



Ancient Temples in Odisha , an epitome of architectural grandeur.

Dr . Sarita Ranjan
Guest Faculty at Utkal university
PH.D, M.A (Gold Medalist)

Abstract - The State of Odisha is renowned for the stunning technique of designing and building temples since times immemorial. The builders of the Odishan temples gave vent to their feelings on the basis of indigenous canonical texts like Bhuban Pradip, Shilpapothi, Shilpashastra, Vastushastra Upanishad, Silparatnakara, Silparasini, Shilpa Prakash, Padma Kesara, Deula Mapagunagara, Bhuban Prabesh, Soudhikagama etc indicating the standard achieved by our ancestors in the field of temple architecture. The structures produced reveal much about their environment, history, ceremonies and artistic sensibility, as well as many aspects of daily life. The practice of architecture is employed to fulfil both practical and expressive requirements and thus it serves both utilitarian and aesthetic ends. The ultimate goal of a temple's design is to bring about the descent or manifestation of the un-manifest and unseen. The temple according to the Brahmanical concept is not merely a place of worship rather an object of worship as an image and the invisible spirit of cosmic being or 'vastu-purusha'. It is the metaphysical plan of a building that incorporates the course of the heavenly bodies and supernatural powers.

Keywords: Deula, Shikhara, Inscriptions, Shilpa Shashtra, Shaktipithas, Kalinga style.

It was once said by James Fergusson that 'there are more temples now in Odisha than in all the rest of Hindustan put together'¹. Temples were built at Sanchi, Nachna, Pipariya, Deogarh, Mandasor, Bhitari, Eran, Bhitargaon, Ahichhatra, Ramtek, etc². These temples which still stand tall after undergoing through various stages of conservation and preservation in Odisha, are like a treasure for a nation and a symbol of pride of their Civilisation. In different parts of the country, distinct architectural style of temples was the result of geographical, ethnic and historical diversities. Gradually, the construction of temples became vigorous and more organised. The vastu - purusha - mandala is both the body of the Cosmic Being and a bodily device by which those who have the requisite knowledge attain the best results in temple building'³. Vastu- purusha - mandala is not necessarily an actual picture of Man, encased in numerous cells or squares. It is an indispensable part of vastu shashtra and it constitutes the mathematical and diagrammatic representation through symbols, of the field of coordinates,

¹ R.C. Majumdar (ed), History and Culture of Indian people, vol. V (The Struggle for Empire), p.535.

² Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture, North India, vol. ii, part - 1, New Delhi, 1988.

³ Stella Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, Vol . I

currents intersections, flow of energies in the subtle body of a human being. The body here is but a sphere of coordinated activities and each part being associated with a particular function. Accordingly, various parts of the temple are termed after the names of different limbs of human body with architectural annotations⁴. Thus the Hindu temple is considered as the image of the 'Maha-Purusa'⁵. He is the cosmic man, on whose body the entire creation is displayed, with all its material, vital, puranic and spiritual forces.

Indian temples are divided into three categories viz, Nagara, Dravida and Vesara on the basis of three gunas (qualities like sattva, raja, and tamas respectively). "Nagara temples belong to the country from the Himalayas to the Vindhya, Vesara from the Vindhya to the river Krishna and Dravida from the Krishna to the Cape Camorin"⁶. The spire of a Hindu temple called Shikhara in North India and Vimana in South India is perfectly aligned above the Brahma pada (s). A Hindu temple has a Shikhara (Vimana or spire) that rises symmetrically above the central core of the temple. These spires come in many designs and shapes but they all have mathematical precision and geometric symbolism. One of the common principles found in Hindu temple spires is circles and turning - square theme (left), and a concentric layering design (right) that flows from one to the other as it rises towards the sky. Beneath the mandala's central square is the space for the formless shapeless all pervasive all connecting universal spirit, the Purusha. This space is sometimes referred to as Garbhagriha - a small, perfect square, windowless, enclosed space without ornamentation that represents universal essence.

