



Siddha Mahavir Temple at Puri

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The temple of Siddha Mahavir is situated at a distance of about one Km to the north-east of the Gundicha temple of Puri. This is a small temple dedicated to Siddha Mahavir (Hanumana). From the architectural point of view the temple is not so important but from the religious point of view, it is one of the important shrines of Orissa. It is believed that Tulasi Das, the famous author of Rama Charita Manasa, stayed here for sometime when he visited Puri.¹ On the basis of tradition, it is further believed that Hanumana after retirement from active service of Lord Rama desired to settle in this shrine.² The kshetra of Purosottama is noted for the installation of several Hanumana images in the late medieval period in order to arouse the martial spirit of the local people to defend the Jagannatha temple from the repeated Muslim onslaughts.³ The Ramananda Sect made arrangement for the installation of Hanumana images in this Kshetra. Hence, there are a series of Hanumana shrines noticed in the different parts of the Kshetra of Jagannatha.

The shrine of Siddha-Mahavir is an important place, where the presiding deity is greatly revered by the local people who are believers of the Ramayana Cult. Dr. Bichitrnanda Mohanty opines that God

Siddha Mahavir is considered as one of the Asta-Mahaviras of the Kshetra (Puri town).⁴ On the other hand, Dr. Braja Kishore Sahu has referred that God Siddha Mahavir is one of the real protectors as well as controllers of the Kshetra.⁵

Architectural features of the temple :

The temple of Siddha Mahavir consists of two structures such as Vimana and Jagamohana. There is an open flat mandapa recently erected in front of the Jagamohana. This temple is built in sand stones, which locally called as Baulamala and Kanda Patharas. It faces to east.

(A) Vimana :-

The Vimana of the Siddha Mahavir temple is a Pidha Deula and its height is about 35 feet from the road level. It has four vertical parts such as pistha, bada, gandi and mastaka. The pistha of the Vimana is 2 ½ feet in height and it is completely undecorated. The bada of the Vimana is panchanga type i.e. having five fold divisions viz Pabhaga, tala jangha, bandhana, upper jangha and baranda. The base of the bada is square of 22 feet on each side. All the component parts of the bada are devoid of decorative ornamentations. The three sides central niches of the bada are housed with



parsvadevata images of Yamaraja, Male deity (Keshari) and Devi Anjana. The upper *Garviksha* of the northern side is decorated with a war tour scene (a row of soldiers holding war implements in their hands).

The pyramidal superstructure is surmounted on the *gandi* of the *Vimana* and it consists of 3 flat shaped *pidhas*. The centre of each *pidha* is projected with *jhäpa-simhas* in all sides of the *gandi*. Small *dopichha* lions are fixed in the corners of the *kanthis* or intervening recesses between the *pidhas*. Diminutive *Mahavir* figures in different postures are also inserted in the *kanthis* between the *pidhas* of *gandi*. *Dopichha simhas* are fixed on the top of the *Kanika pagas* of *gandi*. *Deula Charini* figures are inserted in the four cardinal directions of the *beki* above *rahas*. They are acting as the supporting elements of the *mastaka*.

The *mastaka* of the *Vimana* consists of *beki*, *ghanta* (bell shaped member) above which there is another *beki*, *amalaka sila*, *khapuri*, *kalasa*, *ayudha* (*chakra*) and *dhvaja*.

The sanctum preserves a large image of *Mahavir* (*Hanumana*) as the presiding deity of the temple. The image is about 6 feet in height. He holds *gada* in left hand and a massive rock boulder (*Gandha-Mardana Parvata*) in right hand. The deity has been installed on the decorated masonry pedestal of 2 feet high. The slab of the presiding deity is carved with a series of diminutive *Hanuman* figures in different postures. They are locally considered as the *asta-mallas* such as *Sugriba*, *Jambu bahana*, *Bali*, *Angada*, *Susena* etc. These figures are also believed to be the eight advisers of Lord Rama during his expedition to Lanka to fight against *Ravana* for rescue of *Sita*.⁶ A brass image of *Hanumana* (*Mahavira*) has also

been kept on the same pedestal as the *vije pratima* for ceremonial occasions. The presiding deity of the temple is very attractive to visitors and it is the best specimen of the fine workmanship. The background slab of the deity is decorated with *trefoil arch*; *makara heads* at the base and *Kirtimukha motif* at the apex. This slab is also relieved with scroll works, flower medallions and various scenes from the *Ramayana*. R.P.Mohapatra has referred that the temple though of later workmanship its presiding deity, a huge *Hanumana* image deserves special mentions as an excellent work of Orissan art.⁷ Inner walls of the sanctum are completely undecorated and it is recently covered with china plates. The top of the presiding deity is surmounted by pyramidal roof, which is supported by four massive circular pillars.

