

# Vimala Temple at the Jagannath Temple Complex, Puri

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The temple of Vimala is situated in the south-west corner of the inner enclosure of the Jagannath temple complex of Puri. It seems to be an old structure and has nothing striking in it from the architectural point of view. It is a temple usually visited by the Tantrics who attach more importance to it than the main Jagannath temple. Goddess Vimala is considered as the presiding deity of the Purusottama kshetra. She is described as the Bhairavi and Jagannatha the Bhairava.<sup>1</sup> This temple seems to have been constructed during the Ganga period and it is likely that it has been built over the ruins of an earlier temple. The *Madala panji* states that the temple of Vimala was constructed by Yayati Keshari.<sup>2</sup> Structures of the temple are built in both sand stones and laterite stones. The temple faces to the eastern direction.

The temple of Vimala consists of four structures such as *vimana*, *jagamohana*, *nata mandapa* and *bhoga mandapa*.

## (a) **Vimana :**

The *vimana* is a *pancharatha Rekha deula* and its height is about 60 feet from the ground level of the temple.<sup>3</sup> It stands on a platform of 2 feet high. The *pistha* or platform is ornately decorated with scroll works, flower medallions and lotus petalled designs. The base of the *vimana* is a square of 15 feet in each side.

The *bada* of the *vimana* is consisted of five fold divisions such as *pabhaga*, *talajangha*, *bandhana*, *upara jangha* and *baranda*. The *pabhaga* of the *bada* consists of five conventional mouldings of *khura*, *kumbha*, *patta*, *kani* and *basanta*. The niches and intervening recesses of the *pabhaga* are finely decorated with *khakhara mundis*, flower medallions, scroll works, creepers, amorous couples and Naga pilasters. The niches and intervening recesses between the *pagas* of *talajangha* are relieved with *khakhara mundis*, *simha-vidalas*, *Gaja-vidalas*, *jali* works, scroll works, *sikshadana* scene and *kirtimukha* motifs etc. Figures of *Asta-dikpalas* are housed in the niches of the *khakhara mundis* of the *tala jangha* and are all in seated postures with their respective mounts and directions. *Sikshadana* scene of saints are also depicted in the *khakhara mundi* niches of the *tala jangha*. Some *devi* images are also depicted on the wall niches of the *tala jangha*. The *bandhana* of the *bada* consists of two horizontal decorative mouldings which are relieved with *Alasakanyas*, scroll works, flower designs and lotus petalled designs. The *upara jangha* niches and the recesses between the *pagas* are richly decorated with *pidha mundis*, *simha-vidalas*, erotic scenes, *alasakanyas*, scroll works, *jali* works, Naga and Nagini figures and flower designs etc. The consorts of the *asta-dikpalas* are comfortably

accommodated in the niches of the *pidhamundis* of the upara *jangha* and they are all in seated postures with their respective mounts and directions. Different incarnations of the *Devi* are also depicted on the niches of the upara *jangha*.

#### **Parsva devatas :**

*Parsvadevata* images have occupied central niches of the *bada* in all the three sides. The eight armed Mahisamardini Durga is the *parsvadevata* of the southern side of the *bada*. She has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. Out of the eight hands of deity, only two upper hands display *khadga* and *parasu* and the remaining hands of the deity are completely broken. Two flying *apsara* figures are depicted on the top corners of the back slab and they are holding garland of flowers in their hands. The back slab of the deity is decorated with the *kirtimukha* motif at the apex. The *astabhuja* Durga is shown piercing Mahisasura (demon) by a trident. This gesture is not completely visible because it is severely damaged by nature. Lion, the conventional mount of *Devi* firmly stands on the pedestal. Two conventional attendant female figures are also depicted at the base of the frame of *parsvadevata* niche. The image of goddess Chamunda is the western side *parsvadevata* of the main presiding deity. The six-handed image has been kept on the prostrate body of a corpse who is lying on the plain pedestal. Most of the parts of this *devi* image are broken. Among the six hands of the deity, five are completely broken and only right upper hand displays *khadga*. Two female attendants are flanking on either side of the deity. Here *Devi* is in standing posture on the prostrate body of Siva. The works of the background slab seems to have been designed during the Somavamsi period or before the ruling period of the Ganga dynasty. The frames of the western side *parsvadevata* niche are decorated

with scroll works and *kirtimukha* motifs. The image of Gaja-Lakshmi is carved on the middle portion of the lintel of the *parsvadevata* niche. Two female *dvarapalas* of *Devi* are also depicted at the base of the frame of the *parsvadevata* niche. There is no image of *Devi* found from the northern side central niche as the *parsvadevata* of the main deity. Most probably it has been stolen by the local miscreants.

