

---

## EXCEPTIONAL TEMPLES OF THE SOMAVAMSI PERIOD OF ODISHA

**Subhajit Singha**

---

### Abstract)

*In the post Gupta period emergence of temple architecture activity was the result of religious faith and tolerance of many ruling dynasties. They built numerous temples in several parts of India of their own religious faith and style. In this regard Odisha is the most important temple architectural site among them. Huge numbers of temples were built in different places of Odisha by the ruling dynasties throughout the medieval period. In early period Odisha was not a single kingdom, it was divided into many territorial divisions. The Somavamśī was the most significant dynasty of Odisha, who ruled from 9th century C.E. to 11th century C.E. and sustained great achievements to build different style of temples of various religion Sects. The Somavamśī belonged to the Kosala or south kosala territory of western Odisha. In the middle half of their reign they were able to unified western and eastern Odisha and spread their cultural activities all over Odisha.*

---

### Keywords:

*Sakta, Saptamatrikas,  
Yogini, Tantrik, Garvagriha,  
Yonipitha*

---

### Author correspondence:

Subhajit Singha  
Research scholar at Visva Bharati University  
Bolpur, Santiniketan

---

### 1. Introduction

Temple is the most important elements related to the religious belief of Hinduism and also an important section of architectural activities since early India. We have found so many evidences

about the religious patronization of ancient Indian kings regarding the construction of religious based architectural elements. This type of activities was followed by the royal dynasties of India in later period. Since the Gupta period, the construction of temple was started and continued up to 15th century C.E. From the dynastic order, the Odishan temple architecture passed through its best level during of Somavamśī period. They ruled Odisha from the 9th century C.E to 11th century C.E. Two important phases of evolution of Odishan temple architecture belonged to their reign - one is the transition phase and another is the mature phase. The temple architecture came to be started in Odisha since 6th century C.E. considered as formative phase of Odishan temple architecture, when the Sailodbhavas and the Bhumakars were ruling over Odisha.<sup>2</sup> The formative phase was the experiment phase of Odishan temple architecture. The Somavamśīs came to power in western part of Odisha known as south Kosala.<sup>1</sup> Since their times the temples of Odisha exhibit a mature character. The notable feature of the period was the introduction of rampant erotic sculptures due to the influence of Vajrayana philosophy. A maximum numbers of temples were built by them in Bhubaneswar and outside Bhubaneswar which are the landmarks of Odishan temple architecture. Among them some of the temples are still standing with their unique architecture and also exceptional style.

## **2. Research Method**

### **THE SOMAVAMSIS OF ODISHA:**

The Somavamśī dynasty was a branch of Panduvmsi dynasty that ruled previously in Kosala. At the second half of 9th century C.E. Somavamśī occupy the western part of Odisha known as South kosala from the kalchuries and ruled till 1st half of 11th century C.E.<sup>3</sup> The early Somavamśī kings were primarily the kings of Daksina Kosala (part of western Odisha and part of Chhattisgarh) with their capital in the upper Mahanadi valley and were quit active in eastern Odisha. There is no definite evidence to establish a connection between the Panduvamsi-Somavamśī dynasties of sirpur with the later Somavamśī who founded as a kingdom in the western part of modern Odisha. Kosala was the base of the activities of the early Somavamśī kings. After centering Sirpur as the capital of Somavamśī dynasty they ruled over a wide area comprising modern Bilaspur, Raipur in Chhattisgarh and Bolangir, Sambalpurand, Sonepur in western part of Odish.

### **TEMPLES OF SOMAVAMSI PERIOD:**

Odisha is a land of religious monument and temples. Many powerful dynasties ruled over Odisha from 6th century C.E. to 15th Century C.E. such as the Sailodbhavas, the Bhumakaras, the Somavamśī, the Gangas etc. All of the ruling dynasties patronized the temple building activities in Odisha. Among them the Somavamśīs were very popular and famous for their temple architecture.

A maximum number of famous as well as exceptional temples were in different parts of Odisha during their reign.