The sanctum has one doorway towards the *Jagamohana* and it is devoid of decorative ornamentations. The images of *Gaja-Lakshmi* and *Navagrahas* are completely absent in their respective places. The eastern side outer wall of the *Vimana* (towards the *Jagamohana*) is relieved with *Jagannätha 'Trinity'*.

(B) Jagamohana or Mukhasala :

The *Jagamohana* of *Siddha- Mahavir* temple is a *pidha deula* and its height is about 30 feet from the road level. The structure of the *Jagamohana* has four vertical parts like the *Vimana*. The *pistha* of the *Jagamohana* is 2½ feet in height. The base of the *bada* is rectangular and it measures 35 feet in length and 18 feet in width. There is no decorative moulding in the walls of the *bada*. The northern sidewall of the *Mukhasala* is decorated with some sculptural panels such as the mounted elephant scene, horse procession scene and the *abhisheka* scene of *Puri king*. A mounted



elephant and two cavaliers are relieved in marching posture in the wall. It is thickly covered by lime mortar. The entrance doorway wall of the Jagamohana is inserted with two large panels depicting a Panchamukhi Ganesha and a Sikshadana scene.

The pyramidal superstructure surmounts on the gandi of the Jagamohana and it consists of three flat shaped pidhas. The centre of each pidha is projected with a Jhapa simha on all the four sides of gandi.

The mastaka of the Jagamohana consists of Khapuri, Kalasa, Ayudha (Chakra) and Dhvaja. Two jhapa simhas are projected on the northern and southern sides of the kalasa respectively. Inner walls of the Jagamohana are fully covered with china plates. The Jagamohana has one doorway towards east. The door-jambs of the Jagamohana are devoid of decorative ornamentations. The figures of Gaja-Lakshmi and Navagrahas are also completely absent in their respective places. Two lions are installed on the both sides of the doorway of Jagamohana. They are acting as the dvarapalas of the temple.

(c) Natamandapa :-

The Natamandapa of the Siddha-Mahavir temple is an open flat roof Mandapa, which is supported by octagonal pillars. The height of the flat roof is about 15 feet from the surface of the temple complex. The ceiling of the flat roof is recently painted with different scenes, which mostly derived from the stories of Ramayana. There is a pedestal of 2½ feet high noticed in the floor of the Natamandapa. The footprint of Lord Rama is carved on the top of pedestal for worship. The Endowment Trust of the Government of Orissa has built the Natamandapa of the temple in 2000 AD.

Sculptures :-

The temple of Siddha Mahavira is partially adorned with different sculptures and scenes. The three sides central niches of the bada of Vimana are housed with parsvadevata images of Yamaraj, Keshari and Devi Anjana.

The image of Yamaraja is the parsvadevata of the southern side niche of the Vimana. The two handed image of Lord Yama has been installed on the plain pedestal. He is carved in seated posture on the backside of buffalo, the conventional mount. Lord Yama displays gada in right hand and kala phasa in left hand respectively. The background slab of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch.

A statue of a male figure is locally worshipped as Keshari noticed in the western side parsvadevata niche of the bada of Vimana. R.P.Mohapatra has identified it as the image of Hanumana.⁸ This image is not completely designed in the form of Hanumana. The two handed image of Keshari has been installed on the decorated pedestal. He holds gada in left hand and akshamala in right hand. He is also wearing the garland of beads in his body. Six diminutive Mahavir (Hanumana) figures are finely carved on the pedestal. Two female figures are flanked on either side of the deity. They are displaying flywhisks in their hands. The background slab of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch.

Devi Anjana is the Parsvadevata of the northern side central niche of the bada of Vimana. The two-armed image of Devi Anjana has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. She holds Child (Mahavir) by her two hands. Two female figures (Sakhis) are flanked on either side of the devi. The backside head of the devi (Anjana) is also relieved with trefoil arch. All the parsvadevata images are made of



black chlorite and they are also housed in the pidha mundi niches.

At first N.K. Bose has noticed that a detached sculptural panel inserted into the wall of the Siddha Mahavir temple, which throws interesting light on the technique of inclined plane. The sculpture depicts a temple under the process of construction, where two masons are still working on the top of the unfinished gandi while other four workers are carrying up a rectangular block of stone over an inclined plane.⁹ K.S. Behera also refers that the presence of three pillars to support the inclined plane, whose one end rests on the ground and the other end on the top of the temple, suggest that the slope was made of wooden planks.¹⁰ This sculptural scene indicates the technique and methods of temple construction in ancient Orissa.

