

## Marvels of Odishan Temple Architecture

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**Abstract:** *The idea of a temple originated centuries ago in the universal ancient conception of God in a human form, which required a habitation, a shelter, and this requirement soon resulted in a structural shrine. In India, basically, there are three styles of temple architecture, i.e., Nagara or north Indian temple architecture, Dravida or south India temple architecture and Vesara or Central Indian temple architecture. But an inscription in the Amritesvara temple at Holal in Karnataka (c. 1231 CE), refers to four styles of temple i.e., Nagara, Kalinga, Dravida and Vesara. Even though the Odishan temple resembles the Nagara style, its own distinctive peculiarities take the pride of giving it a separate place and hence the name of Kalinga style of temple architecture. The remarkability of a Kalinga style of temple comes from its plan and elevation. The interior ground plan of the temple is square but externally they are broken by offset projections called Pagas. Externally, the temple appears to show a cruciform plan, because of the projections. The Kalinga temple style exhibits a flexible characteristic. In course of its evolution, some changes are obvious, as the building art was passed on from one generation to the other. These stylistic changes distinguish one phase from the other. But in spite of it, a remarkable continuity is found in the development of the style which started from 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, and reached its climax with the building of the Sun temple at Konark in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE.*

**Keywords:** *Kalinga, Nagara, Odisha, Plan & Elevation, Temple architecture*

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## Introduction

The idea of a temple originated centuries ago in the universal ancient conception of God in a human form, which required a habitation, a shelter, and this requirement resulted in a structural shrine. In very early times, such a shrine may have been made of wood, thatch, but it soon became a sanctum of stone. The stone sanctum was known as Garbhagriha, literally womb house. It was a small square room, with completely plain walls, having a single narrow doorway in the front. The minimal light that penetrated

into the shrine provided an atmosphere of darkened solemnity and mystery. And within its darkness was placed the image of God. This image was sanctified by certain rites, and after this, the divinity was considered in some inexplicable manner to have taken up residence in it. The outer walls of the sanctum were often decorated with figural sculpture relating to the God within. In front of this shrine, was added a small hall. Temples often face the east, so that they are lit by the rays of the rising Sun; and in very early times when there was no hall in the front, the morning Sun would have illuminated the object of worship. But temples facing west, north and south are also not uncommon in Odisha. It was from such common origins that the various temple styles of India trenched off, each developing their own speciality.

In India, basically, there are three styles of temple architecture, i.e., Nagara or north Indian temple architecture, Dravida or south India temple architecture and Vesara or Central Indian temple architecture. But an inscription in the Amritesvara temple at Holal in Karnataka (c. 1231 CE, and belonging to the reign of the Seuna king Singhana), refers to four styles of temple i.e., Nagara, Kalinga, Dravida and Vesara. (Rice, *Epi. Car.*, 1904 Sorab No. 275) Even though the Odishan temple resembles with the Nagara style, its own distinctive peculiarities take the pride of giving it a separate place and hence the name of Kalinga style of temple architecture. In the ancient texts of Silpa Sastras are found detailed instructions for the construction of all types of buildings and also rules of proportions for the sculpting of different categories of images. In Odisha, Bhuvanapradipa, Silpa Prakhasha, Silpa Ratnakosha are some of the most famous Silpa Sastras which not only describes different types of temple but also contains detailed guidelines about the construction, starting from the selection of site based on types of soil to the final consecration of the idol. Even though Kalinga style of temple is broadly divided into 3 types i.e., Rekha, Pidha and Khakara, Bhuvanapradipa classifies thirty-six types of Rekha, five types of Pidha and 3 types of Khakara temples. (Bose, 1932, p.81)