They were built up various types of shrines during their reign. Various types of shrines mean the variety of patterns or style that is different from each other due to their individual traits. These temples bear even some characteristic features of their own. As for example, Rekha Deul, Pida Deul and Khakara Deul, which bear their exceptional characteristic features of the temple architecture of Odisha. Most important and large temples of Somavamśī period are seen in Bhubaneswar. This is known as the temple city of Odisha. The most important temples of this place are the Muktesvara temple, the Rajarani temple, the Brahmesvara temple, the Lingaraja temple, Kedarasvara temple, Suresvara temple, Manibhadresivara temple, Ekambresvara temple, Valukesvara temple etc. Beside this some other important temples are still standing in outside the Bhubaneswar which had been constructed during their period such as, the Panchupandava temple at Ganesvarapur in Cuttack district, the Markandesvara temple at Puri, the Barhmesvara temple at Berabai, the Jalesvara temple etc. In the western part of Odisha they built numerous temples in their early ruling phase which was their home land. They started their rule from South Kosala (western part of Odisha), which was an important sub-division of early Odisha.<sup>4</sup> South-Kosala was consisted with Raipur, Bilaspur, Sambalpur, Sonpur, Boudh and other some places. We have found many temples from these sites such as, the Siva temple of Boudh, the Kosalesvara temple at Bidyanath, the Kosalesvara temple of Patnagarh etc.

#### **ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE TEMPLES OF THE SOMAVAMSI PERIOD:**

The contributions of the Somavamśīs in the field of art and architecture is remarkable. The Somavamśīs were made an attempt to implement certain Central-Indian traits on the traditional temple architecture of Odisha due to their remote association with Central-India. We have found some Central-Indian features through our study that influenced the Odishan temple architecture. Such as, the development of full-fledged Pancharatha plan or projection, the perfect arrangement of the projection of the wall ( *Bada* ) with superstructure ( *Sikhara* or *Gandi* ), the division of the Jangha into two sections, the formation of *Pista*, the addition of a small *Antarala* or Portico in the front of the *Garvagriha*, use of *Mukhasala* or *Jogamohana*, pillars Mandapa, Star shaped and circular plan of structure etc. Implements of these types of architectural elements on the Odishan temples, the temple architecture Odisha became reached its mature phase during this period.<sup>5</sup>

We have highlighted some exceptional temples which were built with separate architectural style in Odisha during that period. Generally basic architectural style of the temples of Odisha belonged to the same architectural pattern along with other regional temples under the Nagara or North Indian temple style. The general architectural style of Nagara temples are square ground plan, curvilinear Sikhra, Mandapa etc. But some exceptional architectural styles of temples are very remarkable for

our study, such as temples of the Kapileswar and the Siddheswar of Rameswar complex at Boudh of Baudh district and another is 64 Yogini temples at Ranipur -Jharial of Bolangir district of Odisha. First one belonged to the extra ordinary star-shaped ground plan with single storied structure and another one belonged to the Tantrik cult with circular ground plan with semi-structural style.

Through these temples we want to highlight the various exceptional architectural parts of the temples during our study period in Odisha as well as the temples of Western Odisha influenced by central Indian style. There are many extraordinary temples situated in different parts of western Odisha during the Somavamśī period which are exceptional from the acquainted style of Kalinga temple architecture.<sup>6</sup> Temple of Gandharadi of Baud district is one of them, where the two same structural temples situated on a same platform. That's why it is called twin temple of Gandharadi. One is dedicated to lord Siva and another is dedicated to lord Vishnu. The basic difference between both of the structure is its Ayudha which is placed on the top of the temples. One bears the symbol of Saivism and another indicates the Vaishnava faith. Architecturally, two separate structures which are standing with different affinities on the same platform bear a rare style in the temple history of Odisha. This architectural style is an important mark for the Somavamśī temples as well as the witness of religious toleration of them.

