Representation of Animal Motifs in the Temple Art of Odisha: A Study from 6th to 7th Century CE

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Abstract:

Animal played an important role in Indian art from the prehistoric rock art to the medieval temple art. Ancient Indians had recognized the animals' right to co-exist with man and therefore they were loved, nurtured and even worshipped. The Odishan temples are a mosaic of rich and varied motifs, which not only shows the excellence of the Odishan artists but also their imaginative temper at its highest.. These motifs in addition to beautifying the structure serve symbolically as auspicious images to protect the temple from real or imaginary evils. Such motifs are not exclusive to the state of Odisha, but their style is unmistakably representative of the regional school of craft and art. Among the various aspects of decorations in Odishan temples, the 'animal motif' played an important role in the thought and action of man. Thus, the study of temple art would be incomplete without including animal motifs.

Key Words: Animal, Motifs, Kalingan Temple, Deul, Parasuramesvara, Odisha.

Introduction:

Animals are essential in every aspect of human life. In order to impress upon the commoners about their importance, the animals were given the status of gods and goddesses. They declared that the Almighty incarnates in different animal forms. Tribes and individuals assume the names of their totem animals. The kings and the emperors opted for different animals in their emblems. Many festivals were/are observed in honor of several animals. In order to inculcate love for animals among children, animals were made heroes in stories. The artists gave them prime position in art and architecture.

The construction of temple as one of the most important architectural feature of Gupta art started in Odisha few year after its assimilation with the Gupta Empire. The Nagara *sikhara* style of architecture, which was the decisive innovation of the imperial Guptas gradually, became the diagnostic trait of Odishan architectural activity. Large numbers of temples were constructed in Odisha during the 6th to the 15th century C.E. Within the broad framework the Odishan craftsmen followed a certain form and class in the field of the temple architecture. The manifestation of this school of architecture in Odisha can be labeled as Kalingan style after the territory where the temples are standing. The inscription found at the *mukha-mandapa* of the Amritesvara temple at Holal in the Bellary district of Karnataka, dated to 1235 CE., refers to Kalingan style as one of the major architectural style along with the Nagara, Dravida and Vesara style of temple architecture of India[1].

One of the outstanding importance's to the study of Kalingan temple art is the implication of its own textual tradition, like *Bhubanapradipa* and *Silpa Prakash* for the purpose of construction. These texts mentioned three broad types of temples of Odisha like, *rekha, pidha* and *khakhara*. The *rekha* and *pidha* form two component parts of one architectural scheme, the former for the sanctum with its curvilinear spire and the latter represented by the porch having pyramidal roof made of *pidhas*. The *khakhara* order is noted by a semi-cylindrical roof and usually meant for female divinities or *Shakti* cult. In the earlier temples, there were no *pidha* types of *jagamohana*, the frontal hall rather it was distinguish by a flat roof. However, in due course the growing need for ornamentation replaced the earlier flat roofed porch by a pyramidal *jagamohana*. Again in course of time due to growing need of rituals two more structures were added namely *nata-mandira* or the hall of dancing and *bhoga-mandapa*, or the hall of offering. The popular name of the sanctum in Odisha is *deul*. The Odishan temple is remarkable for its plan and elevation. The outer projections on the Odishan temple are known as *pagas* and depending on the number of *pagas,* the temples are categories into *tri-ratha, pancha-ratha, sapta-ratha* and *nava-ratha* temples. These categories also clearly suggest evolutionary pattern as *tri-ratha* plan was meant for the earliest temples.