The *baranda* portion of the *bada* consists of ten horizontal decorative mouldings which are relieved with scroll works, lotus petals, flower medallions, *kirtimukha* designs and geese etc.

#### **Gandi or Sikhara :**

The *gandi* or *sikhara* of the *vimana* is surmounted by the curvilinear superstructure. It continues the *pancharatha* plan of the *bada*. The base of the *gandi* is decorated with a series of *angasikharas*. The *kanika* pagas of the *gandi* contain seven *bhumi-amalas* in its surface. Two *vajra-mastakas* are super-imposed one above another at the base of the *kanika paga* of the *gandi*. The *Raha paga* contains four *angasikharas* on each side. The base of the *Raha paga* contains three *angasikharas*; one big at the center and other two small flanking on either side of the central *angasikhara*. There is another *angasikhara* superimposed on the central *angasikhara* of the *raha paga*. The middle portion of the western side *raha paga* is finely projected with the *sardula* headed motif. The *jhapa-simha* motif is projected on the middle portion of the eastern side of the *raha paga*. *Deula charini* figures are inserted in the four cardinal directions of *beki* above the *raha pagas*. They are the supporting elements of the *amalakasila* of the *mastaka*.

The *mastaka* of the *vimana* consists of usual elements such as *beki*, *amalakasila*, *khapuri*, *kalasa* and *ayudha (chakra)*. Here

the finial or *dhvaja* of the *mastaka* is not found from the top of the *ayudha*.

The sanctum of the *vimana* preserves the image of Goddess Vimala as the presiding deity of the temple. The deity has been installed on a plain *simhasana*. The image of the goddess is said to have been built in *lakha* (wax). Her four hands display *akshamala* (rosary), *amrita kalasa*, *varada mudra* and a human figure. There is a lot of controversy over her attributes in the upper left hand. It is differently stated as a human figure, a naga woman, a *naga phasa* (noose) and some other object. The height of the deity is a little more than four feet. The figures of *Chhaya* and *Maya* are finely carved on both sides of the *simhasana*. The back side of the head of the deity is decorated with trefoil *makara torana*. The inner walls of the sanctum are devoid of decorative elements.

The sanctum has one doorway towards *jagamohana*. The door jambs of the sanctum are finely decorated with scroll works, flower designs and creepers with the frolicking boys. The flying *apsara* figures are depicted on the surface of the door lintel. The central portion of the door lintel is carved with an image of Gaja-Lakshmi. The *navagraha* figures are carved on the architrave above the door lintel. Figures of two traditional *dvarapalas* of the presiding deity are found on both side of the door way of the sanctum.

#### (b) Jagamohana :

The *jagamohana* or *mukhasala* of the Vimala temple is a *pidha deula* and its height is about 35 feet from the surface of the temple complex. It has four vertical divisions viz. *pistha* or platform, *bada*, *gandi* or *sikhara* and *mastaka*. The structure of the *jagamohana* stands on a low platform of 2 feet high. The *pistha* portion of the *jagamohana* is decorated

with scroll works and flower designs. The ground plan of the structure is a square of 25 feet in each side. The *bada* is consisted of five-fold divisions such as *pabhaga*, *tala jangha*, *bandhana*, *Upara jangha* and *baranda*. The *pabhaga* consists of conventional mouldings of *khura*, *kumbha*, *patta*, *kani* and *basanta*. The niches and intervening recesses of the *pabhaga* are relieved with *Khakhara mundis*, Naga pilasters, amorous couples, erotic scenes, scroll-works, flower designs and *jali* works. The erotic scenes and amorous couples are housed in the *khakhara mundi* niches of the *pabhaga*. The niches and intervening recesses of the *talajangha* are relieved with *khakhara mundis*, *Astadikpalas*, *Simha-vidalas*, *Gaja-vidalas*, *Sikshadana* scene of saints, scroll works and *jali* works. The *khakhara mundi* niches of the *talajangha* are housed with *astadikpalas* seated on their respective mounts and directions. The *bandhana* of the *bada* consists of the three decorative horizontal mouldings. The *upara jangha* niches and the intervening recesses are also relieved with erotic scenes, *pidha mundis*, scroll works, *kirtimukha* motifs and *jali* works. Female counterparts of the *astadikpalas* are also housed in the *pidha mundi* niches of the *upara jangha* and they are seated on their respective mounts and directions.

