

# Exploring the Majestic Architecture of Puri: A Review of Temples and Beyond

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## ABSTRACT

Nestled on the eastern coast of the country, Puri stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage and awe-inspiring architectural brilliance of ancient India. At the heart of Puri's cultural tapestry lies its magnificent temple architecture, which has captivated visitors for centuries. Steeped in spirituality and adorned with intricate carvings, the temples of Puri exude an unparalleled charm and grace. Each structure tells a tale of devotion, artistry, and the enduring legacy of a bygone era. From the renowned Jagannath Temple, dedicated to Lord Jagannath, to the lesser-known architectural gems scattered throughout the city, Puri's temple architecture is a treasure trove waiting to be explored. Prepare to be enchanted as we embark on a journey to unravel the secrets behind Puri's timeless treasures. Join us as we delve into the architectural marvels that dot the landscape, immersing ourselves in the divine aura and intricate craftsmanship that define these sacred structures. Discover the interplay of spirituality and artistry, as the temples of Puri reveal their stories and unveil the grandeur of Odisha's temple architecture. Whether you are an avid history enthusiast, a connoisseur of art, or a seeker of spiritual solace, Puri's temple architecture offers an experience that transcends time. So, fasten your seatbelts as we embark on this remarkable expedition, exploring the exquisite temple architecture of Puri, where divinity and architectural splendor converge.

**Key Words:** Architectural, Connoisseur, Immersing, Nestled, Spirituality, Scattered, Spiritual-Solace, Tapestry, Treasure.

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## INTRODUCTION

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 close to the centre of this way with their heritage as a prestige and treasure. Most of the Indian religious philosophies and rituals believe in idle worshipping and from the ancient time, temple has been playing an important role in society. It may be religious or socio-cultural point of view, construction of temples has been patronized from 3rd Century B.C. The art and architecture of a nation considered as their property. The history of Orissan art and architecture starts with its dated history from 261 B.C when Ashokaconquered this land, then known as Kalinga. The art and architecture of Orissa in its formative phase take a new turn. The style was so balanced and beautiful that is carved a new identity for itself. This was famous as Kalinga School of Art.Puri is famous in the world for its beautiful temples. Infact, the temples constitutes the most dominant and significant form of architecture in Orissa. They form “one of the most compact and homogeneous architecture groups in India”.

Illustrated by Indian Silpa-sastras, Indian temples can be categorised in three main types, i.e. that is Nagara, Dravida and Vesara style. As the Non-Hindus invaded India in 11th century many Nagara style temples were looted and destroyed and today a very few specimens exist to study the styles and forms and most of them are found prominently in the state of Orissa. Out of three styles of architecture found in India, Orissa has followed the Nagara style with a distinctive regional bias of its own known 'Kalinga Art'. An inscription in Amritesvara temple at Holal (Karnataka) dated 1235 mention the names of all 4 categories like Nagara, DravidaVesara and Kalinga.In due course of time, several canonical text were written for the construction of temples.

### Typical Puri (Orissan) Temple:

Orissan temples constituted a prominent sub-style of the Nagara style of North Indian temples known as Kalinga style of temple. The Kalinga style of temples can be categorised into 3 major types:-

- (1) Rekha Deula (temple with curvilinear shape)
- (2) PidhaDeula (temple with pyramidal shape roof)
- (3) KhakharaDehla (temple with vaulted shape roof)

There are 36 varieties of Rekha, 5 varieties of pidha and 3 varieties of Khakhra with proportionate measurements of each part and their heights. The typical orissan temple consists of both Rekha and Pidha the Rekha for the deula (sanctum) and the Podhadeula to serve as the audience hall (Jagmohan). The Pidhadeula added to the front of the Rekha deula is covered by a pyramidal roof of residing steps. The similar height of Pidha-deula represents a balanced with the higher Rekha – deula and greatly enhance the grandeur of the soaring curvilinear spire with square sanctum. some key features of a typical Puri temple:

