Against this background, our attention is drawn to a place name called Singabhanga (84° 45’12”E 20°21’55”N) in Nayagarh district. This village was a part of the undivided Puri district before the reorganization of the district. It is a forest village. If confronted with this name and asked for his interpretation, a common man, is likely to explain this place name to be meaning ‘a horn that is broken’, for Singha means ‘horn’ and bhanga means ‘broken.’ But, can there be a nexus between the place name ‘Singabhanga’ and the Sun god ‘Singbonga’? We are not sure, but we have circumstantial evidences to suggest an Austro-Asiatic connection.

A search for ‘bhanga’ - ending place names in Orissa reveals 44 such occurrences. Of these, in the undivided Puri district alone we come across five place names such as Singabhanga, Salabhanga, Sagadbhanga, Sagadabhanga and Padiabhanga. Bhanga as a mono-word place name occurs in Keonjhar district, which is dominated by Juangs, an Austro-Asiatic tribe. The ‘bhanga’ suffixed place names occur mostly in tribal districts. Against this background, the identical occurrence of Sagadabhanga as a place name only in the districts of Mayurbhanj (a Santal dominated district) and Puri gains significance.

Besides, bhanga and bangas seem to be variants of one word. A search for ‘bangas’ as a place name suffix reveals 21 such occurrences within Orissa, and Banga as a mono word place name occurs in the district of Puri. The nexus between ‘bonga’, ‘bangas’ and ‘bhonga’ and their Austro-Asiatic connection can be gauged through additional toponymic and other evidences.

In Mundari language, ikir means ‘deep water’ and hence the spirit that lives in water bodies such as pond, tank is called Ikir bonga. A mono word place name called Ikiri occurs in Puri district. Such a name does not occur anywhere else in India. In order to validate the nexus between the name and its meaning this author verified the
geographical location of Ikiri (85°11'44E 20°5'50N) and found this village to be an agricultural village adjacent to a protected forest namely Sukharamal and found a water body within 200 meter from the village. There is no Oriya cognate available for this name and no etymological base can be attributed from within the Oriya corpus. It is probable that Ikir, as a place name represents a pre-Áryan substratum and Munda language that provides an acceptable etymology for the term could be a possible candidate.

Whether Singabhanga is connected with Singbonga or not, the fact remains that there is a strong Austro-Asiatic connection that can be traced to the corpus of place names in Puri district, which is the nerve-center Sun worship.

Certain place names, which are peculiar only to the tribal areas, are found in Puri district, which is not a tribal district at least new. Let us take the term ‘Munda’. In Orissa, Munda as a mono-word place name appears only in Phulbani and Koraput districts. Numerically, Munda as a place name occurs mostly in tribal dominated districts. Out of 845 villages with ‘Munda’ suffixed names, 177 occur in Sambalpur. Sundargarh has 51, Kendhujar 13; Mayurbhanj 12, Bolangir 189, Kalahandi 83, and Koraput 67. In coastal Orissa, Puri has got 14 such names. The fact that Munda is a well known tribal designation cannot be overlooked and its occurrence as a place name material in coastal district of Orissa cannot be ignored.

A study of ‘put’ as a place name suffix in Orissa provides clinching evidence of the probable tribal connection with Puri district in the past. In Orissa, there are 366 villages with ‘put’ suffixed place names. Of this, 328 villages belong to the undivided Koraput district. This would explain the Koraput orientation (implicitly the tribal, particularly the Austro-Asiatic) of the suffix. And fact remains that apart from Koraput, it is the undivided Puri district that accounts for the next highest number of occurrences, with 18 instances.