The *baranda* of the *bada* consists of seven horizontal decorative mouldings. The *raha* or central portion of the *baranda* is decorated with dancing female figures, amorous couples, scroll works, a frieze of elephants and deers and *jali* works etc.

#### Gavaksha :

The central or *raha paga* of the *bada* contains two balustraded windows; one on the northern and another on the southern side of the *jagamohana*. The window of each side contains

four balusters, which are finely carved with dancing female figures holding musical instruments in their hands. Frames of the balustraded windows are relieved with scroll works, flower medallions, *jali* works, creepers containing the frolicking boys and decorative female figures etc. The *gavaksha mandana* of both northern and southern sides of the *bada* are relieved with the royal court scenes or *sikhadana* panels.

#### **Gandi or Sikhara :**

The *gandi* of the *jagamohana* is surmounted by the pyramidal superstructure. It consists of two *potalas*; the lower and the upper *potalas*, which contain five and four *pidhas* respectively. Figures of the *deula charinis* and *dopichha* lions are completely absent in their respective places.

The *mastaka* of the *jagamohana* is consisted of usual elements of *beki*, *ghanta* (bell shaped member), above which there is another *beki*, *amalaka sila*, *khapuri* and *kalasa*. Here the *ayudha* of the *mastaka* is missing.

Inner walls of the *jagamohana* are completely plain. The *jagamohana* has two door ways one on the western side towards the sanctum and another one on the eastern side towards *natamandapa*. The door jambs of the eastern side doorway of the *jagamohana* are ornately decorated with scrollworks, flower designs, *jali* works and creepers with the frolicking boys. The central portion of the doorway lintel is carved with the image of Gaja-Lakshmi. Flying *apsara* figures are also depicted on the lintel portion of the doorway. *Navagraha* figures are also carved on the architrave above the doorway lintel. They are all in seated postures with usual attributes in their hands.

#### **(c) Natamandapa :**

The *natamandapa* of the Vimala temple is a *pidha deula* and its height is about 22 feet

from the surface of the temple complex. As known from its architectural designs, it might have been constructed in a later period than the main *deul* and *jagamohana*. This structure stands on the platform of 3 ½ feet high. The ground plan of the structure is rectangular and it measures 35 feet by 18 feet in length and width respectively. The *bada* of the *natamandapa* consists of five-fold divisions such as *pabhaga*, *tala jangha*, *bandhana*, *upara jangha* and *baranda*. All the components of the *bada* are completely undecorated. The *bandhana* of the *bada* consists of three horizontal mouldings.

The *gandi* of the *natamandapa* is surmounted by the pyramidal superstructure. It consists of three *pidha* mouldings. There is only the *kalasa* kept on the top of the upper *pidha*. The *natamandapa* has four door ways, one on each side of the wall. All the door ways except that in the western side are completely undecorated. Inner walls of the *natamandapa* are fully depicted with the paintings of as many as sixteen forms of Goddess Durga such as Vimala, Chhinnamasta, Ugratara, Mahakali, Bagala, Dhumavati, Shyamakali, Bhubanesvari, Sodasi, Vairabhi, Vana-Durga, Bhadrakali, Hara-Chandi, Matangini And Jaya Durga, etc. These deities are painted in the traditional *pata* painting style of Orissa.

#### **(D) Bhogamandapa :**

The *bhogamandapa* of the Vimala temple is a *pidha deula* and its height is about 20 feet from the surface of the temple complex. It stands on a high platform of 4 feet height. The base of the structure is a square of 15 feet in each side. The *bada* of the *bhogamandapa* also consists of five-fold divisions viz:- *pabhaga*, *talajangha*, *bandhana*, *upara jangha*, and *baranda*. All the components of the *bada* are completely undecorated. Small *dopichha* lions



have been installed on the two front side corners of the *tala jangha*. The *gandi* of the *bhogamandapa* is surmounted by the pyramidal superstructure.

