



# ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE ORISSAN PERIOD

(Academic Script)

## **Art and Architecture of the Orissan period**

Hello everybody and welcome to today's episode. In this episode you will observe the development of art and that developed in Orissa. Here we will concentrate on the major temple built in Orissa in the long span of time. Also we will discuss the characteristics of art and architecture that flourished in this region. The Subject expert is Ms. Shilpi who is visiting faculty at World School of Design and I am Sakshi Mandwal

### **Introduction:**

The art and architecture of Orissa forms a distinct place in Indian history. The Orissan temples and sculptural art characterize attention-grabbing account of the superb combination of Indian tradition with the local idiom. This eastern Indian state was important since Mauryan times and Asoka's battle of Kalinga. It especially gained eminence in the post-Gupta periods when important temple complexes of the northern style named the Nagara style developed at religious centers. Temples as free standing formations came to Orissa after the Gupta period through Dakshina Kosala. The Hindu domination of Bhaumakaras, Somavamsis and Gangas inspired the Orissan architects to persist the spirit of creating their own style of architectural temple representations. Orissan temple comprised the Nagara style of North Indian temples. The building activity of this sub-regional style continued for nearly one thousand years from the 6th-7th century to the 15th-16th century AD in unbroken continuity.

### **Important facts related to the development of Orissan architecture:**

There are many factors that played important role in the development of Orissan architecture. First of all, the Muslim rule in India began in the last part of 12th Century A.D., however Orissa sustained to be Hindu realm up to 1568 A.D. In the similar year, it was taken by the Muslims. Thus Orissa got an extensive period about 375 year to continue its temple- building



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activities without any interruption. Secondly, Orissa came under Muslims in 1568 A.D. but that too was for a short period. During this period no big scale destruction could be done by the Muslims to the Hindu monument of Orissa.

Thirdly, for a long run of time from 6th Century A.D., to 13th A.D., Orissa was ruled by various dynasties. Each one of them supported and patronized the temple building activities without creating any interference. This also supported to enhance the number of temples.

#### **Architectural features of Orissan temple:**

The temple of Orissa has their own distinctive architectural features that determine themselves into three wide orders, in local terms these are known as rekha, pidha, and khakhara. In an Orissan temple made in typical style the first two i.e., rekha and pidha set off nearly side by side and form a space for the glimpse of deity and ritual worship. The pidha deula is meant for worshippers, the space where the visitor can stay, meditate, or read. In the early period the temple represent only one structure which is called the Vimana having a curvilinear tower. But in general Orissan temple is a grouping of two structures, the Vimana and the Sala means the covered entrance in the style of Rekha and Pidha correspondingly. These features together represent the ideal form of an Orissan temple. There are exceptions like the Lingaraja and Jagannath temple where the temple complex has four structures such as garbhagriha that is sanctum, jagamohana that is called the porch of the faithful, natamandira that is the pavilion meant for dance and bhogamandapa that is offerings room.

The temples of Orissa were generally built of sandstones. Its minute particle, homogenous texture and great decisiveness permitted the draftsman to accomplish delicate carving without causing any damage. At the same time the laterite is easily obtainable material throughout Orissa. So it was used for the groundwork, outer wall, entrance and all constructions of less importance. Besides sandstone and laterite, the other commonly used materials in temple-building were chlorite, granite etc. The chlorite stone was regularly used in Sun Temple at Konark

#### **Evolution of Orissan temples:**

The temples of Orissa represent a depiction of natural evolution from Parasuramesvara to Lingaraja throughout Mukteswara and Vaital temples and it finally culminated in Puri and the extremely large Konark. The



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development of temple architecture in Orissa can be observed from beginning to end in four unique phases of temple building activities:

- Formative Phase
- Transitional Phase
- Mature Phase
- Phase of decadence

The Formative Phase is acknowledged as the period in between the 6th century AD to the first half of the 9th century AD. This period was coordinated with the rule of the Sailodbhavas and early period of Bhaumakaras. The temples of this phase are Lakhmaneswar, Parsurameswar, Bharateswar, Satrughaneswar, Swarnajaleswar, Mohini and Kapalini. Among these, Parsurameswar temple allocates to the 7th century is the best conserved example of the early phase. Temples of this phase are triratha in arrangement with a central graha offset and two corner projections. The temples are of small and modest height. Its triratha vimana consists of a rekha sikhara. The jagamohana is a rectangular pillared hall having a terraced covering sloping in two steps. The sculptures of this time are in low relief, plane and commended on the surface of the stone. In beginning these sculptures were disproportioned and made with rigid limbs but they assumed suppleness and proportion during the Bhaumakara period.

