



Orissan Temple Architecture

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Orissa is a land of temples. The concentration of the largest number of temples all over the state has made it a centre of unique attraction for the scholars, indologists, tourists and others.

Out of the five different types of architecture that is - devotional, memorial, civil, military and domestic - we mainly come across the devotional type of architecture in Orissa while others have disappeared with the ravages of time and power.

Temples as free standing structures came to Orissa after the Gupta period through Dakshina Kosala. The Hindu hegemony of Bhaumakaras, Somavamsis and Gangas inspired the Orissan architects to carry on the spirit of creating their own style of architectural temple representations without any Islamic or Persian influence. The period thus ranges from 6th century A.D. to 16th century A.D.

The builders of the Orissan temples gave vent to their feelings on the basis of indigenous canonical texts like *Bhuban Pradip*, *Silpapothi*, *Silpasastra*, *Vastusastra Upanisad*, *Silparatnakara*, *Silpasarini*, *Silpa Prakash*, *Padma Kesara*, *Deula Mapagunagara*, *Bhuban Prabesh*, *Soudhikagama* etc. indicating the standard achieved by our ancestors in the field of temple architecture.

The Indian temples in general are divided into three categories based on their geographical location and peculiar features -

The Northern Indian temples branded as *Nagara* Style of Architecture.

The temples of Deccan belong to the *Vesara* style.

The third category is called *Dravida* Style found in South India.

The Orissan temple architecture ranging from 7th to 13th century A.D. however corresponds to an altogether different category for their unique representations called *Kalingan* Style of temple architecture. Though broadly they come under the Northern style or *Nagara* style, they have certain special features which are unique of their own.

The Orissan temples are of three types -

Khakhara Deula

Rekha Deula

Pidha or *Bhadra Deula*

The *Khakhara Deula* is altogether a different style of architecture closely appearing similar to the Dravidian Gopuram design. The word is derived from *kakharu* (pumpkin, gourd) as the crown looks like a barrel-vaulted elongated roof. The Sakta temples are generally of



Khakhara order. Varahi temple of Chaurasi in Puri district and Gouri temple of Bhubaneswar are two glaring examples of *Khakhara* temple.

Other Saivite and Vaisnavite temples in Orissa represent both *Rekha* and *Pidha* types. In the formative period of Orissan temple architecture there were only two structures of the temples.

The first is original sanctum or *Vimana* or *Bada Deula*.

The second is *Jagamohana* or *Mukhasala*.

The sanctum of the temple is of *Rekha* order which has a curvilinear superstructure. But the *Jagamohana* standing before the main structure is of *Pidha* order. The *Pidhas* form several tiers sitting one upon the other rising to a pinnacle.

With the march of time the Oriya architects began to invent new forms of structure. Thus in big temples we find four structures -

Vimana or *Bada Deula*

Jagamohana or *Mukhasala* or Hall of Audiences.

Nata Mandira or Festive Hall.

Bhoga Mandapa or the Hall of Offerings.

The constructive peculiarities of Orissan temple is marked by uniqueness. The architects perceived the temple in the form of a human male figure or *Purusha*. Like human physical divisions of leg, thigh, waist, chest, neck and head, the temple had similar shapes and structures.

The main temple of Orissa is always of *Rekha* designs with these special features such as -

Pavement or *Talapattana*

Plinth or *Pitha*

Cube or *Bada*

Curvilinear Tower or *Rekha* or *Rathaka*.

Neck or the recess below the *Amalaka Sila* called *Beki*.

Denticulated blockes of stone called *Amalaka Sila*.

Stone cap resembling an unfolded umbrella or *Khapuri*

Finial or *Kalasa*

Trident Discuss on the top.

From the ground *Vimana* rises vertically to a height than is a curvilinear design up to the neck. From the base to the *Gandi* or trunk portion the rise is perpendicular and then the temple slowly inclines inward in a critical manner till the four reclining walls join together at the *Beki* or neck. Above the *Beki* is the portion called *Mastaka* or crown which consists of the *Amlaka*, inverted *Kalasa* and *Dhvaja*. Finally comes the mark of the deity - trident or *trishul* in case of a Siva temple and a discuss or *Chakra* in case of a Vishnu temple. The crown portion is called *Khapuri*. Over the *Ayudha* there may be a flag as auspicious mark. Thus a temple is represented as a *Purusha*.

In a pyramidal *Pidha* type of temple, curvilinear *Vimana* is not there. The *Gandi* or trunk rises from the ground perpendicularly upto a point and then the pyramidal roof is constructed on the four walls that looks much alike the shape of a thatched house from a distance.

Another way is to study the Orissan temple by resorting to vertical division. This is done with the help of vertical segments marked on the *Vimana* of the temple called *Pagas*. The projection at the centre is called *Rahapaga*, on the either side of *Raha* are two *Anurahapagas* and at two corners are two *Konakapagas*. In course of time by gradual evolution *Triratha* plan



of the temple became *Pancharatha*, *Saptaratha* and *Navaratha*.

Another distinctive feature of the Orissan temples is the decorative programme, which is of three types :

Constructive

Representative

Purely ornamental or decorative

These designs are governed by specifications laid down by *Silpasastra*. The vertical projections called *Pagas* are designed as miniature shrines with niches which contain different sculptures to beautify the temple. The canons of architecture classifies soil, stone and temples and contains details of designs and placement of icons, decorative motifs, *Parsvadevatas*, *Dikpatis*, *Astasakhis*, *Naga* and *Nagini*, *Sardula*, *Uta-Gaja-Viraja Singha*, *Navagraha*, *Vetal*, *Kirtimukha*, types of scroll like *Phulalata*, *Natilata*, *Patralata*, *Vanalata*, elephant, horse, bull, *Makara* and other animals. After 13th century there was a perceptible decline in the artistic merit of the decorative programmes of Orissan temple architecture.

The antiquity of Orissa is endorsed by her temple architecture which is as sublim as it is

aesthetically innervating. For centuries now, the Orissan golden triangle of Bhubaneswar-Puri-Konark has retained a vintage point on India's pilgrimage circuit for their devotional as well as architectural background.

Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar marked the culmination of the evolution of Orissan temple architecture. Exactly a century later started the construction of Jagannath temple with the final product of Orissan architects - that was the temple of Konark.

The Orissan Temple Architecture holds an appeal that is magnetic and almost stupefying in its extravagance and mobility. The dizzying heights of the heavily sculptured towers are as much reasons for wonder as are the exquisitely carved base-reliefs within their numerous halls. From the splendid ruins of Konark to highly sanctified environs of Jagannath and Lingaraj temples, one can get an unforgettable experience of Orissa's art and crafts. They are the symbols of Orissa's cultural heritage that remain an eye-opener even today.

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