As the treaties on ancient architecture conceived the temple as a cosmic being, so the different parts are named after limbs of human body. All three types of temples are divided into four parts along the vertical plain. The four vertical parts are *pista* or platform, *bada* or wall portion, *gandi* or body portion or the tower and lastly the *mastaka* or the finial. Architecturally the *pistha* or platform is not a compulsory feature of Odishan temple rather it was introduced during the Ganga period. All these four parts are both architecturally related and integrated into an artistic composition. The *bada* or the wall portion is divided into few constituent elements like *pabhaga, jangha* and *baranda.* In the earlier phase the *bada* has only three parts known as *trianga-bada*, which was replaced by *panchanga-bada* in the later phase, where the *bada* is composed of *pabhaga, tala-jangha, bandhana, upara-jangha* and *baranda.* The *pabhaga* denotes the bottom part of the wall and is composed of mouldings called *khura, kumbha, pata, kani* and *basanta.* The *baranda* forming the topmost part of the *bada* and is composed of a series of seven or ten mouldings. The *bada* portion of both *rekha* and *pidha* vimana are alike, but there is difference between the decorations of *gandi* portion. The *gandi* of the *pidha* temple is of pyramidal shape, consisting of numbers of *pidhas* or receding tiers. The *gandi* portion of the *rekha* temple has a curvilinear spire. This towering superstructure of the earlier temples is squats whereas the mature phase temples have soaring *sikhara.* The projected portion of *gandi* is

decorated with various decorative elements. The corner projection of the *gandi* shows several *bhumis* and has *bhumi-amalas*. The *mastaka* of the temple of *rekha* order consists of the *beki,* the *amala*, the *khapuri*, the *kalasa* and the *ayudha.*

One of the most important features of Odishan temple is that the interior walls of the temples were generally plain where as the exteriors were lavishly decorated. The Odishan temples are not only architecturally important but also store house of sculptures; even it is assumed that an Odishan temple itself is a sculptural in a gigantic scale. The profusion of sculptures on the body of the Odishan temples has evoked admiration of the critics of Indian art[2]. According to Stella Kramrish, "the coherence of its monumental shape is enriched by its carvings, nowhere else in India are the walls of the temples as intimately connected with their sculptures. The temple here is a work of monumental sculpture of which the single carvings from the intricate surface[3]. A perfect harmony between the architecture and sculptures has been achieved on the Odishan temples. The Odishan temples are remarkable for the abundance of sculptures. These sculptures can be divided into two broad categories, religious and secular. Out of all the decorative motifs or so called sculptural motifs a notable feature in the decorative scheme of the Odishan temple is the abundance of animal sculptures. These motifs play a major role in the iconographic and decorative programme of the Odishan temple and these sculptures by their numbers, variety and purpose always attract the attention of passerby, pilgrims, devotees and scholars.

The present study mainly deals with secular aspects of animal art. So here animal motifs are discussed, which are not associated with the cult divinities. Apart from occurring in association with the gods and goddesses as their mounts, the animals have also found place on the surface of the temples as elements of decoration which is termed as secular art in present study. They are found on all the temples of our period and have no chronological significance. Of them lions and elephants are very common in their occurrence. The elephant on the temples have been most realistically treated. In the Odishan art the elephants occupy an important place. In fact the Odishan litho art begins with the elephant figure of Dhauli. Lion on elephant is a very common motifs found on the temples. Lions, called *udyats* are projected from the *raha paga* of the *gandi* in all the latter temples[4].

From the existing monuments, and the finds of the innumerable architectural and sculptural fragments it appears that the region of Bhubaneswar was an important centre of art in Odisha in past. Here we find hundreds of temples, big and small, in different stages of preservation and belonging to different stages of the evolution of the temple architecture. This is also the place where all three categories of temples -*rekha, pidha*, and *khakhara* are found. From all accounts it appears that the place was a great centre of temple building activity in the past. All kinds of experiments leading to the perfection as well as excellence of the temple architecture were conducted in this place. Whatever innovations and improvements experimented from time to time on the temples of Bhubaneswar was subsequently applied into the temples of other parts of the state. In view of the above importance of Bhubaneswar and our limitation of study, we consider it most appropriate to discuss the some selected temples of Bhubaneswar belonging to the Sailodbhava dynasty of Odisha which also represents the most earliest group of surviving temples. As it is not possible to discuss the representation of animal's sculptures on all the temples of Sailodbhava period, we shall deal with a few examples which are important and represent their phase of construction with all details in chronological order. Animal motifs initially appeared in the earliest surviving Orissan temples and continued to be a major decorative motif throughout the long period of temple construction. Even on temples where most of the other decorative motifs are eliminated, these motifs as an obligatory decorative device marked their presence.

