

ART HERITAGE OF ORISSA

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Orissa has witnessed ceaseless human endeavour in the field of art, craft, sculpture and temple building activities for about 2500 years during her recorded history. Endowed with nature's beauty and bounty, Orissa boasts of a rich cultural heritage and tradition of music, dance, dramatics, art & crafts of many splendoured varieties and forms; which elegantly emanate from its magnificent monuments, ancient caves, rock-cut sculptures and innumerable temples found still intact with all its pristine glory and grandeur. This holy land with a hoary past, offers the quintessence of the multifaceted cultural profiles of Indian panorama. Art in all its myriad forms is so deeply ingrained in this state that the routine chores of the folk styles take sublime aesthetic expression of magnificent diction in intangible performing art idioms.

Prehistoric & Protohistoric:

The wooded hinterland of the state beyond Eastern Ghats is the store house of earliest rock paintings. At Ushakothi and Manikmunda in Sundargarh district, Bikramkhol in Jharsuguda district and Gudahandi and Yogimath in Kalahandi, there are upper Paleolithic rock paintings (in red ochre or Hematite) and rock bruising. The painting on the facade of a cave at Gudahandi is exuberantly realistic. The hunting scene of a man throwing a stone missile at a running bison is of high artistic excellence.

Maurya, Meghavahana and Gupta Art tradition:

The history of Orissan art and architecture is corelated with her early history which starts from 261 B.C., when Ashok conquered Orissa, then known as Kalinga. The earliest specimen of Orissan art is the colossal figure of the foreport of an elephant carved on the top of the boulder containing Ashoka's edicts at Dhauli about five miles from Bhubaneswar. There was also an Ashokan pillar now enshrined inside Bhaskareswar temple in Bhubaneswar which has been converted into a Shivalingam later on. These Ashokan monuments thus marked the beginning of Orissan art and architecture.

The magnificent specimen of Orissan secular monuments of the pre-Christian epoch is provided by Sisupalgarh, situated about a mile to the east of Bhubaneswar. The ruins of this ancient fort represent a well planned and well-fortified city. The excavations carried on here by the ASI during the years from 1947 to 1949, unearthed some antiquities which take the origin of the city back to the fourth century B.C.

The next stage of the development of Orissan art and architecture is marked by the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri which stand side by side about five miles to the west of

Bhubaneswar. These hillocks have been honey-combed with rock-cut caves meant for Jaina ascetics. The graphic account of emperor Kharavela's reign and campaigns of 1st century B.C. are found in the Hatigumpha inscription of the Udayagiri hill. The grand and excellent art and architecture of these caves bear base-reliefs which depict the Jaina pantheons and objects of devotion, panoramic views of the worship of the sacred tree or symbols. The sculptures carved out in these caves are specimens of fine artistic excellence marked by vigour and simplicity and share characteristics in terms of antiquity with the sculptures of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhagaya. The political history of the period following emperor Kharavela is described as the dark period of the Orissan history. The Naga and Yakshya images discovered in Bhubaneswar and presented in the Orissa State Museum can however be assigned to this dark period. They are similar to the Naga and Yakshya images found at Sanchi, Mathura and Rajgir and can safely be placed in the 1st or 2nd century A.D. Evidently there were Stupas in Bhubaneswar of which these images are the survivals. They also indicate that the Naga and Yaksha worship was popular in Orissa after the fall of Kharavela's dynasty, when Jainism appears to have received a setback.

It is still a disputed point whether the Gupta's ever held their direct sway over Orissa, but the classical Gupta age did not fail to spread its influence over the Orissan monuments. Several images have of late been discovered, which bear the Gupta characteristics. One very definite specimen of Gupta art in Orissa is a mural painting found at Sitabhinji in the Keonjhar district, which depicts a royal procession with a line of writing below the scene, recording the name of the Bhanja king 'Disabhanja' which is palaeographically assigned to 4th & 5th century A.D. No Gupta temple has yet been discovered in Orissa, but the earliest Orissan temples definitely bear the Post-Gupta influences both in respect of art and architecture. There are a very large number of sculptural and architectural specimens found at cultural centres of Orissa like Puri, Bhubaneswar and Jajpur and these probably belonged to the temples no longer in existence. These remnants provide an interesting study which, when pursued is likely to bridge the gap of the so-called Dark Period.

