

## 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.

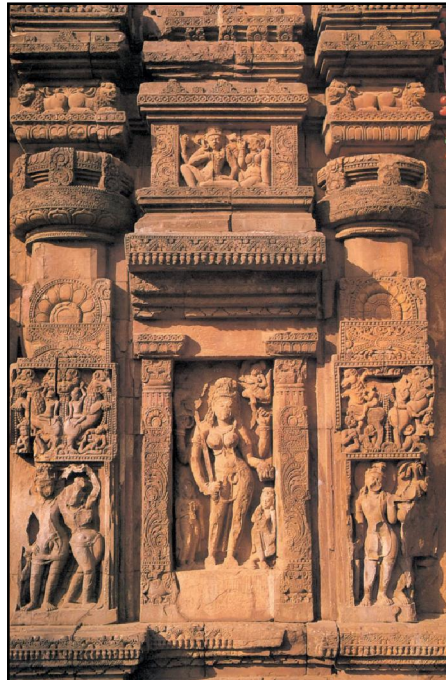
Out of the five different types of architecture that is Devotional, Memorial, Civil, Military and Domestic.

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 if Somavamsi, Bhaumakaras, 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, Silpasarini, Upanishad, Silparatnakosa, Vastusastra, Silpa Prakash, Padma Kesara Deula Mapagunagara, Bhuban Prabesh, Soudhikagana 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 are branded as Nagara style of Architecture.
- The Southern temples of Deccan belong to the Vessara 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 came 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 Gopuran design. The word is derived from Khakharu (Pumpkin, gourd) as the crown looks like a barrel-vaulted elongated roof. The Sakta temples are generally of Khakhara order. Brahmi temple of Chaurasi in Puri 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 Jagamohan or Mukhasala.

The sanctum of the temple is of Rekha order which has a curvilinear super structure. 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 newer forms of structure. Thus in the 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 Vimana or the main temple of Orissa is always of Rekha designs with the following special features such as-

- Pavement or Talapattana
- Plintha or Pitha
- Curvilinear Tower or Rekha or Rathak
- Neck or the recess below the Amlaka Sila called Beki
- Denticulate blocks of stone called Amlaka Sila.
- Stone cape resembling an unfolded umbrella or Khapuri
- Finial or Kalasa
- Trident or Discuss

From the ground Vimana rises vertically to a height than in a curvilinear design 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 or 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 the two corners are two Konakapagas. In course of time by gradual evolution. Triratha plan of the temple became Pancharatha. Saptaratha and Navaratha temples.

Another distinctive feature of the Orissan temples is the decorative programmes which are 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 canon 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, Ulta-Gaja-Viraja-Singh, Ulta-Gaja-Singh, Navagraha, Vaitala, 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 subline as it is aesthetically innervating. For centuries now the Orissan Golden Triangle of Bhubaneswar-Puri-Konark has retained a vantage point on India's pilgrimage circuit for their devotional 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 is 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 wrought-base-reliefs within their numerous halls. From the splendid ruins of Konark to highly sanctified environs of Jagannath and Lingaraj, one can get an unforgettable experience of Orissa's arts and crafts. They are the symbols of Orissa's cultural heritage that remain an eye-opener even today.

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