The typical Kalinga style of temple consists of the sanctum and the porch, two component parts of one architectural scheme. The Vimana or the sanctum is of Rekha order of curvilinear spire (Fig. 1). The frontal porch on the Jagamohana also called as Mukhasala, Mukhamandapa, Bhadradeula etc. is of Pidha order, characterised by pyramidal roofs of receding steps (Fig. 2). In earlier temples, the Jagamohana was not a Pidha deula (deula means temple in local language) but a flat roofed structure, which in course of time changed to pyramidal one. The sanctum or the cella is meant for a glimpse of the deity and ritual worship and therefore smaller and less spacious. The Mukhasala is meant for sheltering the devotees for their prayer and meditation. While Vimana and Jagamohana the two architectural superstructures of the earlier temples, two more structures, namely Natamandira and Bhogamandapa were added to it when Kalinga temple architecture developed to its fullest extent. Both these two structures are of Pidha order. Each one is a separate structure, yet, they form one architectural organisation. Standing in a row, with different heights, it gives the impression of a mountain range and the eye travels to the Sikhara or the pick of the sanctum, which is the highest one. The remarkability of a Kalinga style of temple comes from its plan and elevation (Fig. 4). The interior ground plan of the temple is square but externally they are broken by offset projections. These projections are called Pagas. Depending on the number of Pagas, the temples are classified as Triratha, Pancharatha, Saptaratha and Navaratha. The earlier temples are characterised by Triratha plan, but in course of evolution, the Triratha gave place to Pancharatha, Saptaratha etc. However, the interior ground plan of the Khakara temple (Fig. 3) is rectangular mainly for the number of deities enshrined. But, externally, the temple appears to show a cruciform plan, because of projections.

Vertically, a temple can be divided into 4 divisions i.e., Pista, Bada, Gandi and Mastaka. There is no difference between Rekha deula and Pidha deula, except in the treatment of Gandi, while the former

is of a curvilinear outline; the latter is of a pyramidal shape. The craftsmen of Kalinga considered the temple as the body of the cosmic being (Vastu Purush - Fig. 5)) and hence the names of the different parts of the temple had been given after the limbs of the human body. (Mishra, S. 2019, p. 62) The *pista* is not a compulsory feature of the temple. But it is often found in the temples built during the Ganga epoch. The *Bada* is the first important part of the temple. Initially, it had been divided into three parts, and was known as *Tri-anga Bada*. Its elements are *Pabhaga*, *Jangha* and *Baranda*. This type of composition is found in the temples belonging to the earlier group. Later on, with the increase of height, the *Bada* division increased to five and is now called as *Panchanga Bada*. Here the *Jangha* is divided into two parts with a set of mouldings known as *Bandhana*. Now the five elements of *Bada* are *Pabhaga*, *Tala-Jangha*, *Bandhana*, *Upara-Jangha* and *Baranda*. In earlier temples, the *Pabhaga* was composed of 3 elements i.e., *Khura*, *Kumbha* and *Pata*. Later on two more elements were added, known as *Kani* and *Basanta*. The *Baranda*, which is the topmost portion of the *Bada*, separates the *Gandi* from the *Bada*. Usually it is composed of five or seven mouldings but in case of temples of very large dimension, it increases to ten or even more.

The *Gandi* is the portion where the *Rekha* and *Pidha deula* differ to each other. The *Gandi* of the *Rekha deula* is divided into three parts, known as *Pagas*, by the continuation of the projections of the *Bada*. This type of *Triratha* plan, having three parts are generally found in earlier temples. The central projection or *Paga* of a *Triratha* temple is known as *Raha-Paga* having two projections known as *Kanika-Pagas* on both sides. With the evolution of temple architecture, *Triratha* pattern gave way to *Pancharatha* pattern having two more *Pagas*. The new *Paga* known as *Anuratha-Paga* was placed in between *Raha -Paga* and *Kanika-Paga*. In a *Saptaratha* temple, the projections flanking the *Raha-Paga* are called *Anuraha-Paga*. The *Kanika-Paga* is further subdivided into several horizontal sections, known as, *Bhumis* by the miniature *amlas*, called *Bhumi-amla*. The *Gandi* ends with the *Visama*, the topmost course, with or without *Paga* divisions, sealing the spire. In the *Pidha deula*, the *Gandi* is made up of a number of *Pidhas*. The *Pidhas* are arranged in continuous succession or in tiers, which are called *Potalas* in local terminology. The intervening vertical space in between the *Potalas* is known as *Kanti* or *Kanthi*. The *Pidhas* gradually diminish in size, as they rise, and the uppermost one is generally half the size of the lowermost one.

