



The Iconography of Hindu Temple : Idea and Image

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All religions have their sacred places, places of worship. Temple, means a building for religious exercises and is a centre for worship. It is the abode of God who is the spirit immanent in the universe. The temple, therefore is known by such terms as devalaya, Shivalaya and devayatana. Hence, worship constituting the living use of the temple, starts with the installation of life in the form of deity in the sanctum. The temple is mainly a product of Puranic tradition. Temples does not seem to have existed during the Vedic age. The practice of preparing images of the deities mentioned in the Vedic hymns might have come in vogue by the end of the Vedic period. The view that the *Yangasala* of the Vedic period gradually got metamorphosed into temples by the epic period owing to the influence of the cults of devotion is widely accepted. The temple is mainly a product of and instrument of the Puranic tradition. Hindu myths, legends and beliefs are compiled in texts collectively called the Puranas. The Hindu pantheon of Gods originated from the texts of two Brahminical sects, the Vaisnava and Saiva, which with other minor religious systems are part of the puranic tradition and is known as Hinduism.

The puranic tradition evolved out of a synthesis of the sanskritic (Main), tradition and the regional or vernacular (little) traditions. This process of synthesis

and assimilation is called Sanskritisation or the process of acculturation through the interaction between Brahamanical forms of worship and the local regional or vernacular forms of beliefs and practices or folk traditions. Despite the continuous process of acculturation and synthesis of these two traditions, folk/tribal forms persist in many ways first, as part of the mainstream religious systems in their pantheons and rituals and more importantly, as cult practices in private and public ceremonial worship and festivals independent of the Brahminical temple with their own non-Brahman priests and non-Brahminical rituals. In almost every settlement, rural or urban this duality is conspicuously present in the places of worship in major temples of puranic deities and in smaller cults of the local deities.

There are many ancient texts laying down the formal architectural styles prevalent in various regions and the comprehensive text is called the Vastu Sastra. Vastu Sastras has its sources in the Sastras, Puranas and Agamas, besides trantric literature and the Brihat Samhita. All of them, agree on the point that basically the temple styles can be divided into nagara, dravida and vesara. They are respectively the square, octagon and the apes or circle in their plan. An inscription as referred by R.D. Banarjee, found in the temple of Amritesvara at



Holal (Dist. Bellary, Karnataka), mentioned that four classes of temples i.e. Nagara, Dravida, Kalinga and Vessara exist in India. Scholars opined that Kalinga type, chiefly found in Orissa is a sub-class by itself from Nagara group. However, the manifestation of Orissan architecture was labelled as the Kalingan style after the territory where temples are found. The distinctiveness of the Kalingan style of architecture was amply attested to by the epigraphical and literary references of its own Silpa Sastras like Bhuvana-Pradipa, Silpasarini and Silparatnokosa. They mentioned about three types of temples namely the Rekha, Pidha (Bhadra) and Khakra. The Rekha and Pidha temples forms two component parts one architectural scheme, the former was represented by sanctum with curvilinear spire and the latter was represented by porch having pyramidal roof. These two type were meant for the worship of Siva and Vishnu and other deities except Matrika or Sakta deities. The Khakara order was noted by semicylindrical roof and meant for Sakti worship. The Orissan Temple is remarkable for its plan and elevation. On plan, the general scheme of early temples comprised the sanctum (Deul) and the frontal porch (Jagamohan), but later on two more components added to them were Natamandap (Dancing Hall) and Bhogamandapa (Hall of offering). Thus all components were in one axis. On plan, sanctum is tri-ratha, in earlier example, but in course of time, they became pancharatha, saptaratha and navaratha. The projections are called, the raha (central projection), the anuraha and kanika etc. On elevation, both the

sanctum and the porch could be divided into three parts along the vertical plan, viz, bada, gandi and mastaka. The gandi is decorated with angasikharas, mastaka was the crowning part of the temple architecture.

In the iconographic scheme, the walls of the shrine are divided into three vertical segments with a large niche in the centre of each wall housing a parsvadevata. In a Siva temple, these niches house the images of Parvati and her two sons Ganesh and Kartikeya ; in a Vishnu Temple we find the three forms of Vishnu ; in a devi Temple there forms of the goddess. The parsvadevata niche is flanked by smaller niches containing the relief statues of the deity to whom the temple is dedicated. The Gupta formula of introducing the figures of the river Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna on the doorjambs of the shrine was invariably followed.

In this back ground, let us discuss the iconographic features of the Jagannath Temple. The temple, representing the microcosm - the cosmic man, is structured in the likeness of man, the microcosm. Thus the parts of the temple are designed to correspond with the human body from foot to head. Since the archetypal Purusa is perceived through his manifestation as the universe, when the one becomes two and then a multiplicity or created beings, the temple is conceived as the divine couple tellingly described as the groom and the bride "Vimana Varasresthan ca Kanya Ca Mukhasala" (Silpa Prakash). This emergence of the divine essence and the Sakti for releasing the generating forces



of the universe is one of the basic concepts of Orissan temple.

Every temple has the 'achala' or the permanent image, in the shrine and the other gods of the pantheon as well as subsidiary deities in the niches, and semidevine, celestial beings in various parts of the structure. The 'chala' or mobile images made of bronze are used for various ritual and ceremonial purposes, particularly processions, during festivals. Bronze casting of images, on a large scale, from the early medieval times, heralded a period of ritual consolidation and artistic standardisation, and simultaneously of an imaginative variation of treatment of even well-known religious themes and legends. But, here at Jagannath Temple we have 'calacala' (both movable and immovable) deity, of course the cala (movable) images are separately reserved for other occasions. Here, the main deities are kept and worshipped in the garbhagriha, is also taken out on the ratha (chariot) during the Rathayatra which comes in the category 'calachala'.