As temples grew more complex, more surfaces were created for sculpture by adding more and more rhythmically projecting, symmetrical walls and niches, without breaking away from the fundamental plan of the shrine. In North India it is common for an entire temple to be built on a stone platform with steps leading up to it. Further, unlike in South India it does not usually have elaborate boundary walls or gateways. While the earliest temples had just one tower or Shikhara, later temples had several. The Garbhagriha is always located directly under the tallest tower. There are many subdivisions of Nagara temples depending on the shape of the Shikhara. There are different names for the various parts of the temple in different parts of India; however, the most common name for the simple Shikhara which is square at the base and whose walls curve or slope inward to a point on top is called the 'Latina' or the Rekha-Prasada type of Shikara. The second major type of architectural form in the Nagara order is the Phamsana, which tends to be broader and shorter than Latina ones. Their roofs are composed of several slabs that gently rise to a single point over the centre of the building, unlike the Latina ones which look like sharply rising tall towers. The third main sub-type of the Nagara building is generally called the Valabhi type. These are rectangular buildings with a roof that rises into a vaulted chamber.

⁴ Rigveda, X,90 (Tr) by Griffith. Alice Borner, Sadasiva Ratha Sharma, op.cit., P.XXVIII.

⁵ S. Kramarisch, op.cit., p.161 ff.

⁶ Hayasirsa Pancaratra quoted in Haribhakta Vilasa, Agni Purana, Ch.61 Vs 19 -27.

Broadly speaking the extant temples in Odisha belong to the Northern Nagara style. The distinguishing feature of the Nagara style of temple architecture is its tower or Shikhara. The Shikhara type temples overtook the earlier temples which are not in situ. During its long period of evolution the Odishan temples acquired certain distinct characteristics which distinguished them from that of the Nagara style. The distinction became so well marked that a separate nomenclature called Kalinga style named after its ancient name was applied to the Odishan temples. This style received due recognition when it found mention in the Shilpa texts and the inscription. In general, the Shikhara called Deul in Odisha is vertical, almost until the top when it suddenly curves sharply inwards. Deuls are preceded, as usual, by Mandapas called Jagamohana in Odisha. Barring a few examples temple building in Odisha was a Post Gupta phenomenon. The Nagara Shikhara style of architecture which was the decisive innovation of the Imperial Guptas gradually became the diagnostic trait of Odishan architectural activity which started from 6th c and continued with all vigour till 13th c A. D. Odishan temples usually have boundary walls. The ground plan of the main temple is almost always square, which, in the upper reaches of its superstructure becomes circular in the crowning Mastaka. The exterior of the temples is lavishly carved while their interiors are generally quite bare. Odishan temples are graceful and elegant carvings amidst beautiful sculpture of human, semi-divine, divine beings along with plants, trees and animals, their effective treatment of light and shades, their majesty and dignity in conception with spiritual significance constitute one of the most compact and homogenous groups in India. Most of the main temple sites are located in ancient Kalinga — modern Puri District, including Bhubaneswar or ancient Tribhuvaneshvara, Puri and Konark.

The main architectural features of Odisha temples are classified into three orders, i.e., Rekhapida, Pidhadeul and Khakhra.

Rekhapida (Rekha Deula) : Tall straight building (looking like a Shikhara) covering the Garbhagriha.

Pidhadeula : It is the mandapa, a square building where worshipper's are present and also where dancing takes place.

Khakhra (Khakhra Deula) : It is a rectangular building with a truncated pyramid shaped roof. Temples of Shakti are usually in this type.