## **EXCEPTIONAL TEMPLES OF THIS PERIOD:**

### **Temples of Ranipur-Jharial:-**

Ranipur and Jharial are the two adjoining villages in the Titlagarg Subdivision of Bolangir district in Odisha. This place is situated 30 kms North-West of subdivision headquarters of Titlagarh. Ranipur-Jharial was known as Ranipatha in ancient time. It was a significant pilgrimage center where a large number of temples remains have been found.<sup>7</sup> Among them some temples are still standing, some are restored and many are in ruined condition. The temples like the Somesvara, the Indralath temple, the Causathi Yogini temple are most attractive temples of this site, which were built during the reign of Somavamsi period. Among them the Causathi Yogini temple is most unique and exceptional style of temple in the temple history of Odisha.

### **Causathi yogini temple:-**

The Causathi yogini (64 yogini temple) temple is the exceptional architectural monument of Ranipur-Jharial. It is also bear an exceptional religious belief among the other popular religious thought. Those have been continued from the early period in Odisha. In that sence we have found two Yogini temples belonging to the *Sakta* religion in Odisha. One is situaterd at here ie. Ranipur-

Jharial of Western Odisha and another is Hirapur in Khurda district of Eastern Odisha. Beside these, there are more eleven yogini temple also found in different parts of India.<sup>8</sup>

The Causathi yogani temples are the religious center of Yogini cult or Tantrik form of Saivism. It is put forth by *Matsyendranath* of Kamarupa (Assam) in 8<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. Sadasivacarya and Gananasivacariya was two priests to the *Mattyamayuri* School played an important role regarding to establish of *Yogini* cult in South Kosala during the Somavamsi period.<sup>9</sup> Both were the follower of *Matsyendranath* and worshipped *Kalabhairava* a tantrik form of Siva and Yogini, which is the female part of *Kalabhairava*.

On the basis of architectural features this temple of Ranipur-Jharial carries a unique ground plan.<sup>10</sup> It is built circular in plan measures 54.44 feet diameter of outer portion and 44.60 feet of interior portion. The height of the enter wall is 8.86 feet and consist of five courses of hammer-dressed stone as hard masonry and crowned by projecting eave and large semi-circular coping. To enter in the shrine from the east by a passage, which measurement 5.18 feet wide and 5.74 feet long. The interior portion of shrine has noticed 64 niches or house of Yogini images. These 64 yoginis are some-how associated with *Saptamatrikas* or *matrikas* such as *Brahmani*, *Varahi* etc. Actually the Yoginis from are connected with Buddhist Sahajayana or tradition where the female Saktis are indicated with Yaginis.

T.E. Donaldson assigned that this temple was built in the early part of 10<sup>th</sup> Century C. E, which is the great witnessed of religious toleration of Somavamsi rulers. In the early 10<sup>th</sup> Century C.E during the reign of Somavamsi in Odisha, the Yogini worshipped was very popular as the part of Saktism. For that reson they built temples for Yogini cult, in this regards Yogini temple of Ranipur-Jharial is one of them. The architectural frame and decoration style indicated that this temple may be built in mid of 10<sup>th</sup> Century C.E after the Yogini temple of Hirapur, Kurdha district of Odisha.<sup>11</sup>

### **Temples of Baud:-**

The present town Baud is situated on the right side of Mahanadi River. It is now district headquarters of Baud district of Odisha. The town itself carries huge numbers of ancient architectural monuments. Beside this, the place was also known as a significance religious center of ancient Odisha. A number of architectural and sculptural remains have been found from this site which is bears the cultural evidence of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the religious perspective of Baud, Saivism played an important role since early period to ruling of the Somavamsi dynasty. The Somavamsis were the follower of the Saivism. By the influenced of the Saivism they were built many monuments in Baud. A group of three temples of Siva is most important from the architectural perspective among them. On the basis of architecture, the plan of these temples is quite different from the other temples of Somavamsi dynasly. According to the ground plan it is unique Star-shaped in plan. Three small shrines such as

Bhubaneswar temple, Paschima Samtath and Kapileswar temples are still standing as the living situation in the same complex of Ramanath temple. Now, these temples are under the preservation of Archaeological survey of India.