The *Mastaka* is the topmost portion of the temple. In *Rekha deula*, the *Mastaka* consists of five elements. *Beki* separates the *Gandi* from the *Mastaka*. Above the *Beki* are *Amala*, *Khapuri* and *KalaSa*. The crowning element of the temple is the *Ayudha* or the auspicious weapon, from which it can be known that to which divinity the temple is dedicated to. The *Dhvaja* or banner is placed at the pinnacle of the temple. In later temples, the *amla* is supported by *Dopichalions* at the corners and *Deulacarinis* on the centre of the *Raha*. This arrangement is slightly different for the *Pidha deula*. Above the *Beki*, there is a *Ghanta*, an enormous bell-shaped component, and in order to provide for the *Amla*, yet another *Beki*, known as *Amla-beki* is put in (Mohapatra, 1983, p.16). The rest of the arrangement is just the same as for the *Rekha deula*.

Besides the *Rekha* and *Pidha deula*, the third category of the Kalinga style of temple architecture is the *Khakara deula*, which is unique in its style. This type of temple is very limited in Odisha. The notable *Khakara* temples of Odisha are the *Vaitala deula*, the *Gauri* temple, the *Gopalini* and *Savitri* shrines inside the *Lingaraja* compound, at *Bhubaneswar* and *Varahi* temple at *Caurasi*. Regarding the temple style, there is no separate distinctive style for *Saiva* and *Vaisnava* shrine, but for the *Sakta* shrines, the *Khakara* temple is the unique style. In other words, a *Sakta* temple may not be of *Khakara* order, but a *Khakara* temple is necessarily to be meant for *Sakti* worship. The most distinguished feature of this style is its barrel-vaulted elongated roof. The body of the *Khakara deula* is also divided

into four parts – Pista, Bada, Gandi and Mastaka. Like that of the Rekha and Pidha deula. Besides the Mastaka, all the structures of this style are similar to the structure of a Rekha deula. The Bada of the Vaitala temple has, above its Pabhagamouldings, elegantly carved shallow pilasters in the place of Bhumi divisions. The Gauri temple does not have the Bhumi-amlas. The most important feature of the Khakara deula is its semi-cylindrical vaulted roof, which is separated from the Gandi. In the Gauri and Varahi temples, a Kalasa crowns the top, where as in the Vaitala temple, the roof is crowned by three amlakas, each with the usual finials.

### Evolution

The Kalinga temple style exhibits a flexible characteristic. In course of its evolution, some changes are obvious, as the building art was passed on from one generation to the other. These stylistic changes distinguish one phase from the other. But in spite of it, a remarkable continuity is found in the development of the style till it reaches the climax. The earliest standing temple on Odishan soil has been dated to the latter half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Prior to that no temple has survived in a structural edifice. In the inscriptional evidence of Hatigumpha belonging to 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, Kharavela is described as the “repairer of all shrines of gods” (seva-devayatana-sankara-karako). (Sahu, 1964, p.404) But there is no evidence to determine their architectural shape. Some architectural fragments and detached sculptures, representing Yaksa and Naga images have been found which can be dated to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. (Panigrahi, 1961, pp.207-210) These images do not help us in any way to realize the size and shape of the structure to which they belong. In Indian context, the earliest surviving example of temple architecture dates back to the Gupta period. But in Odisha, not a single specimen of that period has been found as yet. From the village of Asanpat (Keonjhar district), a stone inscription has been discovered, which refers to the construction of a temple by Maharaja Satrubhanja, who may be dated to third or fourth century CE on the basis of palaeography of the inscription. (Das, OHRJ, Vol. XIII, 1965, p.1ff) Two little shrines, one dedicated to lord Durga on the top of the hill near Patia, in Khurda district and the other the Nilakanthesvar shrine on the top of Jagamanda hill near the village Padmapur, in Koraput district, are generally assigned to the Gupta period. (Behera, 1993, p.15) There is another such temple at Mahendragiri.