It may be noted that architectural remains that have survived from Ancient and Medieval India, most of them are religious in nature. Inscriptions have played a significant impact in the shaping of Odishan history. Through inscriptions, we learn about place names, territorial boundaries, religion, administrative units, land grants, and the social and economic conditions of the people of Odisha. These inscriptions have been extremely useful in reconstructing Odisha's political, social, economic, and religious history. According to Hathigumpha inscription, King Kharavela (first century B.C) repaired all the shrines in his kingdom.⁷ It postulates the existence of several shrines in Kalinga before Kharavela's accession to the throne. Those shrines decayed and thus required renovation. Kharavela, the third King of the Chedi dynasty, being a ruler of liberal outlook, attended to this task dexterously. From ancient scriptures as well as Tantrashastra it is clearly evident that from 3rd – 4th century A.D to 12th century A.D, Shaktipithas grew into prominence in various parts of the country. In the Tantric ritualistic descriptions, Odisha has been regarded as one of the most important pithas.

⁷ "Sava devayatana samkara karaka" – line 17 of the Hathigumpha inscription.

Among the famous Devipithas of Odisha mention may be made of Viraja of Jajpur, Samaleswari of Sambalpur and Bhadrakali of Bhadrak. They are all one and the same.

Mother Bhadrakali is quite an ancient mythological deity. The historical background of the study of the Bhadrakali deity can be traced back to a fragmentary inscription discovered from the present precinct of the Bhadrakali temple. The Bhadrakali inscription occupies second place after the Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela so far as its date is concerned. It is written in Pali language with Brahmi script. The statue of goddess is made up of black chlorite stone and is seated in the lotus posture on a lion. The inscription of Maharaja Gana (third century A.D) is engraved on a long piece of stone recovered from the Bhadrakali temple near Bhadrak. Scholars are of the opinion that the name Bhadrak has been derived from the goddess Bhadrakali. This long piece of stone appears to be the door lintel⁸ of a temple built at that time. The Asanpat inscriptions (3rd – 4th c A. D) is another inscription which refers to the construction of a temple by Maharaja Satrubhanja . Satrubhanja was a warrior and emperor who belonged to the Vindhya branch of Nagavanshi rulers that ruled from Keonjhar district of Odisha in the early 4th century A.D (possibly between 261 A. D to 340 A.D). The era of Satrubhanja belongs to the pre - Gupta rise as an imperial power in India when the other ruling Bharasiva Nagas of India joined hands to overthrow the ruling Devaputras of Pataliputra, also otherwise known as Kushan rulers to the modern historians⁹. The Asanpat inscriptions is of thirteen lines which is written partly in verse and partly in prose. Satrubhanja had built monasteries and residences for spiritual men from different religious communities in his empire. The religious communities patronized by him included Brahmacharis, Parivrajakas or Jains, Bhikshus and Nirgranthakas of Buddhist religion. The Asanpat village dancing Nataraja Shiva inscription in Sanskrit of Satrubhanja provides a great deal of details about his achievements as a conqueror and spiritual man .Towards the end of the inscription , it also notes down that he had built a large temple for the Hindu deity Shiva¹⁰. Broken burnt bricks and rubble of an ancient structure are found in the Asanpat area believed by many scholars to be the remnants of this temple. The above-mentioned evidences prove that ancient temples were built in Odisha from an early period at least from the first century B.C. These temples however were not like the present temples now in situ.

The Gangas appeared in Odishan history at the end of the fifth century and again in the eleventh century. They established themselves as the supreme power during this time period. Among the Ganga rulers, three individuals stood out : Chodagangadeva, Anangabhimadeva III, and Narasimhadeva 1. The Ganga dynasty of Medieval India had a considerable influence on the land of Odisha apart from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. The copper plate records of later Eastern Gangas and Gajapatis furnish us some interesting reference to the pivotal role discharged by the temples and mathas in the sphere of educational progress of the society. In the 54th regnal year of Chodaganga Deva , one Surapelu of Arasavali donated five putties of tax – free land which he obtained from the

⁸ Lintel is a structural horizontal block that spans the space or opening between two vertical supports. It can be decorative architectural element, or a combined ornamented structural item. It is often found over portals, doors, windows and fireplaces.

⁹ Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited. 1989. pp. 60–61. ISBN 81-208-0592-5.