The building of temple entered into a transitional phase in the second half of the 9th century. This phase continued up to the first quarter of the 11th century under the rule of the later Bhaumakaras and the initial half of the ruling period of the Somavamsis. The temples built during this period are Vaital (Khakhara Deula), Sisireswara Mukteswara and Markandeswar in Bhubaneswar. The remarkable characteristic of the era was the introduction of extensive erotic sculptures. The emergence of erotic sculptures was probably due to the influence of Vajrayana philosophy. The Mukteswara temple at Bhubaneswar is considered as the gem of Orissan architecture and was the last monument of the period. The jagamohana developed into an inseparable part. It was perfect and natural unification of the vimana with jagamohana with no unfinished overlapping of the sanctum decoration as noticed in the formative phase. Both the arrangements were considered as an identical complex in the original plan. A characteristic feature of the Somavamsis period is the sculptural treatment of the interior part, particularly the ceiling. At last Ketu was



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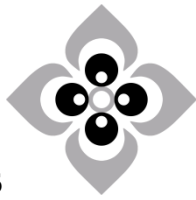
added to the listing of planets and it became a permanent feature of the graha(planet) panel in the temples of the successive period

The activities of temple building achieved its maturity towards the mid of the 11th century, the ruling period of the Somavamsis. This continued till the 13th century which was the period of the Gangas. The temple architecture best developed under the Somavamsis and it can be traced through a succession of temples like Rajarani, Ananta Vasudev , Brahmeswar and lastly the Lingaraj that present the Orissan temple style at its greatest. The tradition of temple building was continued by the Gangas. The Gangas are accredited with the erection of the Jagannath temple at Puri and the extremely large Sun temple at Konark. The sculptures of this period are admirable in their plasticity and representation embraces non-iconic female figures. Natamandapa and Bhogamandapa were added to the Jagamohana. Introduction of the vahanastambha in front of the temple was introduced. The female counterparts of the dikpalas were emerged after the Gangas, Orissa came under the reign of Suryavamsi Gajapatis during the 14th to 16th centuries AD and under them the temple building activities came into a phase of decadence. The grand period of Orissa temple architecture came to a close down. The Suryavamsis, who succeeded the Gangas could not give much attention for temple building and rather concentrated more on patronizing the literary activities. The most important factors for the declines of temple building activities are a lack of royal patronage and decline of Hindu power.

### **Major temples of Orissan architecture:**

Orissa present a huge diversity of styles in temple building. Orissan temples can be described as one of the most compact and homogeneous architectural groups in India. Among these the Indo-Aryan style of architecture may be seen at its greatest and purest. The temple-building evolution in Orissa reached its peak of excellence in the 10th and 11th centuries and stretches from approximately 650 A.D. to 1200 A.D. It shows the progress more consistently than any other similar movement of the Nagara style of architecture. Here we will be discussing few of the major temples of Orissan period.

The Parasuramesvara temple was constructed during 650 A.D. and it is the earliest example of Indo-Aryan architecture at Bhubaneswar. It consists of a tower of the rekha type with a connected enclosed veranda. This tower is basically an enlargement of the types previously seen in the sanctuaries of the Gupta Period. The tower is capped by a complete crown sustaining a



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metal trident of Lord Shiva. The tower visibly consists of identical repeated storey thinning in size towards the top. The veranda is covered with corbelled block of heavy stone which is decorated with pierced latticed windows and low reliefs of dancing dwarfs. Although dating as far back as circa 750 A.D., it is still in a good state of preservation. It is remarkable for its elaborate stone engraving of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati and also for the ornately sculptured medallions on its front portico