The temple architecture in Odisha started from 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, and reached its climax with the building of the Sun temple at Konark in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. This whole period of near about 800 years can be divided into three phases. (Mishra, 2015, p.37)

1. The Early Phase - starting from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE
2. The Middle Phase - starting from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century CE
3. The later phase - starting from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE

### The Early Phase (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century CE)

The early temples belonging to this phase were probably built during the rule of the Sailodbhavas, from the middle of 6<sup>th</sup> century CE till the first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. This period shows certain characteristic features in the temple architecture. The temples are Triratha in plan, Pabhaga of three mouldings, the Baranda terminating in a recessed Kanti, the gradual curvature and stunted form of the Sikhara unburdened by any Angasikhara, and the absence of Dopichalion below the Amlakasila. The presence of eight grahas viz., Ravi, Chandra, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Sukra, Sani and Rahu in the graha slab, excluding the ninth one i.e., Ketu, is another characteristic of the early group. The Satrugnesvar group, the Parasuramesvara temple and the Svarnajalesvar temple belong to this period.

After the Sailodbhavas, the temple building tradition was carried on by the Bhaumas and their vassals. The temples of this period were marked with the continuation of the earlier traditions with some innovations, modification and improvements. The typical specimen of this group is the Sisiresvara temple at Bhubaneswar. The peculiarities of this period can be clearly noticed in the said temple, in the Pagas of the Vimana, in the orientations of the niches enshrining side deities, in some deula and a rectangular Jagamohana. The development of the deula from Triratha to Pancharatha plan is clearly seen in the temple. The roof of the Jagamohana is built according to the cantilever principle. (Behera, 1993, p.23) A noteworthy feature of the images enshrined is that, they all have been made of two or three blocks of stone contained in two or three courses of the walls. (Panigrahi, 1981, p.378) The new technique is to be traced to the centre of the Bhauma tradition of art and architecture. A sunken panel with amorous couples (mithuna) carved in it, also marks the transition between the cubical portion and the curvilinear tower. The Markandeyasvara temple on the south-west corner of the Bindusagar tank is closely related to the Sisiresvara temple and may also be assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. (Behera, 1993, p.24) Standing side by side on a common platform, the twin temples of Nilamadhava and Siddhesara at Gandharadi, have rectangular Jagamohana as of Parasuramesvara. The Jagamohana of Gandharadi has no clerestories and their roofs are built on the cantilever principle like that of Sisiresvara. The lattice windows and main doors are flanked by Naga pillars, as found in the Varahi temple at Chaurasi. All these features indicate that the temples are definitely later than that of Parsuramesvara. (Mishra, 2019, p.66) The Bhringesvara temple at Bajrakot, the Kanakesvara temple at Kualo, the Manikesvara temple at Suklesvara, also belongs to the Bhauma period.

