

Influence of Vernacular Architecture in Evolution of Temple forms of Odisha

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Abstract

Most of the Indian religious philosophies and rituals believe in idol worshiping and from the ancient time, temple has been playing an important role in the society. It may be religious or socio-cultural point of view, construction of temples has been patronized from 3rd century BC. Illustrated by the Indian Silpa-sastras, Indian temples can be categorized in three main types, i.e. Nagara, Dravida and Vesara styles. As the non-hindus invaded India in 11th century, many Nagara style temples were looted and destroyed and today a very few specimen exists to study the styles and forms, and most of them are found prominently in the state of Odisha. Apart from the Nagara style of temples, Odishan archaeology also preserves few examples Vesara style temples. But the question arises that from where the shape of Odishan temples evolved? It has been described and illustrated that temple architecture came to Kalinga after the Mouryas and many temple styles were influenced from temples of North and Central India. But a thorough study of Odishan vernacular architecture answers it with a different notion. The styles and shapes used in construction practices of rural areas in Odisha are reflected in the temple styles. This paper focuses on the significant elements and characters; those have influenced the evolution of shapes of different temple forms in the milieu of Odishan Temple Architecture.

Keywords: Kalinga Style, Temple forms, Rekha Deula, Pidha Deula, Khakhara Deula

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is the frozen contemplation of man out of which he builds temples. Among these temples there are some, which far surpass all the rest, whose majesty of architectural minutiae no human tongue is able to describe; for within their precincts, surrounded by a lofty wall, there is room enough for emotions, beliefs and holy practices of families. There is one timeless way of building. It is a thousand years old, and the same today as it has ever been. The great cultural and traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way with their heritage as a prestige and treasure.

Orissa being a land of ancient and sacred temples, and a state where religions with many philosophies flourished, is thronged by pilgrims throughout the year. There are a large number of fairs and festivals celebrated in the state relating to each religion, tribe. The great ancient temple architecture flourished here as a part of Nagara style, got patronage and reached to its mature segment through phases and culminated with the phase of decadence after 16th century AD. To appraise the pervasive eon of temple architecture, it obliges as a paramount arena of generations and philosophies.

Odisha can be considered as the land of temples. The concentration of the largest number of temples all over the country has made it a center of unique attraction for the scholars, ideologists, tourists and others. Out of the five special types of architectural building like Devotional, Civil, Military, Memorial and Domestic, devotional category flourished here with a systematic evolution. Thus Odishan temples constituted a prominent sub-style of the Nagara style of north Indian temples, known as Kalinga Style of temples.

The construction practice of this sub-regional style of temples continued for nearly one thousand years from the 6th- 7th century to the 15th-16th century AD in unbroken continuity. Bhubaneswar, the ancient Ekamra Khetra served as the experimental ground of these temple building activities without being diverted by the change of ruling dynasties or their cult affiliation and traditional practices. As a result the temples are acknowledged as the Kalinga style of temples rather than the royal families such as Pallava art, Rastrakuta art, Chandella art, Chalukyan art etc. (Parashar, 2016) It is worthwhile to mention here that temple building activities, of another tradition, was prevalent in ancient Orissa as attested by epigraphic evidences. Though these temples of Odisha differs from each other based on their plan forms and shapes, still they comes under one of the most homogenous architectural groups in India. The glorious history of Odishan temple architecture started from 6th century A.D reaching to maturity by 11th century A.D with Lingaraj temple. By the middle of the 13th century the Odishan temple architecture attained its climax with the period of decadence. (Parashar, 2016)

Again the Kalinga style of temples can be categorized into three major types:

- Rekha Deula (Temple with Curvilinear shape)
- Pidha Deula (Temple with Pyramidal shape roof)
- Khakhara Deula (Temple with vaulted shape roof)



Fig. 1: Rekha Deula



Fig. 2: Pidha Deula



Fig. 3: Khakhra Deula

And two minor categories

- Hypaethral style (Temple without roof, as found in Greece)
- Gaudiya style (Temple with terracotta walls and curved roof)



Fig. 4: Hypaethral Temple



Fig. 5: Gaudiya Temple

Major number of Orissan temples consists of temple parts like Jagamohana, Garvagriha, Natya mandapa and Bhoga Mandapa. Garvagriha is the part used for worshipping the deity and is also known as vimana or sanctum. Jagamohana is the next part to the Garbhagriha (which was not a distinctive part of temples in formative phase. (like Bharateswar Temple, Satruganeswar temple or Laxmaneswar Temple). The curveliner shaped temple form known as Rekha deula was the most preferable style for construction of Garbhagriha or Vimana. For the added on parts like Jagamohana, Natya Mandapa and Bhoga Mandapa, Pidha Deula style was adopted. Later on with evolution of different plan forms, the Rekha Deula type of temples were sub-categorized as Eka-Ratha, Tri-ratha, Pancha-rath, Sapta-rath and Nava-ratha Deula and Pidha deula were sub-categorized as Nahachalia or Nuania Pidha Deula, Dwichalia Pidha Deula, Katha-chalia Pidha Deula and Ghantashree. Added to that, going away from the traditional practices of Shaiva and Vaishnava temples, for the construction of Shakta temples, Khakhra deula style was followed and present day, only few of existing shakta temples like Vaital Deula temple of Bhubaneswar or Chourashi temple of Cuttack falls in this category.