Buddhist Architecture:

Architecture and sculpture made notable progress in the medieval period under the patronage of Sailadbhavas, Bhaumakaras, Somovansis and the Gangas. The development of different religions was the basis of such abundant output of art. The best specimens of Buddhist art are found at Puspagiri, Udayagiri, Lalitagiri, Solanpur, Khadipada, Ayodhya, Khiching, Kuruma, Boudh, Banpur and other places. Perhaps, the finest establishment of the Buddhism was at Ratnagiri in Cuttack district. Excavations have revealed the remains of a magnificent main *Stupa*, two spacious *Viharas*, several votive *Stupas* and numerous Buddhist sculptures of great artistic excellence. The figures of Boddhisatwas discovered from Lalitagiri and Langudi are distinguished by unsurpassed grace and slender suppleness. Achutarajpur (near Banpur) in Khurdha district has yielded the largest hoard of Buddhist bronze images of exquisite workmanship. Noteworthy among these bronze images are

representation of Buddha, Tara, Trailokyavijaya etc. Recent excavation in Langudi hill has brought to light a huge Buddhist structure alongwith two Asokan statues with inscription.

Yogini Cult and its art (9th / 10th century A.D.):

In the wake of rise and growth of Vajrayana Buddhism, the tantric Yogini cult originated in Orissa. We find two hypoethral circular Yogini temples, one at Ranipur-Jharial in Balongir district and the other one at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar. The former is built of Sandstone on a flat rocky outcrop. The 64 Yoginis curved out of the local sand stone are found in dancing posture. Most of them holding wine cup, *Khadga* and *Vajra* etc. are presented in ferocious form. The central deity, a three-headed dancing Siva is a unique piece of art work.

The temple at Hirapur though smaller in dimension is of high artistic order. Made of black chlorite, the figures are in standing pose. The exquisite workmanship of these Yoginis figures indicates the high artistic excellence and exuberance of the period.

Temple Art (6th-10th century A.D.):

Temples constitute the most dominant form of artistic expression in Orissa. Apart from Brahmical temples, a few Buddhist and Jaina temples have also survived the ravages of time. All these temples show some common features and conform to the typical Kalinga style of architecture. An Orissan temple consists of the sanctum and the porch. The architectural scheme combining curvilinear *Vimana* and pyramidal *Jagamohana* is a unique feature of the Orissan style. Another aspect is the absence of carvings in the interior, while the surface of the temple is heavily and ornately decorated. The history of temple architecture in Orissa can be illustrated with a continuous series of temples from about the 6th to 16th century A.D. The developed form with embellished distinctive features in plan and elevation, however emerged in the 11th century. The style reached its climax in the 13th century A.D.

The temples of Lakshmanesvara, Bharatesvara, Satrughnesvara, Svarnajalesvara and Parasuramesvara, etc. are among the earliest temples of Orissa. Of these, the Prasuramesvara temple assigned to the 7th century A.D., is the best preserved specimen of the early phase. The temple on the whole is distinguished by its sculptured decoration. Lakulisa, Nataraja, Saptamatrikas, Ganesa, Kartikeya etc. are seen on the walls amidst other artistic carvings.

The next stage of evolution can be noticed in temples like Vaital, Sisiresvara and Markandesvara in Bhubaneswar. The progress of the style can also be traced through a series of temples outside Bhubaneswar, the notable examples being Bhringesvara temple Bajrakot, Kanakesvara temple at Kualo, Siva temple at Bodgaon, Simahernath temple in an island of the Mahanadi river, the twin temples at Gandharadi and the Varahi temple at Chaurasi with oblong plan and barrel vaulted roof of Vaital and Varahi temple belong to the *Khakara* order. The temple architecture developed further in the 10th-11th centuries under the Somavansis. The Muksesvara temple (C.10th) marks the transition between early and late temples. Its deul has a curvilinear *Sikhara* and the *Jagamohana* is a *Pidha* temple

which shows the development from the stage of the rectangular *mandapas* with very fine carvings on its walls and a beautiful *torana* at the entrance. The temple is truly “the Gem of Orissan architecture.” The Rajarani temple (11th century) is famous for its splendid figures of *dikapalas* and charming Alasa Kanyas. The Lingaraj temple sensitizing the *Vimana*, *Jagamohana*, *Natamandira* and *Bhogamondapa*, is undoubtedly one of the finest temples of India. The great temple built in the 11th century, shows the Orissan temples style at its best.