Temples of 6th and early 7th Centuries of the CE constitute an important epoch in the cultural history ofOdisha. In the political arena, as a bone of contention between clashing armies from north and south India, it served as a buffer zone separating distinct cultural tradition. Then Odisha was ruled partly by the Sailodbhavas of Kongoda. It is during this period that the Odishan temple first emerges, the earliest extant temples of which are standing at Bhubaneswar. In spite of unfavorable political condition filled with war and conquests, the Odishan temple evolves into a peculiar type apart from other architectural styles with apparent external influence[5]. It is assumed that although the

Sailodbhavas of Kongoda annexed the area around Bhubaneswar there is no evidence that any of the Sailodbhavas kings were responsible for the construction of any temple at Bhubaneswar, though it is evident that many temples were being constructed at this time.

Satrughanesvara Group of Temples:

The Satrughanesvara group of temples, the earliest standing temples at Bhubaneswar, are the three ruined temples in a line and enclosed within a compound wall composed of debris and fallen sculptures. These three temples named as Lakhmanesvara, Bharatesvara and Satrughanesvara (Fig.1) are short and simple structures of *rekha* order. Near the temple numerous detached sculptures have been found which, according to K.C. Panigrahi, probably belonged to a type of temple of which no specimen have survives, though some may yet be found as there are numerous mounds formed of ancient ruined which have not yet been excavated [6]. The epigraphic evidence from Lakhmanesvara temple tentatively dated the temple to the latter half of the 6th century. Presently all the temples are renovated. All the temples are facing west and simple structures with *tri-ratha* plan. In spite of early date of construction and small appearance, these temples are decorated with various motifs. Besides the cult images and other decorative programme, these temples are relieved with one of the most common motifs appearing on almost the entire Odishan temples those are the secular animal motifs.

It is impossible to know the decorative programme of the structure or to determine whether it was contemporary with the *deula* due to prevailing practice in Odisha continuously adding structures to the original shrine. The most interesting sculptures still adhering to the *bada* of the *deula* are rectangular projecting blocks, resembling wooden beam ends and decorated primarily with animal motifs, which form a lower string course just above the *pabhaga* mouldings on the projecting subsidiary *pagas* and the portal jambs. In *jangha* portions -the projecting blocks are carved with lions, elephant, monkeys, human figures and *mithuna* (amorous) motifs . In these early examples at Bhubaneswar both animal and human motifs intermingle where as on latter temples they became standardized with only elephant and lion represented. The motifs itself most likely derives from the dentil comice appearing on the architrave of early Gupta temples and Buddhist caves carved with lion-heads at Deogarh , Merhia and in the shape of *kritimukha* (face of glory) mask at Ajanta[7].

The *baranda* is decorated similarly to the top moulding of the *pabhaga*. The *chaitya* arch medallions of *gandi* portion house various deities, *mithuna* or lion motifs. The *chaitya* medallions are crowned by *Kritimukha* mask. The horizontal lintel over the doorway and *raha* niches on these temples is dominated by a rectangular panel invariable carved with a narrative scene, animal procession. Animals are also popular decorative motifs among other motifs, though diminutive in size, are warriors fighting various animals, such as *makara* (crocodile)*,* or engaged in combat. These scenes generally appear on the mouldings of the *pabhaga*, *baranda* and *gandi*. Of the animal motifs appearing on these temples the most popular are the lion, elephant, *makara* and *hamsa* (swan/ a bird). The lion and elephant are particularly popular as decorative motifs on the projecting *tala-bandhana* blocks. Generally the elephants are depicted in profile while only the head and shoulders of the lion are rendered, either frontally or in profile. Absent, however, are the popular motifs on a lion attacking an elephant (*gaja-kranta*). The frontally depicted *kritimukha* mask is most prevalent on the *bhumi-barandis*, where it is normally housed within *chaitya* medallions. Its face is highly stylized and often includes hole, drilled in to the stone in the area of its elaborately combed mustache. The *kirtimukha* is characterized by projecting horns, fangs, frowning eyebrows, bulging eyes and fan-shaped ears[8]. The aquatic animal *makara* is generally represented in profile with a short body. But with a tail often assuming fantastic are bisque designs with tendrils curling back towards heads. The *hamsa* receives the most fantastic treatment, in many cases serving as a fountain head for decorative scroll work. In some instance its neck is stretched out to exaggerate lengths its head back towards its tail. Occasionally two birds face are another in the act of kissing or with festoons of pearls dripping from their backs. The carving technique vary from rather shallow engraving to deep perpendicular cutting, suggesting the use of drill, which result in a lacelike play of light and dark rhythms. Shallow cutting is usually employed for geometric motifs; whereas deeper cutting occurs most frequently with organic motifs such as *hamsalata* (*lata* means creeper). These earliest extant temples evince the basic element