### **Bhubaneswar Temple:**

Bhubaneswar temple is one of the important Siva temple of Ramanath complexes along with two other Siva temples of this period. It is a living temple dedicated to Lord Siva. The ground plan of this temple is star-shaped or stellate.<sup>13</sup> The presiding deity of this temple is a Sivalinga upon the star-shaped *Yonipitha* represented the symbol of Lord Siva. The elevation of this temple is *Rekha deul* in pattern as like the other temples of Odisha or South Kosala style. Huge numbers of different religious sculptural motifs are used for the decoration of the temple. Sculpture of *Gansha*, image of *Linga puja*, human figure, animal, *Mithuna* and *Maithuna* are found on separate parts of the temple. This type of architectural features and sculptural elements are assigned that this temple belonged to the Somavamsi period.

### **Paschima Somanath Temple:**

Paschima Somanath temple is another Siva temple of this group in the same compound. It is also under the *Rekha* type of structural, which is general style of Odishan temples as well as South Kosala. This temple also built stellate or Star-shaped in plan. The plan of this temple, the *Yonipitha* and *Pista* also design by Stellate plan which are more frequently located in the temples of eastern India. The worshiped deity of this temple is Sivalinga and it is associated with the *Yonipitha*. The different types of sculptures are located in the outer wall of this temple. Sculptures of *Tirthankara* images, *Nayikas*, pattern of *Khakaramundis* and many divine and semi divine Gods- Goddesses are decorated on the different parts of the temple. The sculptural elements and architectural style are indicated that this temple belonged to the period of the Somavamsi rule, may be middle half of 9<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.

### **Kapileswar Temple:-**

Along with the three temples of Ramanath or Rameswar compound in Baudh, Kapileswar temple is another significant temple belonging to this group. According to the architectural perspective this temple is also as the same exceptional structure with star-shaped ground plan alike the two other temples of this group. But intersecting is that, the ground plan of this temple consists with two square and created eight angle of whole structure. Among the eight angle, one is chamfered in front portion and made a passage and another seven angles are decoratively (ornamentally) rising

(carried) along with the structure of the temple up to *Kanti* or *Visama*. This is a living temple and worshipped daily. The presiding deity is Sivalinga as like the same design of others two temples. The exterior or outer wall is highly sculptural with several God-Goddess figure, semi-divine images, and human figures, *Pidhamundi* with Chaitya motif, *Mithuna* and *Maithuna* figures etc. decoration and architectural elements this can be assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century C.E of the Somavamsi rule.

### **Siddhesvara and Nilamadhava Temple of Gandharadi, Boud:**

Gandharadi is a small village of Baud district in Odisha. It is situated on the right bank of Mahanadi River and 15 km west from present Baud town, which is now newly formed district headquarters of Baud district.<sup>14</sup> The village is the witness of many archaeological evidences of ancient period.

The perspective upon the religious toleration of early medieval dynasties of western Odisha, this village bearing two important ancient temple of Kosalan order with early stage of Odishan architectural style as a witness of religious synchronization. At present date two same temples with architectural features are still standing on a same platform. Both are the temples are faces east, but separated from its presiding deities. One is dedicated to Lord Siva, named Siddhesvara and another is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, known as Nilmadhava.<sup>15</sup> It is also known the worshipped place of *Hari-Hara* Cult. Beside this the twin temples are the great witness of religious assimilation of two cults. Locally, the temples also know as Chari-Sambha temple of Gandharadi.

Architecturally both temples are still standing on a common platform side by side with curvilinear Sikhara. Constructions of the both temples are same *Pancharatha* in plan with nine *Paga* division are carried up to the *Gandi*. Both of the Siddheswara (left side) and Nilmadhava (Right side) temples are consist with a *Garvagriha* and a (two tiered flat roof) *Mukhasala* or *Jagamohana* from the ground plan. Structurally, the *Bada* (wall) of the *Garvagriha* is of three divisions, such as *bandhana*, *tala Jangha* and *upari Jangha*.<sup>16</sup> It is too interesting about the *mukhasala* (*Jagamohana*) of the temples. At present there is no pillar has found inside the *Jagamohana*, but they are still such evidences of the pillars which was observed by late R.D Banerjee in the year 1929 when he visited the temples.

