



General introduction to Odishan Temple Architecture

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INTRODUCTION

Temple is a 'Place of Worship'. It is also called the 'House of God'. Stella Kramrisch has defined temple as 'Monument of Manifestation' in her book 'The Hindu Temple'. The temple is one of the prominent and enduring symbols of Indian culture: it is the most graphic expression of religious fervour, metaphysical values and aesthetic aspiration.

The idea of temple originated centuries ago in the universal ancient conception of God in a human form, which required a habitation, a shelter and this requirement resulted in a structural shrine. India's temple architecture is developed from the Sthapati's and Silpi's creativity. A small Hindu temple consists of an inner sanctum, the Garbha Griha or womb chamber; a small square room with completely plain walls having a single narrow doorway in the front, inside which the image is housed and other chambers which are varied from region to region according to the needs of the rituals.

In various Silpa Sastras we find detailed instructions for the construction of all types of buildings and also rules of proportion for the sculpting of different categories of images. It is from these Silpa Sastras that we come to know about the types of temples. The Indian Silpa

Sastras recognize three main styles of temple architecture known as the Nagara, the Dravida and the Vesara.¹

NAGARA TEMPLE STYLE

Nagara types of temples are the typical Northern Indian temples with curvilinear *sikhara*-spire topped by *amlakasila*.² This style was developed during A.D. 5th century. The Nagara style is characterized by a beehive-shaped and multi-layered tower, called 'Sikhara'. The layers of this tower are topped by a large round cushion-like element called 'amlaka'. The plan is based on a square but the walls are sometimes so segmented, that the tower appears circular in shape. Advancement in the architecture is found in temples belonging to later periods, in which the central shaft is surrounded by many smaller



reproductions of itself, creating a visual effect of a fountain.

DRAVIDA TEMPLE STYLE

Dravidian architecture is a style of architecture that emerged thousands of years ago in the Indian subcontinent. They consist primarily of pyramid shaped temples with cupola-formed *sikharas*. These temples are dependent on intricate carved stone in order to create a step design consisting of many statues of deities, warriors, kings and dancers. The majority of the existing buildings are located in the South Indian States. The earliest monuments of this school can be seen at Mamallapuram and at Kanchipuram.

VESARA TEMPLE STYLE

Vesara type of temples contains elements of both Nagara and Dravida styles. This style is also described in some texts as the 'Central Indian Temple Architecture Style' or 'Deccan Architecture'. The trend was started by the Chalukyas of Badami (500-753 A.D.) who built temples in a style that was essentially a mixture of the *Nagara* and the Dravida styles, further refined by the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta (750-983 A.D.) in Ellora, Chalukyas of Kalyani (983-1195 A.D.) in Lakkundi, Dambal, Gadag etc. and epitomized by the Hoysalas (1000-1330 A.D.). This style mostly prevalent in the Deccan. The ground plan of the temples of this style is star-shaped or polygonal. The temple consists of shrine, anti-chamber and hall with aisles and porch.

ODISHAN TEMPLE STYLE

Odisha possesses the most remarkable Northern temples. To a certain extent they represent a pure form of the original Nagara style. They can be divided into two groups, namely the early form of Nagara temples and the later evolution of the same in the fully developed

Odishan type.³ Because of its unique style it possesses a different temple style known as Kalingan School of Temple Architecture. This style received due recognition when it was mentioned in the Silpa texts and the inscriptions.⁴

The history of temple building activities in Odisha can be seen in a series of beautiful temples dating from about the 6th century to the 16th century. The various ruling dynasties of Odisha from the Sailodbhavas to the Gajapatis devoted themselves in erecting a number of religious shrines in their kingdoms for sheer display of the aesthetic sensibilities, religious mindedness and glorification of their reign.⁵ Bhubaneswar, the Temple City of India has a cluster of five hundred temples, ranging over a period of nearly four centuries.⁶

The Odishan temple style did not represent a fixed type. But in spite of the stylistic change that distinguishes one phase from another, we find a remarkable continuity in the development of the style till it reaches the climax. We have decided the course of evolution of temple architecture in to three phases – Formative Phase, Transitional Phase, and Mature Phase.

