

CULTURE OF ODISHA

Architecture of Parsurameswara Temple

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • March 22, 2018 • 5 min read

Bhubaneswar's Parsuramesvara temple dates all the way back to the seventh century A.D. Although the plan is tri-ratha, the Gandi reflects the Pancharatha style. This temple's pagas (pilasters), which are a distinctive feature of Odishan temple architecture, were not fully developed. A niche is contained within each of the three pilasters. The central pilaster has the most niches, while the other two have an equal number. This temple contains a total of eleven niches. Instead of Ayudha, the sikhara portion contains an amalaka, a kalasi, and a lingam. This is a unique feature of Odisha's Parasuramesvara temple.

Parsurameswar Temple, Bhubaneswar

Credit: Balaji

The Jagamohana or Mukhasala first appeared in Parasuramesvara's temple. It is rectangular in shape and features a skylight between two sloping terrace roof tyres. Two rows of three pillars on each side support the roof, which is also supported by the two side walls. The addition of the porch-hall to the main shrine represents the second phase of Odisha's temple architecture evolution. Other architectural peculiarities are reflected in the Parsuramesvara temple. It has two doors and four irregularly placed windows in the Mukhasala. One door is located on the south side, while the other is located in the western wall. It is directly across from the sanctuary. The north and south windows aid in ventilation. Each window on either side of the west door contains musical and dancing figures.

The porch and shrine walls are carved with a variety of sculptures. The temple's decorative motif includes scro creepers, human and animal figures, and mythological stories. Although the carvings are crude and coarse, they convey a sense of vitality and naturalness. Such sculptures exemplified simplicity and elegance. Even today, these sculptures are unmatched in Odisha's temple architecture history.

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Architectural Specifications and Design Elements

Orissan temples are divided into two sections: the sanctum, called vimana, and a viewing platform, called jagamohana, from which pilgrims view the sanctum (hall of worshippers). The first temple to have this addition is Parashurameshvara Temple. As seen in some of the older temples in Bhubaneswar, the initial deul temples lacked the jagamohana, whereas the later temples included two additional structures: the nata-mandapa (festival hall) and bhoga-mandapa (hall of offerings). The vimana's plan is square, and its walls are divided into sections called rathas or pagas. The vimana is crowned by a curvilinear tower (called bada) resembling a pyramid made of horizontal planes. The temple's sanctum measures 9.88 9.75 ft (3.0 3.0 m) on the inside, 19.75 21 ft (6.0 6.4 m) on the outside, and stands 40.25 ft tall (12.3 m). Amalaka, a stone disc with ridged rims, is placed over the temple's bada.

The jagamohana is rectangular in shape and features a sloping roof with two elements separated by clerestory windows.

The jagamohana is 24.94 18.33 feet (7.6 5.6 metres) long on the inside and 29.33 28.58 feet (8.9 8.7 metres) long on the outside. Pata jali are latticed windows with square or rectangular perforations. Additionally, there are trellised windows adorned with stone slab sculptures of dancers and musicians. The interior is lit by doors and latticed windows. The connection between the vimana and the jagmohana is not perfectly constructed, leading some scholars to hypothesise that the porch was added much later; however, the primitive

connection is attributed to the construction technique. The temple was built by burying completed sections in inclined layers of earth and dragging heavy stones up them.

Mahisamardini Durga, Parsurameswar Temple

Credit: Bernard Gagnon

The temple contains the earliest depiction of a six-armed Mahishamardini (Durga) with a headdress, karna kundala (ornament), mala (garland), and

kankana (anklet). Durga is seen holding a sword in her upper left hand and pressing the face of the demon buffalo with her upper right hand. She is seen piercing the demon's neck with a trishula (trident) in her left middle hand, while holding a pointed weapon in her lower left hand. Khetaka is held in her right middle hand, while a bow is held in her lower right hand. Durga has a similar image in the Vaital temple, which is a well-known Shakta centre.

Though the temple is a Shaiva shrine, its walls are adorned with images of numerous Shakta deities as Parsvadevatas. The temple is the first in Bhubaneswar to contain images of Saptamatrika, a sextet of seven goddesses. These images are sandwiched between Ganesha and Virabhadra representations. All other images, with the exception of Ganesha, are depicted in their respective vahanas (vehicles). The temple's wall also features an eight-armed dancing Ardhanarishvara, an image of Siva and Parvati, and images of Ganga and Yamuna. Additionally, there are images of Vishnu, Indra, Surya, and Yama in the rectangular niches that surround the porch's base. On the southern wall is a sculpture of Kartikeya riding his peacock vehicle. Other notable carvings depict Shiva subduing the demon-king Ravana, who is seen attempting to uproot Shiva's abode, Mount Kailasa. Shiva is sculpted in the temple as Nataraja in various tandavas (dance poses). As is the case with other Orissa temples, the interiors are unadorned. Other carvings on the temple include scenes and fragments of designs featuring a variety of fruits, flowers, birds, and animals. This temple and the ones in Vaital Deula share a floral motif trailing from the tail of a bird, while the ones in Mukteshvara Temple share a vase and flower motif.

On the pilasters of jagamohan and on the faces of the temple's vimana are grotesque figures of vetalas (ghosts). Nagas (snake-men) and their female counterparts, nagins and other females, are depicted in a variety of graceful but chaste poses. Numerous scenes on the vimana are devoted to pilgrimage. The other noteworthy descriptive representation on

the vimana is the hunting scene above the central niche on the south side, in which stags flee from a hunter. On the outermost frame surrounding the jaganamohana's latticed window, delightful scenes of monkeys engaging in all manner of mischief are depicted. The temple's vimana is a triratha with a faint resemblance to a Pancharatha, as indicated by the projecting niches flanking the central projection. The bada of the vimana abruptly begins with the talapatna or pavement, which is composed of three rather than five elements and encloses a parallelepiped rather than a cubic sanctum.

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