Another example of the early phase is the Vaital Deul. This temple differs fundamentally from the Parasuramesvara temple and it derives from quite another tradition. The tower of its internal sanctuary is evocative of the gopurams of the Dravidian temples. Many architectural features, such as its extended vaulted roof in two storeys, its ribbed finials and its gable-ends, shows the influence that it also developed from the Buddhist chaitya-hall. The Vaital Deul has four replica of the core temple at each angle of the jaganmohan. As a result it is representative of a panchayatana or five-shrined temple in the earliest stages of its development. Bhubaneswar has the richest profusion of temples and is known as the temple town of Orissa. It is not only as a consequence of the large number of temples found here, but also for the reason that it is the home of the famous Lingaraja temple. The great Lingaraja temple, supposed to have been constructed around 1000 A.D. It is a later on creation of this resurgence era and has been acclaimed as the finest example of a Hindu temple in India by many scholars. The Lingaraja temple is positioned in a spacious courtyard and is bounded by fortified walls. The tower of this temple rises up to a height of 180 feet and is ornately carved. The sikhara is completely beehive-shaped arrangement. The sikhara of the Lingaraja temple was headed by a number of porches of the bhadra type meant for the accommodation of worshippers. The nata mandir and the bhog mandir of the Lingaraja temple were of later origination.

The interiors of these halls are not so well ornamented, but the outer walls of the temple are abundantly carved and embellished with sculptures which are among the best example of Orissan decorative art. The beautifully carved and sculpted images of various God and Goddess are astounding. Among the other outstanding temples in the vicinity are those of Bhagavati, Basudeva, Brahmeshwar, Bhaskareswar, and Kedareswar etc

The Rajarani temple belongs to an extremely later period of Orissan architecture approximately from 1100A.D.-1250 A.D. Its pillar decoration and certain other features, such as the deul imply a strong association with

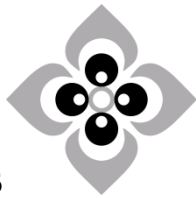


the central Indian type of temple erected at Khajuraho. It is built of yellowish sandstone, locally called Rajrania. Probably the Rajarani takes its name from the local sandstone used to build it. Rajarani Temple is well-known for its sculpted figures and the succeeding tiers of projections rising to outline its 18 m tower. It has a square sanctuary and its internal and external facades are so recessed that it seems to be circular in shape. The decorative deul is positioned diagonal to the severely plain jagamohana. The Rajarani temple is also famous for the tall and slender female figures known as nayikas, carved in high relief on the walls. They are depicted in such acts as looking into the mirror, taking off her anklet, touching the bird, playing instrument, holding branches of trees etc. The temple no longer has a figure of the deity in the sanctum but its strong Saiva connection is confirmed from the figures of Shiva and his consort Parvati on the platform and by also the Saiva doorkeepers.

### **Next temple we will have a look is the Mukteshwar temple**

The Mukteshwar temple probably dates back to about 975 A.D. and characterizes the middle period of the Orissan style. It has been constructed in the style that is relatively alike to the one used in the Kalinga School of architecture. It has been named a miniature gem of architecture for its graceful proportions and beautiful finish. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The jagamohana of this late 10th century temple is a pidha deul with ornamented ceiling, carved into a lotus with eight petals. Here the change in iconography is equally evident with Ketu established as the 9th planet, the association Karttikeya with the cock and the emergence of the mouse as the mount of Ganesha. The impressive torana of the temple is an ornamental arched gateway and it is very much reminiscent of the influence of Buddhism in Orissa. This decorated torana doorway in front of the Jagamohana is a masterpiece dating from about 900 AD. It is a separated entrance consisting of two pillars underneath an arch within a semicircular shaped pediment. The decoration of the arch with reclining females and group of delicate scroll-work is the most salient feature. The Jagannath temple at Puri in Orissa is the largest temple of Orissa and has a dozens of structures in its complex. The temple was established during the twelfth century and was dedicated to Lord Jagannath better known as Lord Krishna. This is a much bigger and somewhat later construction than the Lingaraja temple, although both these great structures are built on more or less the same principle. The architecture of this temple is renowned for the intricate carvings in the wall. The entrance