In the next stage the Gangas continued the building activities. The great Jagannath Temple at Puri was built under the patronage of Anantavarman Chadagangadeva in the 12th century A.D. Like the Lingaraja, this temple is also built in four dimensional style of which the *Bada deula* meant for the presiding Trinity, is the tallest extant temple of Orissa. This grand structure is impressive and magnificent with its panoramic sculptured figures and exquisite carvings brought to light after removal of the plaster. Other splendid examples of the Ganga period include Chatesvara temple at Kisenpur, Gopinath temple at Kakudia, Sobhanesvara temple at Niali, Madhava temple at Madhava and Dakshya Prajapati temple at Banpur besides a few smaller and lesser known shrines at Bhubaneswar.

Konark temple - the Grand Climax:

The magnificent Konark temple marks the grand climax of the Orissan temple style. Built by Narasimha-I (1238-1264) during the hey days of Orissa's great political ascendancy is the greatest and the best of Orissa's monuments. If art is an index of the creative ability of the people, this noble monument is not only the finest articulation of the creative genius of the Oriya people, but also the artistic triumphs of man over time. The grand conception of the temple, as a chariot of the Sun-God with twenty four wheels, is in fact without parallel in the whole range of the world arts. The main temple originally about 228 feet high, has long since collapsed, but the imposing *Jagamohana* with its fine carvings still stands as the reminder of its past glory. The life size loving couples and female figures, the celestial musicians playing cymbals, drums and flutes, war elephants and horses trampling vanquished enemies are some of the marvels and finest specimens of superb and excellent art works of Konark. It is indeed a poetry in stone.

Art and Craft:

In sculpture and temple architecture, there exist a large variety of motifs and styles. The artisans of Orissa have still retained that glorious tradition of stone carving which has created a niche in the history of art of India. From miniature to life size sculptures and temples with myriad of carvings of excellence have been our glorious traditions. Orissa also boasts of an illustrated tradition of painting which is more ancient and indigenous in style, the traces of which still survive at the skilled hands of Chitrakaras (traditional painters) in Puri, Raghurajpur, Paralakhemundi, Chikiti and Sonapur. It presents a vigorous style with a masterly play of bold lines and bright colours quite captivating to the eye. The *Patta Chitras* are based on mythological themes and stories from Radha-Krishna Lila and Lord

Jagannath. It contains folk elements in its style and execution. Apart from this Saura tribal painting has a distinction of its own. One may say that the painting tradition in Orissa which began with the pre-historic rock paintings is still in vogue in all its grandeur and passion.

The illustrated palmleaf manuscripts of Orissa form another very brilliant and important chapter of the history of pictorial art. Among the traditional crafts of Orissa, the applique craft of Pipili is most popular for its designs, brilliant colours, fabrics and artistry. Horn craft is an established traditional art of Orissa. Metal casting technique for beauty and utility is the traditional craft of Orissa. The idols of Gods and Goddess, lamp stand, utensils and decorative pieces etc. create a dazzling impression of creative impulses.

Orissa's history starts with the genuine documentary records of historic arts such as dances, musics and festivals. This is evident from the rock edicts of Chedi Emperor Maha Meghavahana Kharvela of 1st century B.C. All items of Orissa's traditional historic presentations are completely musical having dancing and acting as prominent features in them. Orissa has a rich and varied tradition in dance and music. They can broadly be classified into four major categories: Odissi, Chhau, folk and tribal dances. If one beholds these dances today he can get a feeling of the evolution of a spontaneous art form of the tribal dance to a rigidly, stylized Odissi with folk and chhau occupying a place in between. Today, Odissi has evolved as a ritual in the Jagannath Temple and has emerged as a leading classical dance form of India. Chhau evolved from the martial arts under the patronage of the rulers of the erstwhile princely states of Sareikalla and Mayurbhanj. Folk dances are deeply associated with different religious rituals and the tribal dances are part of the rhythm of life of the different tribes indigenous to Orissa. The prominent folk dances are Chhau, Sambalpuri, Chaitighoda, Ghumra, Danda nata, Ranapa, Paika and chadheya etc. In tribal dances, Gadaba, Kandh, Koya Paraja and Desia nata, etc. are note-worthy. Out of the 60 tribes of Orissa almost all the tribals have their distinct customs, dialect, dance and music. Singing and dancing are integral part of tribal people as basic as food and shelter. A tribal enjoys music and dance by direct participation and performance.

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