¹⁰ Inscriptions of Odisha: Circa 5th-8th centuries A.D, Volume 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited. 1997. pp. 171–172.

King, for the maintenance of five Brahmin teachers and a scholar. It is learnt that one Ranganath Vaggeyakara with the title of Abhinava Bartacaraya and Todarmalla, who was attached to the temple, that Simachalam, was to impart instruction in dancing and music to temple dancers ¹¹.

Land grants to the temples are general features of Odishan history. These temples became the agency for the spread of education. There are evidences which suggests that scholars also resided in the temple premises. Kamalāsana Bhattāraka ¹², who was a devasthaniya (temple superintendent), possessed mastery in paramārtha tattva. Sivacharya, the dikshaguru of the Ganga King Devendravarman lived with his students and grants in the temple of Gurandi in the Mahendra region ¹³. The early Ganga Kings of Kalinga were devoted to Gokarnesvara Siva on the Mahendra mountain. The earliest reference to Gokarnesvara is found in the Ponnuturu copper plates of the Ganga ruler Maharaja Samantavarman (A.D 560). Thus, we can say that the precincts of the temples in ancient Odisha became the abode and medium to spread education in their respective locality. As the nucleus of the educational system was broadly Brahmanical in its negative aspect the Brahmanical educational system resting on the infrastructure of Varnasrama dharma and caste hierarchy, excluded the vast majority of population from the field of educational enrichment. In fact, it developed an elitist pattern detrimental to overall growth of socio - economic and cultural edifice.

The Indian Civilization embarked upon a new phase of development during the Gupta rule. The contributions of the Western scholars like A. Sterling, J. Fergusson, Lt Kittoe and W.W. Hunter are immense and it greatly helps in the reconstruction of Odishan history in general and art and architecture of the land in particular. During Gupta Era, the rock cut architecture reached its zenith and this era marked the beginning of the Guptas. The Brahmanisation of Odishan Society began during Gupta rule in North India and Mathar rule in Kalinga. The rulers of Odisha accepted the Brahmanical social order and helped the growth of Sanskrit learning and culture through generous offer of land grants and patronage to Brahmin scholars. Consequently, temples and Agraharas emerged as centres of Brahmanical learning. It is generally believed that the beginning of the Odishan temple architecture cannot be earlier than the 6th c. A. D because among the extant temples the earliest ones – Lakshmanesvara, Bharatesvara and Shatrughnesvara – are assigned to this period. We have concrete evidence to prove that temples were also built during the Gupta Period, even earlier to this as stated in the previous paragraphs.

Gupta age was evidently the “Golden age of India” or the “Classical Age of India” partially due to the unprecedented activities and development in the arts, architecture, sculpture, painting and literature. The technique of temple building was mainly governed by the principles laid down in the Vastu Shastras, the science of architecture which came to be codified in the Gupta period. These manuals explicit about the treatment of every aspect of temple origin, of the names of various temples, the rules of selection of site, its plans, the time when a temple is to be built, the construction materials of the temples, the superstructures of the temples, the proportionate measurement and varieties of the temples,

¹¹ Select Inscriptions of India, vol .vi, p.1091.

¹² S.N. Rajguru, Inscription of Odisha, vol. ii, pt.1, p.180.

¹³ S.N. Rajguru, Inscription of Odisha, vol. ii, pt.1, p.70

the images and decorative motifs to be sculpted etc. As such every minutest detail right from the foundation to the finial of the temple was meticulously laid down. It seems this religious art in ancient India is quite different and distinct from the rest, the literature came from the hands of the handful of monks and priests, while the art came from the hands of secular artists and craftsman, a cohesive endeavour by whole community.¹⁴