The association of the term Sauri with the concept of Sun worship is ancient. In the Gveda we come across authors such as Abhitapas Sauryai, Ca{k}uh Sauryai, and Vibhrat Sauryai, who were Sun worshipers. Their names are indicative of their devotion to Sun. What is relevant for us is the designation ‘Sauryai.’ In this regard, V.C.Srivastava observes: “The fact that the above authors mentioning Súrya as their father cannot be ignored as chance. The hymns, of which they are the authors, all occur in the tenth man{\textsuperscript{\textordmasculine}}ála. Since this man{\textsuperscript{\textordmasculine}}ála is the latest in the Gveda and the earliest authority of their authorship is the Brihaddevat{\textsuperscript{\textordfeminine}}, which can hardly be placed later than 400 B.C it can be said that in the later Vedic period a few special Sun worshipping saints had emerged, who were extremely devoted to the Sun-god.’’ 86 The early Sanskrit literature uses Savara as a generic term for Sun-worshiping tribes. Gujarat region known for Sun worship traditions, where the famous Sun temple Modhera is located, is also called, Saur{\textsuperscript{\textordmasculine}}stra. The Tantric doctrine of the solar sectarians was called ‘Saura Í akti.’ 87 The Bhavi{\textsuperscript{\textordfeminine}} Pur{\textsuperscript{\textordfeminine}} mentions an ancient work dealing with the Saura dharma, which
was declared by Nārada. Thus the Sun orientation of terms Saura, Sauri and Savara is obvious.

Coming back to the toponymy of Orissa, we find Sauri as a place name occurring in the undivided Ganjam, and Mayurbhanj districts of Orissa. Place names such as Sauraguda in Koraput, Sauripalli in Phulbani betray the obvious Saora connection. Sauria as a place name occurs twice in Puri district. It is significant to note that Puri district has got a sizeable Saura population. In the year 1941, out of 3,26,236 Saoras registered in Orissa, 26,385 lived in Puri district.

People of another Kolarian tribe, namely Lodhas also live in Puri district. In order to validate the nexus between a place name and demography, this author verified and found a tribal presence in a village called Lodhabuin in Puri district. The reliability of place name evidence to reconstruct the past gets established through case study like this. Lodhachua is another place name in Puri district. Place names such as Asurdhip, Asurdhipa, A suradhipa found in Puri district also deserve attention, for Asur is the name of a Kolarian tribe.

In fact, the occurrence of place names such as Singpur, Singapur in Orissa and elsewhere in eastern India calls for a focused study. This author is of the view that the traditional interpretation of holding the prefix ‘Singa’ in Singapur to be meaning ‘lion’ needs to be reviewed. The domain of lion in India is restricted to western parts of the country. Lion has no natural habitat anywhere in eastern India. Then how come the aborigines of eastern India could have adopted the name of an unknown animal in such a large number to designate their villages? The main function of prefix as a stem is to specifically qualify or identify a particular place. A concept unknown in the immediate environment is seldom taken as a nomenclature of a place in the primitive societies. That may be possible in an elite society which can be guided by their knowledge of literature. This author is of the view that the association of Singa the lion with Singapur, if at all agreed, can only be as a symbol for Sun, for lion happens to be the most important Sun fetish in many a culture. Till the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran, the home of ancient fire-Sun worshippers, had Sun with lion as its royal emblem. Sri Lanka is another nation with Sun-lion as its State Symbol. In fact, Sinhala the original name of Sri Lanka should be read as the land of Sun rather than as a land of lion. In Pali/ Prakrit, Sinhala is called Sihhala. It is pertinent to note that Singbonga the Sun god of Mundas is also called ‘Sihbonga.’ The Gadabas, another Austric tribe, use the term Si to denote ‘Sun.’ This would establish the Sing, Sih, and Si as variations of the same term, and hence Sinhala or Sihhala should be assessed in this new light. It is pertinent to note that people from Bihar (now Jharkhand) and Orissa are considered to have established Sinhala rule in Sri Lanka. Besides, lion is not native to Sri Lanka. The meaning of Singbum, the homeland of Austro-Austric tribes of Jharkhand, should be understood on the above line.

In view of the facts discussed above, we have enough reason to hold that the district of Puri, where the KonĀrak Sun temple is located, had a strong tribal presence in the past.
The customs and cultural practices of certain communities also portray an aboriginal basis. The characteristic features of Sun gods enumerated in the ancient literature provide enough clues to the possibility of tribal influence relating to certain aspects of Sun worship and related rituals. The curative aspect of Sun god is one of the many features of Vedic Sun god, whereas that is the core of the tribal faith. The ‘giver and curer of leprosy’ image of tribal Sun god has no parallel in Vedic religion, whereas that forms the core of the Samba myth-related Sun temples endorsed by Puranic tradition. The fertility aspect of Sun god is an enlightened understanding in the Vedic Age, whereas the fertility aspect of Sun makes for the very survival of tribes. The concept behind erotic images in Sun temples in India can be explained through the plain and simple tribal myths rather than through the elitist interpretation with philosophical overloads.

