

Surya-Nārāyana Temple At Puri

Ratnakar Mohapatra

The temple of Surya-Nārāyana is situated in the northern side inner enclosure or Kurma-Bedhā of the temple of Jagannātha at Puri. It is exactly located close to the east of Laksmi temple and also adjacent to the east of the Navagraha temple.¹ According to M.M. Ganguli, the temple of Surya-Nārāyana (Dharma rāja) is of no architectural value except that it contains three parts contiguous to each other; this is merely met with.² According to J.B. Padhi the present Surya deul was earlier dedicated to Indra Devatā whose image is found inside the sanctum.³ According to G.C. Tripathi, this temple was also originally the seat of Dharma Devatā.⁴ It is the only single shrine of Surya Devatā in the Purusottama Ksetra. So from the religious point of view, this temple has some importance in the cultural history of Orissa. Those devotees, who come to visit Lord Jagannāth, also visit Surya Devatā of the temple complex.

The temple of Surya-Nārāyana consists of three structures such as Vimāna, Jagamohana and Nātamandapa. From the architectural point of view, this temple has not so much importance in Orissa. All the structures of the temple are built in sand stones, which is locally called Baulamālā *pathara*. It faces to the eastern direction.

Vimāna :

The vimāna of the Surya temple is a Rekḥā deul and its height is about 55 feet from the ground level. It has four vertical parts such as pistha, bāda, gandi and mastaka. The structure of the Vimāna is sapta-ratha in plan. It stands on a low platform of 2½ feet in height. The pistha or the platform of the vimāna consists of three horizontal mouldings, which are relieved with scroll-works, flower designs and jāli works. The base of the pistha is a square of 35 feet on each side. The bāda is panchānga type i.e. having five component parts such as pabhaga, tala jangha, bāndhāna, upara jangha and bārandā. The pābhāga consists of conventional mouldings of khurā, kumbha, pattā, kāni and basanta. The niches and the intervening recesses of the pābhāga are relieved with khākharā mundis, scroll works, jāli works, flower designs, flower medallions, creepers with flower devices and Nāga pilasters etc. The niches of the upara jangha are decorated with khākharā mundis, which contain the figures of asta dikpālas and the royal court scenes. The figures of the asta dikpālas are seated on their respective mounts and placed in their respective directions. The intervening recesses of the tala jangha are filled with simha-vidalas, alasakanyās, kirtimukhas, female figures surrounded by some sakhis,

scroll works and creepers with the flowers. The niches of the upper jangha are decorated with pidhā mundis, which contain the figures of the female counter parts of the asta-dikpālas. They are all in seated postures on their respective mounts and directions. The intervening recesses between the pagas of the upper jangha are filled with alasakanyās, lady with child, preaching scene of lady, standing female figures with tree branches (woman-tree motifs), erotic scenes, flower medallions, creepers with flowers, Nāga kanyās and jāli works etc. All the pārsvadevatā niches of the bāda are now completely vacant. There is only a small image of Mahāvīr found in the southern wall of the bāda. The bārandā of the bāda consists of ten horizontal mouldings.

The curvilinear superstructure is surmounted on the gandi of the vimāna. The gandi displays five pagas or rathas to outwards. All the pagas of the gandi are elegantly carved with scroll works, jāli works and creepers with small flower designs. The kānika pagas of the gandi contain ten bhūmi amalās in its surface. The base of the eastern side Rāhā paga of the gandi contains an angasikhara, which is surmounted by the Gaja-simha motif. The deula cārini figures are inserted in four cardinal directions of the beki above the rāhās. Female figures are finely fixed on the top of the kānika pagas of the gandi. The projecting lions are not found from the top of the kānika pagas. Due to the absent of the projecting lions in the respective places of the temple, M.M. Ganguli has referred that a peculiarity with the temple is that the figure of projecting lion is not noticeable here as is usually met with in the temples of Orissa.⁵

The mastaka of the vimāna consists of beki, amalakasilā, khapuri and kalasa. Both

āyudha and dhvajā are not inserted in their respective places of the mastaka.