The ceremonial worship of Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, and the Buddhist and Jaina deities with their female counterparts in the beautiful temples of high magnitude was a new feature in the realm of religion. Shakti cult played a vital role in the socio-religious life of the Odishan people. The theoretical interpretation of the Shakti cult inculcated in the Upanishads, Puranas and Upa - Puranas composed in the earlier period, and in this glorious epoch found expression in the glorification of the goddesses. The archaeological as well as literary sources prove the prevalence of Shakti cult in Odisha to an early age. Both in paintings and engravings of Odishan rock at several instances of bisected triangles resembling female genital have been encountered. Repeated occurrences of such symbols in the different rock shelters amply suggest the popularity of the primordial mother cult or the cult of fecundity during the pre-historic period. Shakti cult in the form of female divinity especially the deity of Viraja at Jajpur made its appearance in Odisha during the Gupta period. The image is assigned to the Gupta period by K.C. Panigrahi. The two armed deity Viraja represents the earliest form of Shakti in Odisha. During the post - Gupta period the cult of Stambeswari, the other important goddess cult of Odisha was Sanskritised and became the female deity of Sulki dynasty of Kodalaka Mandala (A.D.600 - 900) as evidenced from the epigraphic records. In the same period the rulers of Kangoda Kingdom, Sailabodhas were the devout worshippers of Shiva along with Parvati. For the first time in the history of Odishan inscriptions we find an invocatory verse pertaining to the divine couple of Sambhu (Shiva) and Parvati (Shakti) in the preamble of the undated Buguda Charter of Madhavaraja II of the Sailodbhava dynasty. Another important epigraphical record of Sailodbhavas which sheds light on the Shaktipitha of Odisha is the Banapur copper plate grant of Dharmaraja Srimanabhita making endowments for the presiding deity Bhagvati.

During the 8th and 9th centuries, a powerful dynasty known as **Bhaumakara** ruled over the territories of Utkal, famous for the temple dedicated to Viraja, the presiding deity, which was the seat of government of the Bhaumakaras. The principal idol here is Devi Durga, who is worshiped as Viraja (Girija), and the temple gave Jajpur the nicknames "Viraja Kshetra" and "Biraja Peetha". The Durga idol has two hands (dwibhuja), spearing the chest of Mahishasura with one hand and pulling his tail with the other. One of her feet is on a lion, and the other is on Mahishasura's chest. Mahishasura is depicted as a water buffalo. The idol's crown features Ganesha, a crescent moon and a lingam. The temple covers a large area, and has several shrines to Shiva and other deities. According to the Skanda Purana it cleanses pilgrims, and it is called the Viraja or the Biraja Kshetra. Jajpur is believed to have about one crore of Shiva lingams. Odishan sculpture and architecture at that time was at a very developed stage in Bhubaneswar.

¹⁴ 1.R.C. Majumdar (ed), History and Culture of Indian people, vol. V (The struggle for Empire), p.535
2. Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture, North India, vol. ii, part - 1, New Delhi, 1988.

The rule of the Bhaumakara dynasty was followed by the rule of the **Somavamsi** rulers. The Lingaraj temple renowned for its sculptural excellence, were built during their rule. The temple was built by King Yayati Keshari and is a classic example of Kalinga architecture. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva .The temple also has images of Vishnu because of the rising prominence of Jagannath sect emanating from the Ganga rulers who built the Jagannath Temple in Puri in the 12 th century. The construction of such magnificent temples as Lingaraja and Jagannatha inspires awe and wonder in the onlooker regarding the construction technique. Indeed, corbelling was used. The sized-Khondalite stones are laid horizontally on top of one another in the majority of temples, “ primarily by a system of counterpoise, with the weight of one stone acting against the pressure of another, with much of the stability being a matter of balance and equilibrium.” There was no cementing mortar used, but iron cramps and dowels were used to secure the stone stabs in place.