Sculpturally, the temples are belonged to the transition phase of Odishan temple architecture. The architectural elements and Sculptural treatments of the temple create the evidence of inter-connection between the early and medieval temple architecture of Odisha. Decorative aspects of *Nabagraha* planate, sculpture of naga-nagi, chaitya medallion and many other deity images are found from the one of the remarkable part of these temples. All the above Sculptural evidences and the architectural features assign that these temples belonged to the later part of the transitional phase or the beginning of the mature phase, when the Somavamsis ruled that place.

### **3. Results and Analysis (10pt)**

The temple architecture of Odisha has ranging from 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E to 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E under the Kalinga style of architecture. Generally, during this period the temple architecture of Odisha continued with some extraordinary features of Kalingan style that the Rekha deul and the Pida deul. Rekha deul is a curvilinear tower where as Pida deul is the steepical roof. These two structures are the general tradition of Odishan temples. But during the reign of the Somavamsi period, few temples were built with some exceptional features which are separated from the general tradition such as circular ground plan with open sky roof (Yogini Temples), Star-Shaped ground plan temple structure, two different structures of religious affinities on the same platform etc. These are bears such exceptional qualities from the traditional temple architecture of Odisha. For that reason I have highlighted these above temples with their features and called 'exceptional' during the mentioned period through this article.

### **4. Conclusion (10pt)**

The Somavamsi rule in Odisha is a significant epoch in the history as well as cultural trend of Odisha. This period not only recorded an overwhelming change in the political aspect but also witnessed a great change in religious life of Odisha. It is also remarkable for a large number of temples of various religious creeds and various deities. Some exceptional temples also indicate their religious tolerance and unique style. The magnificent Siva temples of Muktesvara, Lingaraja, Rajarani, Brahmesvara and number of others Brahmanical temples are found in Bhubaneswar. Further, the Siva temple at Boud, Kosalesvara temple at Baidyanath, Vishnu temple at Ganeswarpur, Ganesa temple near Dhauli, Ganesa temple at Jajpur, Biranchi Narayana temple at Palia in Bhadrak, the two temples for Yogini for Ranipur-Jharial and Hirapur, some Matrika temples, like Varahi temple at Chaurasi, Sakti temples at Ranipur-Jharial, Jajpur and Puri of outside the Bhubaneswar by the Somavamsis which are unanimously considered to be the highest fulfillment of the Kalinga school of art and architecture. So, this period is witnessed of the great cultural activities in the form of religious based construction of temples, which stand even today as silent witnesses to the glory of Somavamsi as well as the Odisha.

**References(10pt)**

1. Panigrahi, K.C. ,*History of Orissa(Hindu Period)*, PP.96-97
2. Behera, K.S., *Temples of Orissa* , P.15
3. Panigrahi, K.C., *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, P.8
4. Panigrahi, K.C. ,*History of Orissa(Hindu Period)*, PP.96
5. Parida, A.N., *Early Temples of Orissa*, PP.30-34
6. Donaldson, T.E., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, P.195
7. Senapati, N., ed, *Orissa State District Gazetteer ( Bolangir )* , P.509
8. Ibid , P 507
9. E.I., Vol.XXIV. PP.239-243
10. Senapati, N., ed, *op.cit*, P.492
11. Donaldson, T.E, *op.cit*, P.260
12. Banerji, R.D., ‘*Antiquities of Baudha State*’, JBORS, XV(1929), PP.64-68
13. Donaldson, T.E, *Decorative programme of the Superstructure on the Orissan Rekha-deula, Sidelight on the History and Culture of Orissa*, P.580
14. E.I, Vol.XI, PP.96-97
15. Banerji, R.D, *op.cit*, PP. 64-86
16. Panigrahi, K.C. ,*History of Orissa(Hindu Period)*, PP