### **The Middle Phase (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE )**

The development of temple architecture that started during the rule of the Bhaumas, reached its perfection towards the close of the reign of the Somavamsis. With the beginning of this phase, the Jagamohana became an inseparable part of the temple, which transformed from flat roofed to a well-arranged Pidha deula in continuous succession or in tiers. In the Muktesvara temple at Bhubaneswar, we find the beginning of second phase of temple architecture, with the introduction of Pidha deula for the first time. The Pidhas arranged in tiers is also found in the Lingaraja temple. The lattice-window is now replaced by balustrade window, which served the model for the succeeding generation. The Sikhara received great beauty, lightness and rhythm in its treatment, which was thick stunted and possessed weight, previously. The projections of the deula are now well developed and produce a charming effect in light and shade by their recesses. Another notable feature of this period is the introduction of the projecting lion from the Raha, with either a Kirtimukha or an Elephant under it (Gajasimha). This Gajasimha motif became very popular subsequently. The Amlakasila is supported by Deulacarinis and Dopichalions. But these elements are absent in the Muktesvaratemple as the temple belonged to the early part of the Somavamsi period. During this period, the Bada division increased to five segments viz., Pabhaga, Tala-Jangha, Bandhana, Upara-Jangha and Baranda with the Pabhaga division also increasing to five mouldings i.e., Khura, Kumbha, Pata, Kani and Basanta. The Kanti of the early phase disappeared giving place to a band of mouldings, which demarcate the Bada from the Gandi. In the Gandi, we also notice the embellishment of Anga Sikharas, which diminish in size as they rise to the pick, adding to the grandeur and ascent of the Sikhara. The sculptures of this period are excellent in their plasticity and modeling and include non-iconic female figures. The technique of modeling the figures in alto-relievo ( Behera, 1993, p.34) is also another new development. In Bada new sculptural motifs are introduced known as Pidha mundi, Khakara mundi and Vajra mundi. With the introduction of the ninth planet Ketu, the Navagraha slab became an indispensable feature in later times.

As the Kalinga temple architecture was in the process of development during the Somavamsi period, all the elements stated above are not found in all the temples of the said period. The monuments built during the early period of Somavamsi rule possess many features common to the temples of the preceding dynasty but the temples belonging to the developed phase, like Lingaraja and Brahmesvara have all the fundamental characteristics of the Kalinga architecture. The three Tantrik temples at Baudh, the Panchapandava temple at Talachua, the Muktesvaratemple, the Rajarani temple, the Brahmesvara temple and the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar and the Jalesvara temple at the village of Kalarahanga, belong to this group.

### **The Later Phase (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century CE )**

The Kalinga temple architecture reached its climax during the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of the Gangas. The process of evolution continued as usual and the earlier temples like Lingaraja and Brahmesvara served as models for the Ganga builders. Many temples were constructed during this period. They usually stand on raised platforms. Though they carried on the existing tradition regarding plan and elevation, the distinct improvement of the design can be marked in the Saptaratha plan. Another important innovation of this period is the addition of two more structure, namely Natamandira and Bhogamandapa. The provision of porches or subsidiary temples (Disha-deula) in front of the Parsvadevata is altogether a new feature. The Vahanastambha like Bull in Saiva temples, Garuda in Vaisnava temples and Aruna in Surya temples, is another notable feature of this period. The Natamandira, Bhogamandapa and Vahanastambha in the Lingaraja temple are later addition. The appearance of the consorts of the Dikpalas on the upper Jangha of the temple is another new development of the period. The so-called corbell arch is to be found not only in the doorways of the Vimana but also in the Jagamohana of the temple. Some of the cult images like Ganesa and Kartikeya appear in their last evolutionary form. The walls of the temples are decorated with scrollwork, usually in the form of creepers, in full or half medallions including leaf designs and animal figurines such as deer, bear, elephant, horse and swan. The Jagannatha temple at Puri, the Laksmi temple inside the complex of Jagannatha temple at Puri, Sari Temple, Citrakarini temple, Yamesvara and Anantavasudeva temple at Bhubaneswar, the Daksaprajapati temple at Banapur and the world famous Sun temple at Konark, can safely be included in this group. The temple building activities which started during 6<sup>th</sup> century CE began to decline due to lack of royal patronage, and continuous invasion of the Afghans. But the activities continued, though in a smaller scale, in the different part of Odisha. In western part of Odisha many temples were built during the Chauhan rule from mid 14<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though they followed Kalinga style, variations are noticeable which give an impression of a style different from the traditional one.

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