EVOLUTION OF ODISHAN TEMPLE

The temples evolved in Odisha consist of two main parts – the sanctum and the frontal hall. The sanctum called *vimana* and the frontal hall or the *mukhasala* called *jagamohana*.⁷ These two together make the temple a complete whole. The two structures linked internally. Externally the *jagamohana* is subordinate to the main temple in height. There is a traditional belief among the craftsmen of Odisha that the main temple is the bridegroom and the *jagamohana* is the bride. In course of time, to meet the growing needs of the rituals, two more structures, the *natamandira* and *bhogamandapa*, were added. Each is a separate structure but integrated to form

an effective and harmonious architectural organization.⁸

PLAN AND ELEVATION

The Odishan temple is remarkable in its plan and elevation. The interior ground plan of the temple is square, but externally, because of projections, the temple appears to show a cruciform plan. The Odishan temples are distinguished by vertical projections called the *rathakas* or *pagas*. Depending on the number of the *pagas*, the temples are classified into tri-ratha, pancha-ratha, sapta-ratha, and nava-ratha.⁹

TYPES OF TEMPLES FOUND IN ODISHA

Odisha is famous for temple architecture and with varieties of temples presents the Kalingan School of Architecture in its well-developed forms.¹⁰ According to Silpa Sastras, there are three different types of temples in the Kalingan School. These are 'Rekha', 'Bhadra' or 'Pidha' and 'Khakhara'.

The sanctum of the temple is either *rekha* or a *khakhara* type *deula*. Similarly, the *mukhasala* is either a flat-roofed rectangular hall or square hall with the roof arranged in *pidhas*. Majority of the sanctums are of *rekha* type and whereas the *khakhara* type is limited to a few Sakta temples. The *mukhasalas* of the temples of formative phase are flat-roofed rectangular halls while in later period, the *pidha deulas* were introduced.¹¹

REKHA TEMPLE

The rekha temple or the *vimana* is characterized by a curvilinear superstructure. It can be divided into four parts. The four divisions are *pista*, *bada*, *gandi* and *sira* or *mastaka*. From the bottom to the finial, each part of the temple has a separate name. The Odishan craftsmen considered the temple as the body of the Cosmic Being. Therefore, the different parts

of the temple are named after limbs of the body. Just as the different parts of a human body are organically related to each other, so the different divisions of the temple bear vital relationship with each other and are integrated into an artistic composition.¹²

The cella where the presiding deity is enshrined - conceived as the womb of the Cosmic Being and thus called Garbhagriha. Like the womb it is intensely dark. The dim light of the earthen lamp along with the fragrance of the flowers, incense; it creates an atmosphere of solemnity where a devotee can fix his mind in meditating his beloved God.¹³

PISTA

The Pista is not a compulsory feature. This is generally found in temples erected in the Ganga epoch.¹⁴

BADA

The constituent elements of the Bada are *pabhaga*, *jangha*, and *baranda*. This type of *trianga* bada is found in temples belonging to the earlier phase of the style. In later temples, the *bada* is composed of five elements; *pabhaga*, *tala jangha*, *bandhana*, *upara jangha*, and *baranda*. The *pabhaga* denotes the bottom part of the wall and is composed of mouldings called *khura*, *kumbha*, *pata*, *kani* and *basanta*. The *baranda* forming the topmost part of the bada is composed of a series of seven or ten mouldings.¹⁵