II. INTROSPECTION

Religious and social aspects are the moral fiber of any kind of religious buildings. In early Christian era also, churches were constructed to gather at one place for mass prayer and thus it fulfilled the social need also. In case of Odishan temples also, that social aspect was involved, which prospered with the evolution of different parts of temples. In the rural areas of Odisha, people don't have separate Puja rooms or praying rooms in their individual houses and they perform their puja or offerings at "Bhababata tungis (a house designated for reading the Holy Bhagabat and Geeta by the villagers in the evening)". Perhaps this practice was fulfilling the social aspect of a religious building, when temple construction was not in practice. The houses were constructed of mud with thatched roofs in Pyramidal shape. In Odia colloquial language, the thatched roof is termed as Chala and when it stacked and cut in pyramidal shape, it is known termed as Pidha. The concept of introducing Pidha Deula as Jagamohana next to Garbhagriha lies here. Garbhagriha was used for worshipping and offering purposes as well as Jagamohana was used for social gatherings, performing Yagyans and other social rituals.

In the spring season, people of Odisha celebrate a traditional mass festival known as Asta Praharis and for the Shankirtan or mass prayer, some special kind of mandapas are constructed in temporary basis with thatch roofing and bamboo pillars. These structure consist of an offering or central platform and a pradakshina path.



Fig. 6: Chala ghara (Thatched house)

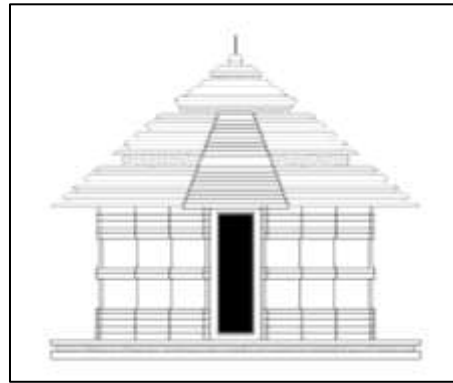


Fig. 7: Nahachalia Pidha Deula



Fig. 8: Temporary Astaprahari Mandap

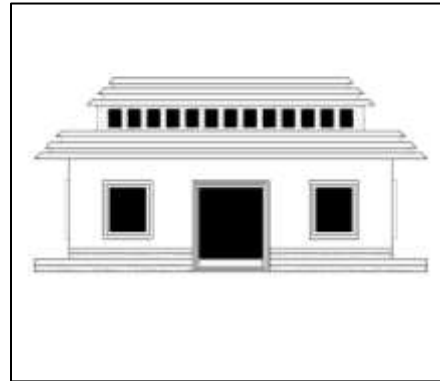


Fig. 9: Dwichalia Pidha Deula

In the formative phase, when temples were constructed with only Garbhagriha, the need of another shaded portion or designated area for gathering and performing social rituals and mass offerings was needed. With these requirements, later on next to the Garbhagriha, such type of thatched roof temporary structure were perhaps constructed, as they are constructed for temporary religious activities in today's context also. Later on these structures got constructed permanently using stone and because of the initial thatched roof structures; they were termed as Pidha Deula. The Jagamohana part of Mukteswar temple resembles the pyramidal shaped thatched roof dwellings of rural Odisha. The Jagamohana of Parshurameswar temple consist of a two layer flat roof structures (Dwi-chalia Pidha Deula) which resembles the Astaprahari Mandapas constructed in rural areas.

The next peculiar style of Orissan temple architecture is Khakhara Style of temples. They are also known as Boitala temples, as their vaulted roof resembles inverted shape of Boita (traditional Boat). It is believed that, these styles of temples were only constructed for Shakta worshipping. The chaitya arches found in the temple of Vaital Deula, Bhubaneswar bear resemblance to the chaitya arches constructed in vedic villages. Thus it can be proclaimed that, the style of Khakhara temple came into construction practice with the arrival of Mouryan dynasty in Odisha. But the basic shape of these Khakhara temple are the matured form of temples found in villages for worshipping "Grama-devati" by the tribal.

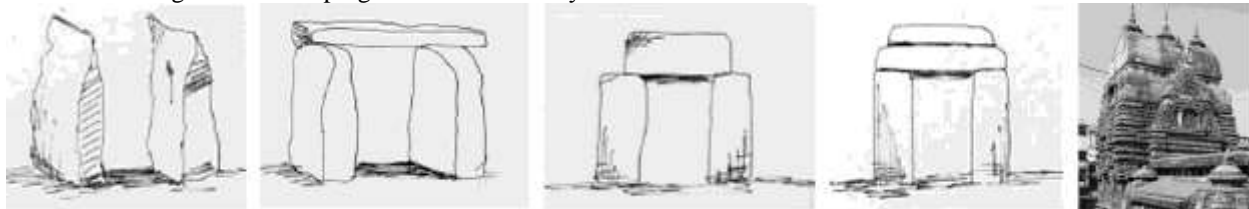


Fig. 10: Evolution process of Khakhara style

III. CONCLUSION

Architecture is an art, and it may be similar from region to region. But most of the times, it gets evolved and influenced from local traditions and practices rather than getting inspired from other places. This is how temple architecture in Odisha flourished to its mature phase with evolutions of its plan, evolution of its elements and evolution of its built form and shape. Temples like Mukteswar Temple, Rajarani Temple, Sun Temple Konark, Puri Jagannath Temple and many more sing the saga of this self-sustained and self-evolved style of temple architecture. Many architects, historians and archaeologists have performed researches on its plan form, involvement of fractal geometry in the temple forms and plan, their construction techniques and philosophies etc. But today also the few unseen and undiscovered facts are there related to the evolution process, which needs a special attention.

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