of the latter temples in rudimentary forms, suggesting a certain maturity; there is a lack of uniformity and symmetry in the all decorative programme and individual motifs[9].

Svarnajalesvara Temple:

The Svamajalesvara temple is chronologically next to the earlier Satrughanesvara group of temple. The temple faces toward east and is in dilapidated condition. This temple also exhibits some popular figure motifs on its sculptural part. Among the popular motifs, the animal motifs are prominent. In *jangha* portions projecting blocks are decorated with elephants and lions. The manes of the lions are highly stylized, appearing like cascading pine-cones. Of the animals, the most numerous are *makaras,* most of whom are associated with scenes from the Ramayana depicted on the north facade. In one example a monkey is housed in a *chaitya* medallion where he is seated and holds a citrus in his hands. There are also hybrid animals and figures, one of whom is most likely *gomukha*, the bull faced *yakshas*. As on the Satrughanesvara, there are diminutive images of centaurs and hunters on the horseback, including one, carrying a seated figure, being attacked by a spotted tiger. There are also many hybrid figures. In general the overall quality of the motifs of Svamajalesvara is more consistent than on the earlier temples. Some of the carving is still rather eroded, however and the motifs are not as refined or sophisticated as on the latter Parasuramesvara temple and more closely related to those on the earlier temples of the Lakhmanesvara group.

The Parasuramesvara Temple:

The Parasuramesvara temple (Fig.2) is one of the best preserved specimens that belong to the early phase of Odishan temple. Paleographically, the temple has been assigned to the 7th century CE [10]. The temple presently consisting of a *deul* and *jagamohana* ,faces west and enclosed within a compound wall. The *deul*, has a square and squat *gandi* and its *bada* rises directly from the pavement, where as *jagamohana* is a rectangular hall with a terraced roof that slopes in two stages with a clerestory in between. The roof is supported by six monolithic pillars, arranged in two equal rows. Besides the main entrance there are also provisions of two more doorways each on southern and northern wall. Besides the doorways, there are four latticed windows, an early feature in the decoration of the *jagamohana*.

The temple also contains large number of decorative elements and out of those entire elements; animal motifis an important one. The lintel above the niches on the east and north sides of *bada* is relieved with narrative scenes, the hunting of wild elephants. A man seated on a horse is spearing a lion or fabulous animal, another, piercing the body of an elephant, another again, defending himself from the attack of a lion or fabulous animal with a shield[11].The decoration above the *pabhaga* begins with the *tala-bandhana* consisting of six projecting blocks. The projecting blocks are decorated primarily with elephants or lions, only occasionally human figures. So, that the decorative programme is becoming more standardized. The *baranda* recess is decorated with lion motifs at the comers. On the left of the western face of the *Jagamohana* is depicted the scene of capture of an elephant by domestic ones. The wild elephant has one of his legs tied with a rope, a man on front is continuously attempting to tie the right hind leg of the wild elephant with the noosed end of a rope, and the animal is kept at bay with a long spear by the rider of an elephant in front. The elephants are very life like and seem to have been copied from nature[12].
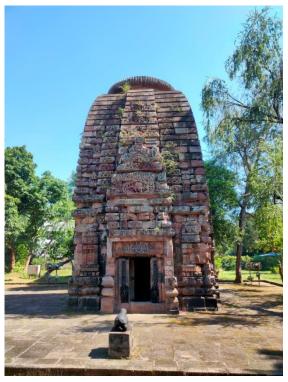
Animal figures has found main device of decorative art in the Parasuramesvara temple. Among them lion and elephant are predominately found. In earlier temples they appear as single figures in horizontal or vertical rows. Sometimes only the heads of the lions are traced in the medallions endowed within the *chaitya* arches. The representations of full figures of the lions are merely conventional but the elephants seem to have been copied from nature. "No where perhaps have these animals been so naturally depicted", observes K.C. Panigrahi as they are found in rows of herds or in combat with their fellow creatures or with the lions or while being captured and trained, the scenes of realism and perspective exhibited by the sculptures in depiction them has been schematically represented and their tails have invariably been shown up raised to reach the heads in the foreparts. In the scenes of the elephant capture, that appear in the Parasuramesvara and the
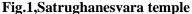
Svamajalesvara temples, both the animals as well as the incidents of their capture have been most naturalistically depicted[13]. The most popular animal motifs is the lion, represented frontally as a *kritimukha* mask , in profile pouching on a crouching elephant or prostrate warrior , or as the mount of Durga . In many cases ornate foliage flows out from the mask of the *kritimukha* in tentacle fashion producing an overall effect of a creeping squid like creature. The largest lion, apart from the *dopicha-simhas* added to the *beki* during repairs are the addorsed lions flanking the seated images at the apex of the *vajra-mastaka* on the *rahas*. They function here as guardian motifs and serves as prototypes for the *udyata*-lions appearing on latter temples. On the projecting blocks of the *tala-bandhana*, the lion is represented both in profile and frontally, as a full lion or merely a head[14].