Evidence from KonÁrak Panel

Within the precincts of Deula, the sanctum sanctorum, an image carved on the panel seems to indicate the tradition of making sacrificial offer to the Sun god. In this panel, a woman with a typical hairstyle seems to be holding a hen. This could be taken as a sculptural reminder of a custom of making sacrificial offer of hen to Sun god. The sculpture may not indicate the actual scene of sacrifice. However, a woman with a peculiar hairdo, which is not typical of local style, carrying a hen can be taken as a depiction of a symbolic sacrificial offer. Even now the custom of offering calf, goat and hen to the goddess by leaving such earmarked animal or hen in the temple area, with out actually sacrificing them, prevails in KÁljai temple located on a hillock in ChilikÁlake. Hence, the panel image at KonÁrak discussed above may be viewed in the light of such prevailing customs.

Conclusion

We may sum up by saying that the Sun worship in Orissa, particularly at KonÁrak, has evolved receiving many layers of influences from several sources during pre-historic and historic times. The Sun-god centric tribal faiths must be among the earliest sources of influence. The continuity of the conventional representation of Sun and rays in the prehistoric cave paintings can be traced in the Saora Wall Paintings. The remnants of primitive tribal thoughts with regard to Sun are traceable as a substratum influence in the Vedic texts and in later literature. On the whole, the current super structure of KonÁrak Sun Temple may belong to LangulÁ Narasih ha Deva, but the foundation, it seems, belongs to the primitive people of Orissa. Behind the visible manifestations of Árka, the Vedic Sun god, it seems, the abstract symbols of Singbonga, Singi-Arke and Uyungsum are embedded.

When we discuss the interactions between primitive tribes and Vedic people, we need not restrict the field of interaction to the geographical boundaries of Orissa or eastern India,
simply because we are focusing our discussion on Konarak. The interaction could have taken place even outside. The very fact that the early Sanskrit literature uses Savara as a generic term for Sun-worshiping tribes, and the Gujarat region known for Sun worship traditions is also called Saurâstra, will lead us to believe that such tribes might have pre-existed and coexisted the Vedic people in Western, North western India as well. It is not improbable that the interaction among Austric, Dravidian and Vedic people might have taken place even outside India. It would be relevant here to note that the traditional view\(^9\) that Munda languages were never spoken in areas other than Orissa, Madhya Pradesh South Bihar and Maharashtra is being challenged by some scholars.\(^91\) They base their view on the old Munda names found in the \(\text{G}v\text{eda}\). It is even suggested that the Mundas could have lived near Malwa at some ancient point of time.\(^92\) To this current thinking we would like to add some toponymic evidence from North and North West of India, which would simultaneously add strength to the core theme of this article.

Munda as a mono-word place name occurs at 16 places in India. Out of this, the name occurs at 12 places within the known Munda regions such as Madhya Pradesh / Chhattisgarh (7); Orissa (4) and Bihar (1). The rest four are found in Uttar Pradesh (3) and Himachal Pradesh (1). What is more surprising is the occurrence of Munda as a mono-word place name in Pakistan (6) and Afghanistan (3). Saora as a mono-word place name occurs in Pakistan. Within India, Saora as a mono-word place name occurs at five places in West Bengal, in the areas where Santal- Munda people live. Saura as a mono-word place name occurs at 12 places (Bihar-3; Uttar Pradesh-5; Madhya Pradesh-3; Himachal Pradesh-1) in India. Interestingly, Pakistan accounts for four such occurrences. We come across Santal, which is the designation of an Austro-Asiatic (Mundarian) tribal group of eastern India, as a place name occurring in Pakistan and also in Himachal Pradesh.

Hence, the substratum influence on Sun worship in India should be viewed in a broader perspective, which would accommodate the possible interaction between non-Aryan, tribal, Sun-centric faiths and Vedic traditions even outside the known Munda homelands. However, it is the remote and primitive Munda-Saora-Bondo villages of Orissa that could provide a ‘lab condition’ to cross-check and validate such influences.