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to the shrine is decorated with scenes from the life of Lord Krishna and the gates and walls are heavily decorated with marble figures of lions and guards. The temple is enclosed by walls on all sides and on each side there is a gate. There are four gates on all the walls named as Lion gate, the Horse gate, the Tiger gate and the Elephant gate. The temple consists of four structures in one alignment from east to west, the bhogamandir, the natamandir, the jaganmohan and the deul or the inner sanctum. The main tower rises above the inner chamber where the divinity resides. In the inner sanctum are the three holy images of Jagannath, his brother Balbhadra, and his sister Subhadra. The generous decoration on the walls of the nata and bhogmandir is relatively motionless to the earlier period sculptural depiction. These carvings clearly indicate that when these structures were built, the Orissan style of architecture had entered a period of decline.

The most noteworthy feature of the architecture of Orissa is found in the sun temple of Konark. This sanctuary was erected in the reign of king Narasimhadev to celebrate his victory over Muslim rulers. The temple is principally dedicated to Lord Surya. Due to this fact, it is also called as Sun Temple. The special feature of this temple is that the shrine entirely erected in the shape of a huge chariot. This chariot is positioned on twelve pairs of marvelously carved wheels and drawn by seven vibrant horses. According to one say, these 12 pair of wheels are a symbol of 24 hours in a day, while the other say, these wheels represent 12 months of the year. Seven days of the week are supposed to be signified by the seven horses. The wheels of this chariot have an exciting fact behind their structure. Each wheel has a set of eight spokes and these spokes serve as sundials. The shadows made by these sundials give accurate time of the day.

The elaborate carvings and rich sculpture make this temple truly a sight to take a look at. On the entrance, two huge lions that appear to be protecting the temple can be seen. To reach the main shrine, a way through steps is required to be taken. Two life-size statues of horses are noticeable on both sides after climbing the stairs. Inside the temple the walls are embossed with intricate carvings, sculptures and bas-reliefs

The temple also consists of a 'Nata Mandapa' or Dancing Hall that is full of carvings. The images here are carved in an erotic style and posture. These carvings depict figures of divine, semi-divine, human being and animal figures along with floral and geometric beautification. These sculptures



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appear full of sensation and gesture. The incomplete spire most probably would have reached a height of nearly two hundred feet. The sun temple is also referred to as the Black Pagoda.

### **Buddhist art and tantric art of Orissa:**

In the 7th century, the visit of Chinese traveler Huen Tsang to Orissa intensely accounts it as the flourishing state of Buddhism. Orissa is enormously rich in the Buddhist art.

The Ratnagiri Hill is acknowledged to have the most wide-ranging ruins and is famous for housing the monastery of 'Pushpagiri' as written by Huen TSang. Most of the sculptures found here date back to 8th and 9th centuries. Buddhism was apparently encouraged in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the Bhaumakaras kings came into supremacy and texts says that the first three of their rulers were Buddhist devotees. Thus the Buddhist art flourished parallel to the Hindu art. Archaeological evidence testifies that there was considerable activity in Orissa during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the sculptures found are Sakyamuni Buddha attended by Bodhisattvas at Ratnagiri, Avalokitesvara at Ratna giri, Khasarpana Avalokitesvara at Udaigiri, Samavara from Ratnagiri.

Another important aspect which influenced the art of the Orissa was the worship of Sakti cult, which was developed in Hinduism and paralleled the Prajna devotion in Buddhism. There are very less Yogini temples in India among which two are located in Orissa, one at Ranipur-Jharial and other at Hirapur. These temples appear to belong to the Somavansi period or earlier. Yogini temples which are dedicated to the 64 yoginis are generally circular in shape relating to the feminine aspect. Also the images of the yoginis are sculpted with demonic expressions and depicting the victory of Shakti that is the feminine power. This most famous Yogini temple of Orissa at Hirapur is also known as the "Mahamaya Temple". The Hirapur Temple is the smallest of the Yogini temples in India.