Here, the deities Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath worshipped in iconic form still the iconography is very complex as it assimilates the features of Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism. However, scholars extended their opinion on the basis of Mora well inscription (Mathura) of 1st AD which says that the "Pancavira" cult led by the Abhira tribe were worshipping of Gopal Krishna, Vasudeva Krishna along with Subhadra the younger sister of Gopal Krishna. The south Indian tradition also knew of Subhadra as younger sister of

Gopal Krishna. The Brahat-Samhita of Varahamihira (Gupta period) provides that Ekanamsa the younger sister of Vasudeva Krishna should be placed between Baladeva and Krishna. The first trio in south India showing Balaram on the right, Subhadra in the centre and Vasudeva-Krishna on the left, is found in the Pallava bas relief at Mamallapuram. There are three panels found in the Mathura Museum datable to Kushan period also depicts Balarama, Subhadra and Vasudeva. Again a trio panel comes from Devangarh in Gaya District of Bihar presently housed in Patna Museum shows Balarama, Devi Subhadra and Vasudeva-Krishna. Another post Gupta panel housed in the State Museum, Lucknow (No. G. 58) also shows three images, Balarama, Subhadra and Vasudeva Krishna. The Orissan panel of 13th century depicted in Konark temple slightly differs with representations of Siva Linga, Jagannath and Durga perhaps meant for the equal status given to three major religious streams of contemporary period. Again the representation of Jagannath image in the Rajivlochan temple of Rajim towards 15th century A.D. concludes independent image of Jagannath cult of Vaishnavite nature. Here, we may conclude the great pan-Indian character of Vaishnavite nature assimilates at Puri and gave birth the Jagannath cult.

Similarly, in the temple iconography also the major parsva devatas are found life size independent images of Varaha, Narsimha and Trivikrama on three cardinal directories of South West and North respectively. These three images separately represented, are more common in Vaisnava religious



establishments. These images are placed in conformity with the iconographic features of Silpa ratna, Agnipurana, Vishnudharmottara, Rupamandana and Matsyapurana.

The representation of Dikapalas or Lokpalas in the corners of Khakaramundis of lower Jangha of Jagannath temple are Indra, Yama, Kubera, Agni, Nritti, Vayu and Isana. Although depiction of Dikapalas are in vogue in the earlier temples of Orissa but it was prominent in Mukteswara and Rajarani Temple, than all the later temples have the representative Dikapalas which was considered guardians of the quarters over which they have respective jurisdiction. Here, systematically we find Indra (mutilated) in the East, Yama in South, Varuna in West and Kubera in North. Agni, Nritti, Vayu and Isana are respectively on South-East, South-West, North-West and North-East. These are recognised as Vedic/Puranik deities and some of them being more important than the other. The Vishnudharmottara and Brihat Samhita gives the description of these Dikapalas. Here, in the Jagannath Temple all the Dikapalas with their respective quarters, weapons and vehicles are found in order. Here, it is interesting to mention the image of Nritti, The Lord of South-West, found placed on the niches of lower Jhanga, of Jagannath Temples. The image is seated on a body of a man. Nritti, the Vedic deity like Yama, Agni and Indra is said to be the wife of Virupaksha. Virupaksha is Kala and Nritti is murtyu as described in Vishnudharmottara. Sculptures showing Nritti is extremely rare and as part of iconographic programme of a full fledged temple we have the beautiful image of

Nritti in the outer of wall of the main temple.

The most remarkable feature of the Jagannath Temple is the representation of twenty four forms of Vishnu in the outer wall on both sides of each parsva devata shrines. These twenty four manifestations are alike in their iconographic features. They are all standing images with no band in the body possessing four arms and adorns with Kirita crown and other usual ornaments, each one of them stands upon a padmasana. The difference between any two of these images has to be made out of the way in which the Sankha (Conch), the Chakra (Wheel), the Gada (Mace) and the Padma (Lotus) are found distributed among their four hands. The 'Rupamananda' furnishes the twenty four - names of Vishnu which and the corresponding arrangements of the four ayudhas in the four hands in each case. It is worthy to note that the number of possible permutations of four things taken four at a time is exactly twenty-four. These twenty four forms of Vishnu which have been listed in 'Rupamananda' and Padmapurana are found nowhere in any temple sculpture except in this Jagannath temple otherwise signifies the visnavite origin of the temple.

The next important depiction is the ten avatars of Vishnu in the upper jangha of the Jagannath Temple. They are of course not found in order, but clear and good shape is marked in South-East corner, Varaha and Narasimha, in the South-West corner, Balarama and North-West corner found Buddha and Kalki. The avatara representation is another iconographic feature of Vishnavite temple.



The reference of the Avatara of Vishnu found in Bhagabat Gita, Pancharatra texts, Mahabharat, Bhagavat Purana, Varaha and Agnipuranas. However, inclusion of Buddha as avatara of Vishnu is found in Varha and Agnipuranas and Bhagavat Purana. The representation of ten Avataras in a standardised form and its reflection in Jayadeva's Gitagovinda confirms the iconography of vaisnavite temple.

The admixture of pancharatra with Vasudeva Narayana-Krishna also depicted in the temple walls.

Thus Hinduism is a more recent nomenclature given to a conglomeration of heterogeneous traditions and plurality of beliefs and worship with a long history of development from the Vedic religion through the worship of epic and Puranic Gods and personnel deities, cults and sects, as well as philosophical systems rather than to a monolithic tradition or a structure based on a single beliefs and worship or a single text scripture. The temple, in more than one sense, represents the multiple facets and complex process of this development through its architecture, sculpture, iconography, rituals and institutional organisation - it is like a text which has to be read and understood in the various contexts of its evolution into a monument of enduring value.



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