The sanctum preserves the image of Surya-Nārāyana as the presiding deity of the temple. The temple priests indicate that the presiding deity in question is the original Surya Nārāyana image of the famous Konārka temple. With the fall of the Konārka temple, the priest arranged its shifting to Puri for proper preservation.⁶ It is also stated in Mādālā Pāñji that the installed image of Sun God was brought from Konārka temple by King Narasimha Deva of Bhoi dynasty (A.D. 1622 to 1647 A.D.).⁷ According to R.K. Dash, the idol of Bhāskar, the Sun God, was brought from Konārka temple by Marahattā ruler Rāghabji and kept secretly in this temple.⁸ On the basis of the tradition, Prof. K.S. Behera has mentioned that the image of Surya, worshipped in the temple, was brought from Konārka temple in the first quarter of the 17th century A.D. (1600 A.D. to 1625 A.D.).⁹ As the image of Surya Nārāyana stands on a pedestal of stone, carved with the figures of seven horses; this is certainly the figure of Sun God.¹⁰ So the presiding deity of the temple is Surya Nārāyana. The image has been installed on the simāhāsana of 2½ feet in height. He holds a full-blown lotus in each hand. There is another stone image found in the backside of the presiding deity (Sun God).

Within the sanctum, a partially disfigured image has been lodged behind a masonry wall. There is lot of controversy among the scholars as well as the archaeologists with regard to the identity of that image, which is installed in the backside of the presiding deity (Sun God). Though, there is a stone image of Surya at the centre of the sanctum, just behind the image there is another stone image. Some scholars attribute it to be the figure of Indra. Chintamani

Acharya specifically states that it is the temple of Indra and the broken image of Indra (backside of the presiding deity) still exists there.¹¹ According to R.K. Dash, in the temple of Surya Devatā, the broken image of Indra is still there but in front of it a small wall has been raised and the image of Sun God is placed there.¹² According to Surendra Mohanty, there is no authentic evidence regarding the name of the backside image of the presiding deity (Sun God).¹³ According to Jagabandhu Padhi, it appears as if the image of Surya has been deliberately installed very close to the other image to hide it from public vision.¹⁴ According to P.K. Pattnaik this image of Buddhist origin is kept just behind that of Surya and cannot be seen except with the help of bright light. This is popularly associated with Indra, which does not appear to be correct.¹⁵ He has also not accepted it as the image of Indra. According to M.M. Ganguli, behind the stone background of the Surya-Nārāyana image is seen a beautiful image of a mutilated Buddha in a sitting posture with several carved figures, all in black chlorite stone. He also refers that the importance of the temple is due to the nature of the deity-enshrined therein.¹⁶ This scholar also proposes that in the backside of the presiding deity (Sun God) is probably an image of Buddha. This backside image (Buddha) is seated in padmāsana posture. The entire slab of the deity is 4½ feet in height. The background slab of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch; makara head at the base and the kirtimukha motif at the apex. Two flying apsara figures are depicted on both top corners of the slab. Some female dancing figures are carved in both sides of the makara head arch. The sculptural features of the backside image (Buddha) indicate that it is a fine workmanship of the Ganga Art of Orissa. The image of Buddha is larger than the

presiding deity, the Sun God. From the artistic point of view, the image of Buddha is very beautiful. There is no other Buddha image except this one in the premises of the Jagannātha temple. Out of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, Jayadeva has identified Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. M.M. Ganguli has referred that the image of Buddha had been removed from the original Buddhist shrine of the temple complex and in later period, it has been kept there.¹⁷

Both the images of the presiding deity (Surya-Nārāyana) and the backside deity (Buddha) are worshipped in the sanctum. A few more brass idols of Surya and his consort are also under worship in this temple.