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3. V.C. Srivâstava. *op.cit,* p.22
4. Ibid.p.23
5. This date is assigned by Sadâśiv Pradhan, who has worked extensively on the rock shelter paintings of Orissa. (personal communication)
6. Sadâśiv Pradhan. (personal communication)
7 V.C.Srivastava. op.cit. p173
8 Ibid
9 Mahábharata III.3.40 quoted in V.C.Srivastava. op.cit. p186
10 Mahábharata III.3.29. quoted in V.C.Srivastava. op.cit, p.186
13 The Santals, a sister tribe of the Mundas, do not have the A sur Legend. For further details refer A.Van Exem. op.cit, Chapter III
15 Ibid. p.3977
16 A.Van Exem. op.cit. p.158
17 Ibid. op.cit. p.136
18 Ibid. op.cit. p.160
19 Ibid. op.cit. p.224
20 Ibid. op.cit. p.79
21 Ibid. op.cit. p.26
23 Ibid. p.67
24 Verrier Elwin. Bondo Highlander, op.cit. p.143
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. p.142
27 K.R Amiah: 1953 quoted by S.D.Shrim in his article “Jeypore- Tract- A Primary Centre of Origin of Cultivated Rice” nd (information based on personal communication with Sharma)
28 S.D.Shrim, personal communication
29 Verrier Elwin reports about one Muliya, who was punished by the court of law for committing a murder. He invokes Singi-Arke to punish those gave false evidence against him: ‘As I was going in the train,’ he told me, ‘I saw the electric light and it reminded me of Singi-Arke. I saluted it and said, “If these witnesses told lies against me, without fail punish them.” And presently the first of the witnesses fell from a tree and was killed; the second went lame; the third was bitten by a snake; the fourth lost one of his bullocks eaten by a tiger and his son died.’ Verrier Elwin. Bondo Highlander, op.cit. p.199
30 V.C.Srivastava, op.cit.p33
32 A.Cunningham quoted in Verrier Elwin, The Religion, p.1
33 Ibid
35 Shanti Lal Nagar op.cit, p.110
36 V.C.Srivastava. op.cit.p.172
37 Verrier Elwin. The Religion, p.126
38 Ibid. p.564
39 Ibid. p.123
40 Rigveda IX.113-9, X-107-2,154-3, I-109-7,154-3 quoted in V.C.Srivastava, op.cit. p.35
41 Atharvaveda, I.23.24 quoted in V.C.Srivastava, op.cit. p.56
42 V.C.Srivastava, op.cit. p.56
43 Ibid. p.54
44 Ibid. p.85
46 V.C.Srivastava. p.84

Michael Witzel, op.cit

Kuiper quoted in Michael Witzel. op.cit

J.Gonda quoted in Michael Witzel. op.cit,p.96.

Rigveda I.157.5- quoted in V.C.Srivastava.op.cit,p.135

Rigveda I.112.3; X.106.13; 1.180.3 quoted in V.C.Srivastava.op.cit,p.135


I atapatha BrÁhmana. III.2.3.11, 18; V.3.1.7, V 3.1.7 quoted in V.C.Srivastava.op.cit,p.71

Pancavi Da BrÁhmana. V.5.17 quoted in V.C.Srivastava.op.cit, p.158

V.C.Srivastava.op.cit,p.158

Orea (Mennas Ram) quoted in A.V an Exem.op.cit, p.42

Ibid


M adanjeeet Singh.op.cit.p.16.

Ibid.pp.16-17

Ibid.pp17-18

Ibid.p.201

Verrier Elwin. Religion, p.126

Verrier Elwin. Bondo Highlander,op.cit, p141

R.C.M ajumdar quoted in Shanti Lal Nagar op.cit,p.110


Ibid


Dipak Chandra BhattÂcharya. op.cit.p18

Ibid

Verrier Elwin. Religion. p.120.


Ibid


Ibid


N.K.Behuraia, J.Dash op.cit,p.109
V.C. Srivastava. op.cit, p. 172
87 R.C. Majumdar. The Age of Imperial Kanauj, p. 262, 323 quoted in V.C. Srivastava, op.cit, p. 265
88 V.C. Srivastava op.cit, p. 233
89 Verrier Elwin. Religion, p. 4
90 T. Burrow holds this view. Burrow quoted in Michael Witzel’s article cited earlier
91 In view of the occurrence of old Munda names in the Sūtra, Kuiper calls for the revision of the traditional view that limits the Munda speakers mostly to the eastern India. This view of Kuiper is quoted in Michael Witzel’s article cited earlier
92 Michael Witzel op.cit