It was during the **Somavansi** rule that the process of synthesis between Shaivism and Vaishnavism reached the climax of its process in the Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar. Though the temple is dedicated to Shiva ,we find numerous Vaishnavite sculptures in the temple depicted on equal footing along with the Shaivite sculptures. The colossal Shivalinga inside the sanctum of the Lingaraj temple is partly worshipped as Hari and partly as Hara as we get to see the assimilation of the two major Brahmanical faiths i.e. Shaivism and Vaishnavism .The compound of the Lingaraj temple contains another beautiful and significant image of Harihara in dvibhanga pose, the pedestal of which contains the figures of both Nandi and Garuda , the vehicles of Shiva and Vishnu respectively. The ayudha on the Kalasa of the temple is represented partly by a trident and partly by half of a disc. In the temple the leaves of Vilva and Tulsi which are favourites of Shiva and Vishnu respectively are used for the worship of the deity. Besides , the Vahanastambha located in front of the temple contains at its top not only the image of Nandi but also that of Garuda. Thus, these features in the Lingaraj temple suggest that the Hari - Hara movement which had its beginning in the 5 th and 6 th centuries A.D reached its climax in the Lingaraj temple under the patronage of the Somavamsis. The Somavamsis (Janmajeya , Yayati I and Yayati II) were devout worshippers of Shiva but were also known to have patronised Vaisnavism during their rule. Udyota - Kesari , the great Shaiva King of Somavamsi dynasty , is also known to have honoured and patronised Jainism. From the Lalatendu Cave Inscription we learn that Udyota - Kesari repaired the images of twenty four Tirthankaras on the walls of the said temple. He is also said to have excavated a well for the Jaina monks who used to live in those caves . Thus we see that the Somavamsis patronised all the three Brahmanical faiths simultaneously.

By the end of the 11th Century A.D. and early 12th Century, the **Gangas** captured political power over Odisha. It was during the Ganga rule that the religious syncretism reached its high watermark. The first ruler of this dynasty, Ananta Varman Chodaganga Deva (1078 - 1147) started construction of the great Jagannath Temple at Puri. His successors completed the temple. The Ganga rulers warded off Muslim invasion of Odisha and extended their empire. The gigantic stone temple with its rare artistic and architectural skill enshrines the Jagannath triad i.e. Jagannath ,Balabhadra, and Subhadra symbolising the religious syncretism in Odisha. As the manifestation of Vishnu ,Jagannath has been identified with Narasimha¹⁵ , Purusottama and Krishna ¹⁶ and is worshipped with the mantraraja Narasimha

¹⁵ Narasimha the incarnation of Vishnu in man and lion form Hiranya Kasipu.

¹⁶ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathy , The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Odisha , Delhi, 1978, Ch.II. Pp.10,73,25.

mantra .Though Lord Jagannath is considered to be the manifestation of Vishnu , a keen scholar after observing the rituals and the iconographic details comes to a definite conclusion that the cult has not been derived from any particular religious faith, but it is a synthesis of many religious thoughts and ideas prevailing in the land from the earliest times .One can easily see the presence of the Jaina concept of transmigration of soul as a consequence of Karma , the Buddhist belief of ‘Nirvana’ and the Hindu theory of incarnation in the philosophy centering the Jagannath Cult. Nilakantha Das conceives the Jagannath triad as the embodiment of Jaina Trinity Samyakjnana ,Samyak Charita and Samyak dristi¹⁷.That the triad represent the Buddha , the Dhamma and the Sangha of Buddhism is the contention of some other scholars .Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda refers to Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu and Jagannath taking birth as Buddha¹⁸ . Some scholars also think that the triad represented the synthesis of three major religions of Hinduism i.e. Vaishnavism ,Shaivism and Saktism. Ananta Varman Chodaganga Deva (1078 - 1147) , the foremost Ganga monarch, in his Korni Copper Plate Grant ¹⁹ assumed the epithets of both Paramamahesvara (Saiva) and Paramavaishnava (vaisnava) . He also patronised Saktism and offered perpetual lamps to Bhagvati who is described as the presiding deity of the Ganga dynasty. Anagabhimadeva III, another Ganga ruler ,described himself in the Draksharma Temple Inscription as the ‘son’ of Visnu ,Shiva, and Durga (Purusottamaputra , Rudraputra ,and Durgaputra) ²⁰ .