The sanctum has one doorway towards the Jagamohana. Two circular pillars are erected as the jambs of the doorway. The door lintel of the sanctum is completely undecorated. The figures of the Navagrahas are finely carved on the architrave above the doorway lintel. They are all in seated postures with respective attributes in their hands. The Navagraha slab is also relieved with scroll work and flower designs.

Jagamohana

The Jagamohana of the Surya temple is a pidhā deul and its height is about 40 feet from the ground level. The structure is erected on the plinth of 2½ feet in height. The bāda of the Jagamohana is panchānga type i.e. having five fold divisions such as pābhāga, tala jangha, bandhana, upara jangha and bārandā. All the component parts of the bāda are devoid of the decorative ornamentation. The pyramidal superstructure is surmounted on the gandi of the Jagamohana. It consists of two tiers or potālas; the lower and the upper potālas, which

contain four and three pidhäs respectively. The middle portion of each potāla is decorated with pidha mastaka design on each side. Dopichhä lions and mandira cārini figures are also completely absent in their respective places.

The mastaka of the Jagamohana consists of beki and ghanṭā (bell-shaped member), above which there is another beki, amalakaśilā, khapuri and kalasa. Äyudha and dhvajā are not inserted in the kalasa of the mastaka.

The middle portion of the floor of the Jagamohana is occupied by the images of Rabi (Surya) and Candra, which are made of astadhātu or a mixture of eight metals. The western inner left wall of the Jagamohana contains a figure of Jarāsura and the right side of the western inner wall contains a figure of Chhāya in its niche. The northwest corner of the Jagamohana is occupied by the Kandarpa Ratha 'made of wood' in which Krishna is sitting and Gopis are depicted in seated postures on different parts of the Ratha. The Jagamohana has four doorways, which are all devoid of the decorative ornamentations.

Nātamandapa

The nātamandapa of the Surya temple is a pidhā deul and its height is about 20 feet from the ground level of the temple complex. It is also erected on the platform of 2½ feet height. The base of the structure is rectangular in size and it measures approximately 35 feet in length and 15 feet in width. The bāda portion of the nātamandapa is completely undecorated. The pyramidal superstructure is surmounted on the gandi of the nātamandapa. It consists of three bell-shaped pidhäs. There is only kalasa installed on the top of the upper pidhā. So all the elements of mastaka are not found from the upper pidhā.

The Archaeological Survey of India, Puri Circle, has de-plastered all the above structures of the Surya temple in 1990's. Thickness of lime plaster over these structures was maximum 45 cm. This information has been given by Jivan Pattnaik.¹⁸

Date of the Temple

There is no authentic evidence regarding the approximate date of the construction period of the Surya temple inside the temple premises of Lord Jagannātha. On the basis of the architectural features, J.B. Padhi has mentioned that the temple seems to have been constructed sometime in the 13th or 14th century A.D.¹⁹ On the basis of the architectural style and backside images of the sanctum, the construction period of the Surya temple can be tentatively assigned to the first half of the 14th century A.D. Most probably, it was constructed some time after the construction of the main Jagannātha temple of Puri. The temple was originally dedicated to the backside image (Buddha) of the sanctum. This temple was converted to Surya deul in the first half of the 17th century A.D. It is also very difficult to know about the real builder of this temple. There are as many as four of the kings of the Ganga dynasty bearing the name Bhānu Deva (Bhānu is synonymous of Sun God). It testifies that Ganga rulers of Orissa were the followers of Surya Devatā. But there is no other evidence about their patronage for the construction of this shrine. The structures of the vimāna and the jagamohana seem to have been constructed during the same period, but the nātamandapa was built in the later period.