Representation of peacock is noticed abundantly for the top most canopy of the niche and the top most frieze of the *bada*. Makaras are again in abundance, particularly on the top moulding of the *pagas* or on the *bhumi* mouldings of the *gandi*. The *makara* in particular is decorated with great masses of arabesque tendrils which frequently turn into ornamental scrolls extending the length of the moulding. In other cases, particularly when carved with the *vajra-mastaka* motifs, a warrior is depicted one leg in the mouth of the *makara*. The *hamsa* is also frequently associated with arabesque scroll work and *chaitya* motifs. The scroll motifs are frequently enmeshed with figure or animal motifs, particularly on the top *pabhaga* moulding, *bhumi* moulding of the *gandi* or in the *baranda* recess on the *raha*[15].

Conclusion:

In summary, though these early temples of Bhubaneswar are architecturally similar there is enough dissimilarity, particularly noticeable in individual motifs, to suggest an evolving decorative programme. There are two major trends noticeable in the minor decorative motifs. The first is a unifying trend whereby the basic components of the various motifs became standardized. The second trend is towards increased refinement within the basic component and this is achieved primarily through variety of pose and complexity of design. Both trends suggest the experimental nature of the decorative programme and reflect a growing maturity and competence of on the part of the sculptor. The general trend in figure sculpture is from a linear to a more three dimensional approach and from a limited repertoire of static poses to more dynamic and animated poses. The aforesaid three temples are the typical examples of Sailodbhava period and are in the earliest phase of Odishan temple building tradition. During the later part of Sailodbhavas rule in the northern frontier of their kingdom a new royal family, the Bhaumakaras, established their political supremacy. The Bhaumakaras apparently were an aboriginal tribe, generally taken to be the Bhuyans, inhabiting the northern hilly tracts of Odisha, who supposedly migrated from Assam where a branch of their family existed from earlier time[16]. They ruled from the middle of the 8th century to the first quarter of the 10th century CE. This era was also witnessed harmonious development of religious sects like Saivism, Saktism and Tantric Buddhism. Due to assimilation of these three religious sects a new form of asceticism appeared which is known as the Kapalikas, one of the most extreme sects that emerged from this amalgamation. This changing religious atmosphere also influenced the decorative programme of the temples constructed during this period.
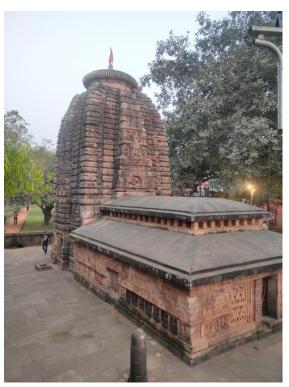
Fig.1,Satrughanesvara temple

Fig.2,Parasuramesvara temple

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