The niches of western inner wall of the *bhogamandapa* are housed with two excellent sculptures of Ganesha and Kartikeya. Both the sculptures are a little more than 2 feet in height. The eight-handed image of *nrtya* Ganesha has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. His right three hands display rosary, broken tusk, and *dhyana mudra* while the left three hands hold battle axe, a pot containing *ladus* and *Abhaya mudra* and the upper two hands hold a snake. Mouse, the conventional mount of Ganesha is carved on the left side of the pedestal. Two *sakhi* figures are flanking both side of the Ganesha image.

Another notable sculpture of Kartikeya is kept in a niche of the right side western wall of the *bhogamandapa*. The six-headed Kartikeya image is installed in standing posture on the plain pedestal. He has twelve hands ; the right six hands are holding *naga-phasa*, arrow-head, *pasa-ankusa*, club, lotus flower and touching the mouth of peacock while the left six hands are holding rooster cock, shield, *gada*, bow, direction figure and broken object etc. Peacock, the conventional mount of deity is installed in a standing posture on the right side of the Kartikeya image.

The ceiling of the *bhogamandapa* is finely depicted with paintings of the flower designs. The middle portion of the ceiling contain a lotus flower design which is suspending to down wards.

The *bhogamandapa* has four doorways to all opening sides. Jambs of these doorways are completely undecorated. Two female figures are depicted in the niches of the entrance doorway wall. They are acting as the *dvarapalas* in both sides of the entrance doorway. They hold knives

in their right hands, while the left hands are placed on the left thighs with vigorous posture. Their faces, bellies and hands are very plump.

The figure of *Gaja-Simha* or Lion on a crouching elephant has been installed outside the temple i.e. ten feet eastern side of the *bhogamandapa*. The *Gaja-Simha* figure is about 4 feet in height and this place is covered with a flat roof.

A flight of steps is provided for approach towards the *bhogamandapa* as well as the sanctum. Recently, all the four structures of the *Vimala* temple are renovated by Archaeological Survey of India ; Bhubaneswar Circle.

The shrine of *Vimala* is believed to be a suitable place for Tantric form of worship. *Purusottama kshetra* or *Puri* is regarded as one of the several *Sakta pithas* enumerated in *Tantra Chudamani*, *Kubjika Tantra* and *Jnanarnava Tantra* and it is here that the navel of *sakti* had fallen.<sup>4</sup> according to the *Devi Purana* the feet of *Adishakti* fell here for which this place is considered as one of the important *Sakti pithas* in India.<sup>4</sup> The names of *Vimala* and *Purusottama* are found mentioned in *Matsya Purana*.<sup>5</sup> This information is supported by other *puranas*. Goddess *Vimala* is regarded as the protectress of the *kshetra*, while *Jagannatha* is the presiding deity of the temple.

On the basis of the architectural features, the present temple of *Vimala* can be tentatively assigned to the Ganga period of Orissan history. The sculptures, especially the *parsvadevatas* seem to have been made in *Somavamsi* period. The background slab of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch which was the unusual pattern of the *Somavamsi* art. The images of the *Parsvadevatas* are not designed in the Ganga style. It indicates that these images are the side deities of the original temple. So the present

temple is erected on the ruins of the earlier *deula*. It is also said that before Lord Jagannath was installed in the temple, goddess Vimala was enshrined there.

#### References :

1. Quoted in *Bharatiya Tantra Sastra* (Oriya), Nilamani Mishra, p. 181.
2. *Madalapanji*, Prachi Edition, 1960, Bhubaneswar, p. 6
3. L.K. Panda, *Pitha*, edited in *Odisara Sakta Sanskruti* (Oriya), P.29.

4. S.D.Kar, *Puri Guide*, Puri, 1992, p.
5. *Matsya Purana*, P.13 - 35.

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*His Excellency the Governor Shri Rameshwar Thakur inaugurating Sangam, a Confluence of Odissi and Kathak dances at Rabindra Mandap on 5.9.2005. Dr. Subas Pani, Chief Secretary is also present on this occasion.*