These structures show that during the reign of Bhaumakaras and Somavamsi rulers, there was a gradual combination of Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Shaktism and the Vajrayana, or Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism in the region.





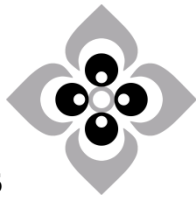
### **Sculptures of Orissa region:**

The earliest example of Orissan sculpture is the elephant figure at Dhauli which dates back to the Mauryan period. The modeling and implementation of this elephant figure is amazing and different from those apparent in the animal figures surmounting the pillar capitals of Mauryan era. It symbolizes a fine delineation of bulky volume and liveliness with a noble movement and linear rhythm

The sculptural art of Orissa is also found in a good number at Ratnagiri, Khandagiri and Udayagiri. The well-preserved standing statues of the bodhisattvas Vajrapani and Padmapani can be seen in niches in a porch at Ratnagiri. Other noticeable statue is the head of Buddha at Ratnagiri. At Udayagiri, Hathigumpha (cave 14) and Ganeshagumpha (cave 10) are especially well known due to art treasures of their sculptures and reliefs. Queen's Palace cave known as 'Rani ka Naur' is also an extensively carved cave and ornately carved with sculptural friezes

The massive number of Orissan sculptural art is however characterized by sculptures of Hindu belief. Sculptures related to Saivism, Vaishnaism and Saktism were found in Orissa. Under Sakti Sculptures the Saptamatruka Chamunda and Durga images are remarkable. Of the two tantrik yogini temples of Orissa located at Ranipur-Jharial and Hirapur, the chlorite yogini images from Hirapur is notable. Though these are quite small in size but are outstanding for their varied iconography and elegant handling. The different forms and myths related with Lord Siva are depicted through the sculptures. Bhubaneswar alone has supplied sculptures representing Lakulisa, Natraja, Bhairava, Ardhanariswara and many other aspects of Siva. Many outstanding specimens of Ganesa are found from Bhubaneswar. One of the remarkable sculptures is the nine-foot colossal figure of Lord Nrusimha in black granite which is preserved in the Jagannatha Temple premises at Puri. It is really an impressive figure depicting the fearful mood of the god with great artistic skill.

The famous temple of Konark has some of the latest sculptures, particularly the Surya deity and others. Along with cult deities in the temples the walls of the temple are covered with decorative sculptures such as Nayika figures, Gajasimha figures, mithuna figures etc. A significant feature of sculptural art at Konark is the presence of erotic sculpture on the outer walls to connote the fact that religion cannot be separated from real life



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The lion-gates are an important feature of Orissan architecture. Lions are installed at the doorway of temples. This is the reason that the temple door is called "Simhadwara". The lions are not carved naturalistically. They are shown with big sharp nose and thick moustaches.

#### **Scholars on the erotic sculptures at Sun temple Konark:**

The topic which was most talked about the Konarak temple is the large quantity of erotic sculptures on the temple wall. However, various explanations have been offered for these "mithunas", but no single explanation has succeeded in resolving the mystery about these images on temple walls. Lowell Thomas described Konarak as the "most beautiful" and at the same time "the most obscene building in the world". The depiction of sexual union in sculptures according to Stella Kramrisch is observed as a "symbol of Moksha".

A.K.Coomaraswamy described the erotic sculptures as representational of the illusive world of pleasure in compare to the solemn character of the inner side of the sanctuary. The outside of the temple represents various activities that belong to the samsara that is the existing world; beyond that and within the temple is the image of God. The worshipper must triumph over the world of pleasure to find the divine god. Coomaraswamy's holistic clarification seems to be more valid. He says that such a typical feature of the temple architecture in India could be noted as a representation of the equitable place of 'voluptuous ecstasy' in life.

So after seeing this episode it might be said that the architecture of Orissa is distinct for its renowned style which has gradually evolved into an intricate plan with adorned plastic figures and lofty sikharas. The art and architecture of Orissa forms a distinct unit of Indian architecture by having a continuous development and numerous well- preserved example.