1. **Deul or Rekha Deul:** The main temple structure, known as the deul or rekhadeul, is characterized by a curvilinear tower or shikhara that rises high above the sanctum anctorum (garbhagriha). The shikhara is pyramidal in shape and consists of several tiers or levels, each adorned with intricate carvings.
2. **Jagamohana or MuktiMandap:** In front of the deul, there is a porch-like structure called the jagamohana or muktimandap. It serves as an assembly hall or gathering space for devotees and is often adorned with elaborately carved pillars and walls.
3. **Natamandira or BhogaMandap:** Located in front of the jagamohana, the natamandira or bhogamandap is an open hall used for ceremonial dance performances and offering food (bhoga) to the deities. It is characterized by its unique architecture and ornate carvings.
4. **Vimana:** The topmost part of the deul, also known as the vimana, is the pinnacle of the temple and is adorned with a kalasha (a pot-like structure) and a chakra (a disc-like structure). The vimana is often highly decorated and serves as a visual focal point of the temple.
5. **Stone Carvings:** Puri temples are renowned for their exquisite stone carvings. The walls, pillars, and doorways of the temple are adorned with intricate sculptures depicting various gods, goddesses, mythical creatures, and scenes from Hindu mythology. These carvings showcase the exceptional craftsmanship and artistic skills of the artisans of Odisha.
6. **Temple Complex:** A typical Puri temple is not just a standalone structure but also includes a complex with various auxiliary buildings and structures. These may include mandapas (halls), kitchen areas, administrative offices, and accommodation facilities for the temple priests and staff.
7. **Boundary Wall and Gates:** Puri temples often have a boundary wall that encloses the temple complex. The wall may feature decorative gateways or entrances known as toranas, which are also embellished with intricate carvings.

### Components of Puri temple:

As regards the plan, in elevation the orissan temple has four components, such as pista(platform) the bada (the vertical wall) gandi (the trunk) the mastaka (head or crown). The pista is absent in many temples. The bada consists of three parts, such as pabhaga (foot portion or bottom part), jangha (the high part) and baranda (moulding forming uppermost part of bada). The Jangha is sub-divided into two parts talajangha and upper jangha by a set of mouldings known as bandhana. There is similarity between the main temple and the pidha up to bada. The difference starts from the gandi whereas gandi of the Rekha deula inclines in a convex form that of Pidha takes a pyramidal form. The gandi of Rekha deula is divided into several pagas (vertical projections). The corner pagas is known as Kanika-pagas are further sub-divided into horizontal section known as bhumi by miniature amlas.

The central paga is known as Rahapaga and the next two as Kanika and Anu-raha. The door or entrance comes on Raha-pagas whereas niches come on the other three raha-pagas which go down up to pa-bhaga. It is thus in the plan of four-door shrine. Depending upon the number of pages (also called rathas), temples are classified as triratha, panchratha, saptratha etc. The topmost course of gandi is called visama.

1. **Deul (Main Temple):** The main temple, known as the deul or rekhadeul, is the central and most sacred structure of the Puri temple. It houses the main deities, Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. The deul has a towering curvilinear shikhara or spire, which is the distinctive feature of Odishan temple architecture.
2. **Garbhagriha (Sanctum Sanctorum):** Within the deul, the garbhagriha is the innermost chamber where the deities are enshrined. The garbhagriha is accessible only to the temple priests and is considered the holiest part of the temple.
3. **NataMandir (Dancing Hall):** Positioned in front of the jagamohana, the NataMandir is a hall used for religious and cultural performances, including traditional dance and music dedicated to the deities. It

- features intricately carved pillars and walls.
- 4. BhogaMandap (Offering Hall):** Situated in front of the NataMandir, the BhogaMandap is a hall where food offerings (bhoga) are made to the deities. It is also a space where devotees gather during festivals and rituals.
  - 5. Kitchen and Cooking Area:** The Puri temple complex has a dedicated kitchen area where food is prepared for the deities and later distributed as prasadam (holy food) to devotees.

### Initial stage of temple architecture

The history of temple building in Orissa is said to have begun in 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The earliest surviving temple at Orissa are the three ruined temples like Lakshmaneswar, Bharteswar and Satrugneswar. On the basis of an inscription in Lakshmaneswar temple the date of the temple are assigned to the latter half of 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Each of them has niches on its bada to contain parsvadevta. The front of Bharateswara temple is carved with two chaitya windows containing Ravananugraha from of Shiva and Natraja.

In the lower and upper niches respectively. These temples are unicameral having only the sanctum without the Jagmohana. The temple architecture of Puri evolved over centuries, influenced by the prevailing architectural styles and cultural traditions of the region. Here is an overview of the initial stage of temple architecture in Puri:

