



Sri Jagannath Temple at Puri - An Architectural Study

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In the later half of the 7th Century, as the surviving examples show, the temple structure in its medieval aspect was beginning to assume a prescribed form.

The principal architectural features of the temple are as follows : Through out the greater part of the country, the sanctuary as a whole is known as the *Vimana* of which the upper and pyramidal or tapering portion is called the *Sikhara*, meaning tower or spire. Inside the *Vimana* is a small and generally dark chamber or cella for the reception of the divine symbol. This cella is the *Garbhagriha* and is to be entered by a doorway on its inner and usually eastern side. In front of the doorway is a pillared hall or *mandapa*. Some of the earlier temples indicate the *mandapa* as a detached building isolated from the sanctuary by definite open space as in the Kailashanatha temple at Canjeevaram and built about 700 A.D. A little later it became the custom to unite the two buildings, thus forming an intermediate chamber or vestibule called *antarala*. Leading upto the main hall or *mandapa* is a porch or *ardha-mandapa* while there may be a transept on each side of this central hall known as the *Mahamandapa*. The most complete illustrations of the fully formed and coordinated temple structure are the 10th Century examples at Khajuraho.

With the establishment of the temple type by about the 8th century A.D. the people proceeded to embark on an era of temple building.

Orissa, a land of many holy shrines, famous for the divine powers of the deities occupying them, for the artistic embellishments, the architectural skill and sculptural richness, occupies her rightful place. The present capital widely known to art-lovers the world over as the 'Temple City' was a Laboratory for daring innovations and bold experiments in architecture and temple designing in the period from the 8th to the 13th century A.D. Surviving specimens of temples here mark the evolutionary stages through which temples have passed. Milestones in architectural ingenuity have been left behind in temples like the Mukteswar, the Rajarani and the Lingaraj temples itself. However it is only in the Jagannath temple at Puri that Orissan genius has blossomed more fully. The genius also shines best at Konark, which shows art par excellence.

"The Jagannath temple surmounts a mound 20' high called Nilagiri. As the whole of the mound is now covered by building, I could not ascertain whether the eminence is due to a sand-ridge, or the rubbish of the ancient Buddhist structure over which the present



temple has been built" - (*The Antiquities of Orissa by R.L. Mitra Vol.II*). The outer walls, *Meghanada Prachira*, enclose an area of 665' x 644' (R.L.Mitra). They are build of dressed laterites, thickness of walls uniform, but the height varies from 20' - 24' because of variation in ground level.

Four gates mark the outer walls, which were perhaps added about three centuries after the construction of the main temple, during the reign of Purusottama Deva apprehending foreign aggression. The eastern gate, the *Simhadvara* is the main gate leading from the *Badadanda*. The gateway is guarded by two imposing lions in a crouching position. On the side pilasters of the door there are a couple of statues of guards, *Jaya* and *Vijaya* by name.

The gateway breaks the monotony of the walls mounted by battlements and is a square structure with a pyramidal roof. The door frames are of black chorite 'Muguni', richly carved in bands. Doors are made of heavy sal wood? The other doors though built on the same plan are not as grandiose and rightly carved. The northern gate is guarded by a couple of elephants mounted by mahounts, '*Hastidvara*'. The southern gateway is guarded by horses '*Asvadvara*'. The western gate had no special guardian and is known as the '*Khanjaduara*' which would mean it was intended to be a service entrance.

Aruna Stambha - Sun Pillar

It is a monolithic pillar of black chlorite, set on a pedestal of the same material 7'9" square and 6' high. The pedestal is richly carved and are of unsurpassable beauty. The pillar itself, is a sixteen - sided pillar being 25' 2" high from the pedestal to the bottom of the capital. The capital itself is 2'6" high and is surmounted by a squatting Garuda. The total height from the ground level to the top of the capital is 33'8". This was originally a portion

of the Konark Temple complex but was brought to Puri by the Marathas.

The four gateways lead to flights of stairs leading to the inner enclosure. The eastern gate leads to the famous twenty-two steps popularly known as the '*Baisi Pahacha*'. At the top of the flight of stairs are double walls eleven feet apart. The exact function of a double wall is not clear but it was either intended to fill up the space between them with hard earth to form a solid compact wall, or to allow defending soldiers to move freely around the boundary without exposing their body.