There is a scene of royal procession with two elephants inserted into a niche of the northern sidewall of the Mukhasala of the temple. The elephants are placed one in front of the other so that only one is visible in this view. The front figure of the near elephant is of royal lineage as suggested by the two parasols held by attendant figures, one on each elephant. Three figures with hands in anjali mudra stand in-front of the elephants while an acrobat rolled into a ball is beneath the head of the near elephant. The head of the royal figure is completely missing. Some senior priests of the temple say that it is a scene of Indra Devata. Most probably, this scene is a royal tour of Puri king. An elephant and a horse with their grooms are carved on the pedestal of the royal procession slab. The measurement of the royal procession slab is 31 inches in length and 18 inches in width respectively.¹¹ A short line of inscription is engraved just below the

sculptural panel. The royal procession scene was executed in the third quarter of the 13th Century AD.¹²

The left side eastern entrance wall of the Jagamohana contains an image of Panchamukhi Ganesha in its niche. The slab of the deity is exquisitely carved by the artist. The ten-handed image of Ganesha has been installed on the decorative pedestal. His right five hands display chakra, snake, trident, broken tusk, and varada mudra while the left five hands hold gada, pasa, ankusa, flower and a bell. The image of Ganesha measures approximately 34 inches in length and 20 inches in width.¹³ He wears a Sarpa-Yajnopavita in His body. His Sakti is seated in lalitasana and embraces Him with Her right arm. She holds a lotus flower in Her left hand.¹⁴ The upper portion of the slab is decorated with foliage. The pedestal of the deity is relieved with a Kalasa along with stalks and foliage. The slab of the Panchamukhi Ganesha is carved out of black chlorite. Prof. K.S. Behera and T.E. Donaldson opine that the image of Ganesha was made in the middle of the 13th Century AD and it probably comes from Konark Sun temple.¹⁵ Srinibas Tripathy has also referred that the Panchamukhi Ganesha image inserted into a niche flanking the entrance of the Jagamohana of Siddha Mahavir temple seem here was originally brought from Konark.¹⁶

The right side eastern entrance wall of the Mukhasala is relieved with the sikshadana scene. R.P. Mohapatra has identified that it is the teaching scene of Vyasadeva who is reciting the Bhagabata Purana among his disciples.¹⁷ The guru is seated in a pavilion with his right leg crossed over his left and right hand raised as if imparting instructions. Facing him are three rows of two figures each. Both male and female devotees are flanked on either side of



guru. Most of these devotees are carved in folded hands (anjali mudra). The stone slab of the sikshadana scene measures 27½ inches in length and 18¼ inches in width.¹⁸ Prof. K.S. Behera and T.E. Donaldson have referred that the sikshadana motif inserted into a niche on the Siddha Mahavira temple was also brought from the Sun temple of Konark.¹⁹ This sikshadana panel was probably executed in the 13th century AD.

Besides these sculptures, three brass idols of Narayana and a figure of child Krishna are preserved in a shed, which constructed in the right of the Jagamohana. Along with them stone images of Yama seated on buffalo, Hara-Parvati, Radha-Krishna Yugalamurti and a huge stock of palm leaf manuscripts have also been preserved in this small apartment. According to R.P. Mohapatra, the images preserved in the shed furnished varying dates of workmanship.²⁰ Available sculptures noticed in the temple complex are not made in same period. Most of the sculptural panels, which inserted in the walls of temple, were brought from Konark temple. Parsvadevata images of the temple were made at the time of temple construction. The other images in the temple premises were executed in later period.

The surface of the temple complex is about 4 feet high from the road level. A boundary wall of 10 feet high has enclosed the temple and it measures approximately 80 feet in length on the northern and southern sides and 60 feet in width on the eastern and western sides respectively. The modern flat roof covers the main entrance porch of the temple complex. A series of ascending masonry steps are provided for entry into the temple complex. Two huge lions are installed on the both sides of the main entrance gate of the eastern side.

They are acting as the gatekeepers of the temple.

Date of the temple:

There is no authentic evidence regarding the construction period of the temple of Siddha Mahavir. On the basis of the architectural style, the construction period of the temple can be tentatively assigned to the 1st half of the 16th century AD. Most probably this temple was built by the Gajapati ruler of Orissa.

Now the Endowment Trust Board of the Government of Orissa is managing the temple. The site of temple is also a beautiful spot for picnic.

Thus it is known that the temple of Siddha Mahavir is one of the sacred spots of the Kshetra. By the influence of Ramanuja sects, Humanana temples were constructed in the different parts of the Kshetra. This temple possibly was built by the King of Puri. Out of available sculptures, some of them were brought from the Konarka Sun temple. Probably, Tulasi Das, the famous author of Rama Charita Manasa was residing near this shrine, although the architectural feature of the temple is not so important but from the cultural point of view, it is one of the important shrines of Puri.

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