GANDI

The Gandi of the *rekha deula* inclines inward in a convex curve, this being more pronounced towards the top in later temples. It is divided into several *pagas* by the continuation of the projections of the *bada*.¹⁶ In a temple of Tri-ratha plan, we find two types of *pagas*. The central projection or *paga* is known as *Raha-paga* having

two projections known as *Kanika-pagas* on both sides. These Triratha temples generally belong to the formative phase. With the evolution, Triratha pattern changed to Pancha-ratha pattern having two or more *pagas*. The new *pagas* are known as Anuratha-pagas which is placed in between Raha-paga and Kanika-paga. In a Sapta-ratha temple, another two *pagas* added in between Anuratha and Kanika known as Anuraha. In Navaratha temples, Pariraha pagas added on either side in between the Anuraha and Kanika pagas. Kanika pagas are further subdivided in to a number of horizontal sections or storeys (bhumi) by the miniature *amla* (ribbed disc resembling the amlaka fruit), called bhumi amla.¹⁷ Sometimes the *gandi* is decorated with *anga-sikharas*. The central *raha* is relieved with a prominent chaitya-window design.¹⁸ The *gandi* ends with the *bisama*, the topmost course, with or without *pagas* divisions scaling the spire.¹⁹

MASTAKA

The Mastaka of the Deula consists of the *beki*, the *amla*, the *khapuri*, the *kalasa* and the *ayudha*. The *beki* separates the square *gandi* from the circular crowning elements. The *amla* in the case of later temples is supported by *dopichhalions* at the corners and figures of Vimanapalas placed on the centre of the *raha*.²⁰ Above the *amla* comes the *khapuri* or the skull, and on it is placed the *kalasa* or water-pot and *ayudha* or the weapon of the deity to whom the temple²¹ is dedicated. The *dhvaja* or banner is placed at the pinnacle of the temple.²²

PIDHA TEMPLE

There is no difference between Rekha temple and Pidha temple in the treatment of the *bada*, but they differ in the disposition of the *gandi*. The *gandi* of the *jagamohana* is of pyramidal shape.²³ It is composed of a number of *pidhas* or horizontal platforms, piled up in the

form of a pyramid. The *pidhas* rapidly decrease in size from bottom upwards. The diminution proceeds until the topmost *pidha* is half in size to the lower most one. The *pidhas* may be arranged in one or two tiers, with moderate height of vertical wall intervening between them. Each of these tiers is called a *potala*. The cross-section at any point of the *gandi* is square. Above the *gandi* comes the *mastaka*, composed of several elements which are circular in cross-section. First comes the *beki*, then the *ghanta*, an enormous ribbed structure shaped like a bell. On the top of the *ghanta* is a succession of *beki*, *amla*, *khapuri* and *kalasa* as in the Rekha.²⁴

KHAKHARA TEMPLE

The Khakhara temple is very unique in its style. This type is very limited in Odisha. This is exclusively meant for the Sakti worship. The *gandi* of the *khakhara* is composed either like that of a *rekha* or of a *pidha* with certain minor differences.²⁵ The plan of the deula is oblong, and its *mastaka* is distinguished by its barrel vaulted elongated roof called *khakhara* by the treatisers due to its faint resemblance to *kakharu* or *voita kakharu*. Over the *khakhara* are placed either miniature *amlas* or *kalasa* flanked by lions.²⁶

The *khakhara* type is limited to six examples in Bhubaneswar, but miniatures of this type were very extensively employed as a decorative motif on the body of Rekha or Pidha temples and the type has a wider distribution.²⁷

Except these three types of temples, we also find another two types of temples known as Gauriya temple and Hypaethral temple in Odisha.

GAURIYA TEMPLE

Gauriya type originated in Eastern India as a result of the impact of the west in the sphere of Indian Architectural activities. It is said to be the combination of the Gothic style and the Indo-

Aryan style of architecture. There are a few Gauriya temples in the district of Mayurbhanj and there are only two examples of this type of temples in the town of Puri; one beside the Markandeya



tank and the other at the gateway of Uttara Parsva monastery.²⁸

HYPAEETHRAL TEMPLE

Hypaethral temple is a circular temple in the ground plan without the roof belonging to the Sixty-four yoginis placed in the wall of innerside.²⁹ Of the extant Yogini temples, four are located in the Gwalior-Bundelkhand region (the ones at Khajuraho, at Bheraghat near Jabalpur, at Mitauli near Gwalior and at Dudhai near Lalitpua), while other two are in Odisha (the ones at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar and at Ranipr-Jharial in Bolangir district).³⁰

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