By the 13th Century, the renowned Sun Temple (Black Pagoda) at Konark was constructed by the Ganga ruler Narsingha Deva – I who reigned from 1238 to 1264 A.D. At Konark, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, lie the ruins of the Surya or Sun temple built in stone around 1250 A.D .The Sun temple is set on a high base, its walls covered in extensive, detailed ornamental carving. These include twelve pairs of enormous wheels sculpted with spokes and hubs, representing the chariot wheels of the Sun god , who in mythology, rides a chariot driven by seven horses, sculpted here at the entrance staircase.The most popular theory associated with Konark temple is its magnets and the floating idol in the air.The uniqueness of the Sun Temple of Konark lies in the fact that it was built with an architectural setup of various magnets.During the construction of the main tower of the temple the artisans put an iron plate between every two stone pieces.There is a lodestone at the top of the temple was said to be a massive 52 ton magnet. According to legend, the statue of the Sun God inside the temple was built of a material with iron content and was said to be floating in air, without any physical support, due to the unique arrangements of the top magnet, the bottom magnet and the reinforced magnets around the temple walls.The placement of the main temple and the Sun God had been aligned in such a way that the first ray of the Sun from the coast would cross the Nata Mandir (Dancing Hall) and would fall & reflect from the diamond placed at the crown of the Sun God.The famous Sun temple of Konark represents the culmination of Odishan style.

Thus the long tradition of building temples resulted in the construction of magnificent temples like Rajarani , Muktesvara, , Brahmesvara, Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar ,Jagannath temple at Puri and the Sun temple at Konark.The Odishan temple style did not represent a fixed type. But in spite of the stylistic change that distinguishes one phase from another, we

¹⁷ M.N. Das (ed) ,Sidelights on History and culture of Odisha , Cuttack ,1978, p.378.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ JAHRS,Vol. I ,P.113.

²⁰ S.N. Rajguri, op,cit.,vol.V, Pt.I , No.37, pp.67-68.

find a remarkable continuity in the development of the style till it reaches the climax. The various ruling dynasties of Odisha from the Sailodbhavas to the Gajapatis devoted themselves in erecting a number of religious shrines in their kingdoms for sheer display of the aesthetic sensibilities and glorification of their reign. It further led to the proliferation of hundreds of temples dating from about the 6th century to the 16th century, throughout the length and breadth of the state enriching the art heritage of Odisha. The construction of temples did not stop in the sixteenth c. It continued in its decadent form. Manuscripts bearing illustrations of temples have been found in Odisha. Temple design is noticed in the traditional Jhoti on the walls of the houses in the villages. Modern temples are the legacy of this tradition.

Recently an ancient temple at Biropurusottampur village in Pipili tehsil of Puri district have been discovered. The ruins of a 6-7th century Shiva temple in Puri district makes it one of the oldest temples in Odisha and one of the earliest in the post-Gupta era. The temple locally known as Swapneswar Mahadev is located by the side of Ghateswar temple in the village and is made of square Khandolite stone blocks with no binding or cementing as is seen in most Odisha temples of 11th and 12th century onwards such as Jagannath temple and Konark temple. The neatly chiselled blocks denote an era when Kalingan traditional temple architectural style was in its infancy. The temple is devoid of any external embellishments on both the inner and outer walls; even the Parsadevata niches are empty. The region was a part of the South Toshali area of the ancient Kalinga kingdom and finds mention in the copper plate inscriptions of the post-Gupta period. The Kanasa plates of Sri Lokavighraha and Olasingh plates of Bhanuvaradhana, issued in the 6th-7th century throw light on the worship of Maninagesvar (Shiva) and Naga Cult of the South Toshali region. Taking into account the material and style of this temple, it is evident that it was built at least 1300 to 1400 years ago, and is among the oldest intact temples in the region.

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1. R.C. Majumdar (ed), History and Culture of Indian people, vol. V (The struggle for Empire), p.535
2. Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture, North India, vol. ii, Part – 1, New Delhi, 1988.
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