- 1. Early Period:** During the early period, the temple architecture in Puri was characterized by simple and modest structures. The early temples were typically small in size and made of perishable materials such as wood and thatch. These early structures served as places of worship and were primarily dedicated to local deities.
- 2. Emergence of Stone Temples:** With the advancements in architectural techniques and the availability of skilled craftsmen, the use of stone in temple construction became prominent. Stone temples began to emerge, featuring more durable and elaborate structures. The use of stone allowed for intricate carvings and finer details in temple architecture.
- 3. Influence of Kalinga Architecture:** The temple architecture of Puri, including its initial stage, was deeply influenced by the broader architectural style of the Kalinga Empire. Kalinga architecture is characterized by curvilinear towers, intricate carvings, and emphasis on horizontal lines. These elements started to manifest in the early Puri temples.
- 4. Temple Layout:** The early temples in Puri followed a basic layout, comprising a sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) to house the deity and a small porch or mandapa in front of it. The mandapa provided space for devotees to gather and participate in religious activities.
- 5. Architectural Features:** The early temples in Puri showcased some distinctive architectural features. The temple structures had pyramidal roofs, gradually tapering upwards. The roof was often crowned with a finial or a pinnacle. The walls were adorned with simple but elegant carvings, depicting deities, celestial beings, and floral motifs.
- 6. Ritualistic Significance:** The temples in Puri were designed and built to facilitate religious rituals and practices. The layout and orientation of the temples were aligned with the principles of Vastu Shastra, an ancient Indian architectural science that emphasizes harmony with nature and the cosmos.
- 7. Material Usage:** During the initial stage of temple architecture in Puri, local materials such as laterite stone and sandstone were primarily used for construction. These materials were abundantly available in the region and offered durability to the structures.

### Architecture between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The next stage of growth of temple architecture is noticed in the temples built between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The 8<sup>th</sup> century temples include Vaital, Sisiresvar, Uttaresvar, Mohini, Markandeshwar. The notable temples are Bhringeswar, Shiva temple, Kankeshwar, Manikeswar. The changes and innovations of the period are seen at Sisiresvar temple. It is pancharatra in plan. The front rahapaga contains the image of Nataraja in a chaitya window. The Jagmohan, like that of parsurameswar is rectangular in plan and has a terrace roof but it does not have any window or pillar. It is an advancement in architectural feature.

### Architecture between 9 – 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

Temples of 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century evolved more architectural features like the harmonious proportion of pagas on the Bada and the Gandi. The pyramidal form of the Jagmohana emerged in this period. The Singhanath temple in the bed of Mahanadi in Cuttack district, the twin temples of NilaMadhava and Siddeshvara at Gandharadi in Boud district are some of the specimens of the period. Singhanath is the most advanced offormative phase temples as far as the joint between shrine and Mukhsala is concerned. The Muktesvara temple belongs to the period of transition. The sanctum is full-fledged pancharatha in plan and the roof of the Mandapa has a horizontal tier with kalasa as the crowning element.

### Temple architecture between 11<sup>th</sup> cent. to 13<sup>th</sup> Cent.

The Rajarani temple (11<sup>th</sup> cent.) represents a unique experiment in temple architecture. Its shikhara has been clustered by miniature repetition of the shikhar around the gandi in the Khujraho style. The beautiful female figures and standing Digpalas are the outstanding features of the temple. The Rajarani temple and its Jagmohana facing east stand on a platform having three mouldings. The bada is divided into five parts indicating a progress from trianga to panchangabada. While the Vimana represents Rekha style clustered with miniature shikharas, the Jagmohana is a typical pyramid structure similar to that of the muktesvara temple. The Jagmohan is panchratha in plan and crowned by a Kalasa.

### CONCLUSION

Puri is a great religious and sacred centre and a place of pilgrimage. It owes its importance entirely to its connection with the famous temple of Lord Jagannath. The Sanskrit names used to describe the holy place in general are dhama, kshetra and tirtha. Dhama means "abode" and it refers to the fact that God has a special residence place there. God is omnipresent in every single atom of the creation, but some special places have been blessed and surcharged with spiritual power by divine activities and by the activities of holy people there. Puri is an important ancient city of Orissa. It is famous in the world for the shrine of Lord Jagannath and has been considered as one of the four sacred dhamas of Hindu religion. The Kosalananda k Kavyam of the seventeenth century A.D. has described Puri as the city of nectar and ornament of the earth. Admiring the sanctity and the holiness of Puri W.W. Hunter observed that "konwn to every hamlet throughout India, and to every civilised nation on earth, as the abode of Jagannath, the Lord of the world.

Puri raised some question about the Hindu tradition through the prodigious display of divine images, its elaborate ritual traditions and its understanding of humanism. In different phases of time from the past the antiquity of Purusottamakshetra Puri remain unsolved. We have no concrete evidence regarding the remote antiquity of Puri. Puri is the seat of Jagannath the Lord of the universe the sanctity of the place from pre-historic period. In absence of any corroborative data it is, however difficult to trace the antiquity of Puri to the pre-historic period. Puri as tirtha first finds mention in the Vanaparva of Mahabharata, and its glory and sanctity are elaborately described in several Puranas, still its cultural history can be definitely traced from the seventh century of the christian era. When Indrabhuti of Vajrayana sect of Buddhism flourished in Orissa. Next we come to the age of the great Shankaracharya who founded one of his four pithas called 'GovardhanaPitha' here which has remained in existence till today. To sum up we can say that architecture is an art, and it may be similar from 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 here flourished to its mature phase.

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