The main temple, and also most other lesser temples are located in the inner enclosure measuring 420' x 315'.

The *Vimana* or the main temple rises from a plinth measuring 80' square. The *Vimana* rises in a sheer perpendicular to a height of 35' above the plinth after which it curves inward. The stonework rises to a height of 192'. (In comparison the Lingaraj Temple of Bhubaneswar rises to a height of 160' on a square base of 66'). The body of the temple has been covered with a liberal coat of lime mortar that masks the details of rich carvings. It is only now being unmasked for a general view though the presence of rich carvings underneath the lime mortar was known as early as R.L. Mitra's survey of the Temple. Temple Records mention the first thorough repairs to have been carried out in the reign of the Surya Vamsi king Prataparudra. The temple was 'plastered and whitewashed'.

Basing their opinions on the plain look of the Jagannath temple many European art critics, including Stirling and Fergusson speak of a general decadence in the art of sculpture in Orissa during the period, the Jagannath temple was built. Yet strangely the Sun temple at Konark built only fifty years later and twentyfive miles away bears ample and rich



testimony to the undying art traditions of the region.

The Jagamohana or the porch also rests on a plinth 80' square 6' high. Its body rises vertically to a height of 31'6" after which there is overhanging cornice projecting nearly 5' from the wall. The cornice was originally totally unsupported but after some damage to the cornice R.L. Mitra has referred to some repairs and re-enforcements with mild steel rail and wrought iron architraves, which may be seen even today. The *Jagamohana* is split into a central nave and two aisles by solid square pillars. The walls at their thickest are 18'. It has four doorways one towards the sanctum 14'4"x8'10", one to the south 13'8" x 6'6", one towards the *Natamandapa* in the east 14' x 7' and the fourth towards the north.

The *Natamandapa* or the Dancing Hall belongs to a much later age than the main temple and the porch. While the exterior measure 80' square, the interior measures 69' x 67'. Four rows of plain, square pillars divide it into a central nave and two aisles. The pillars bordering the nave are 4' square and 16'8" high. The two rows of pillars dividing the two aisles on either side are squares of 3'6" and rise only 12'8". While the length of the nave and the aisles is 69' the nave is 16' wide, the aisles near to it are 10'6" wide and the *Natamandapa* are generally bare of any art or decoration, though of late *pattachitra* type of paintings have been made on the eastern walls.

The *Bhogamandapa* was originally a part of the Konark temple complex. It was dismantled and reassembled by the Marathas in the 18th century. The *Bhogamandapa* or the Hall of Offerings is the eastern most structure of the main temple complex. Though almost a square like the other structures, it is smaller in size and measures only 58' x 56' and strides a plinth 7'6" high. The plinth is profusely

decorated with delicate sculptures. The body of the structure above the plinth is 15'6" high and also bears a superabundance of rich carvings, on red sandstone. The door frames on either side of the doorway are of green chlorite luxuriously adorned with delicately chiselled carvings. Two pilasters support a red sandstone architrave bearing the *Navagraha*. Contrasting the richness and profusion of the exterior, the interior is spartan in its plainness and is devoid of any attempt to relieve the monotony of the bare walls, save the four pillars supporting the wall. The roof of the *Bhogamandapa* is pyramidal in shape made of overlapping stones. There is a covered passageway connecting the *Bhogamandapa* with the kitchen complex so that offerings cooked in the kitchen may be brought to the *Bhogamandapa* by the Lord's servants without being defiled by unwanted touch. As a reassembled structure it is remarkable for lack of any physical evidence showing its dislocation from the original site quite a distance away.

It is not possible to discuss the other temples within the inner enclosure of the Jagannath temple complex. That they throw many interesting sidelights goes without saying. The main temple complex i.e., the *Vimana*, *Jagamohana*, *Natamandapa* and the *Bhogamandapa*, in their own right as architectural specimens have few parallels in India. A complete removal of plaster which shields the sculpture, rich or otherwise, from the critical gaze of art historians and scholars, is in good progress. If the specimen of the Lingaraj temple built before it, and the Sun temple built after it provide any indices, they cannot but be truly remarkable.

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