Rituals and Festivals

The rituals of the Jagannātha temple are associated with Sun worship. The Sun worship is conducted in the temple near Mukti mandapa,

not here (place of Surya temple).²⁰ The temple has a special feature that all the betrothal oath ceremonies are rightly performed here.²¹ Special Pujā is done in the temple on Sundays, Lunar and Solar Eclipses and Sāmbādasami. The Car Festival of Sun God is also observed on the 6th day of the bright fortnight of Māgha.²²

It is known from the above discussion that the temple of Surya-Nārāyana is the single shrine of the Purusottama Ksetra (Puri) enshrining Sun god. Both from the architectural and cultural points of views, this temple has no such importance like the Sun temple of Konārka. The presence of the shrine indicates that some rulers of Puri were also the devotees of Sun God (Dharma Devatā). A special feature of this temple is that the marriage negotiations are done here. The parents of both bride and bridegroom take a vow before Sun God to get their children married to each other. Most probably, this temple was originally dedicated to the backside image (Buddha or Indra), which is found behind the presiding deity of the sanctum. Some scholars also suggest that before the installation of Sun God of Konārka, the temple was dedicated to Lord Indra (God of Rain). Whatever it may be, the temple was not earlier dedicated to Sun God. After the installation of Sun God of Konārka, the temple came to be known as Surya temple. The existence of this shrine in the Jagannātha temple complex suggests that the Sun worship was also prevalent in the Purusottama Ksetra during the medieval period of history.

References:

1. N. Senapati and D.C. Kuanr, Orissa District Gazetteers; Puri, (Ed.) Govt. Press of Orissa, 1977, p. 783. See G.C. Tripathy, Sri Jagannātha Temple At a Glance, Puri, 1989, p.13.
2. M.M. Ganguli, Orissa And Her Remains, (Ancient and Medieval), Calcutta, 1912, p. 428.
3. J.B. Padhi, The Holy Land of Puri, Puri, 2003, p. 118.
4. G.C. Tripathi, Op-Cit., p. 13.
5. M.M. Ganguli, Op-Cit. p. 428.
6. R.P. Mohapatra, Archaeology in Orissa, Sites and Monuments, Vol. 1, New Delhi, 1986, p. 164.
7. A.B. Mohanty, Mādālā Pāñji; Prachi Edition, Cuttack, 1940, p. 68. See K.N. Mahapatra, Khurdā Itihāsa (Oriya), p. 74.
8. R.K. Dash, Legends of Jagannātha Puri, Bhadrak, 1978, p. 89.
9. K.S. Behera, (Ed.) "The Temple Complex and Jagannātha At Puri", in UHRJ, Vol. vi, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, 1995. p. 28
10. M.M. Ganguli, Op-Cit, p. 429.
11. Chintamani Acharya, Puri, Utkal Sahitya Press, Cuttack, 1941, p. 72.
12. R.K. Dash, Op-Cit, p. 89.
13. S. Mohanty, Utkala Yuge Yuge, Cuttack, p. 82.
14. J.B. Padhi, Sri Jagannātha At Puri, Puri, 2000.
15. P.K. Pattnaik, "Historic Monuments in the Ksetra of Jagannātha", in M.N. Das (Ed.), Side Lights on History and Culture of Orissa, Cuttack, 1977, p. 514.
16. M.M. Ganguli, Op-Cit., p. 429.
17. Ibid.
18. J. Pattnaik, "Conservation Problems Remedial Measures of Lord Jagannātha Temple, Puri- An Overview" in Journal of Srimandira; Puri, Ratha yātrā Special Issue, Puri, 2003. p.64.
19. J.B. Padhi, Op-Cit., 141.
20. R.C. Mishra, Purusottama Ksetra, Puri, 2003, p.119.
21. G.C. Tripathy, Op-Cit., p.13.
22. Pt. S.N. Dash, Jagannātha Mandira and Jagannātha Tatwa (Oriya), Cuttack, 1966, p. 305.

Ratnakar Mohapatra is an ICHR Junior Research Fellow, at present doing research at Sambalpur University, Jyoti Vihar, P.O. Burla, Sambalpur-768019.