

## A Little Known Sun Temple At Palia

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The glorious heritage of sun worship is very old and dates back to one of the early civilizations of the world-"the Indus Civilization." Besides, the legendary anecdote behind the celebration of Samba Dasami on which day people offer devotional offerings to Surya is another tradition of sun worship. The standing testimony of Sun temples in India viz., Modhera in Gujarat, Martanda in Kashmir, Osian in Rajasthan confirms it. In Orissa, besides the world famous Sun Temple at Konark we find two more Sun Temples, one at Buguda in Ganjam and another at Palia in Bhadrak District. The Sun Temple at Palia is popularly known as Biranchi Narayan Temple.

Village Palia, which is located 15 km south of Bhadrak on the way from Bhadrak to Chandabali occupies a significant place in the cultural map of Orissa. Today, the standing Biranchi Narayan Temple speaks about the heritage of Surya Upasana in Orissa.

Biranchi Narayan is another name of Sun God, the god of light and lustre. The existing temple is dedicated to god Biranchinarayan who is enshrined as a crudely four-faced image of Sun. A square sized stone slightly tapering towards the top contains four carved images of Sun god in relief on the four sides of a slab.<sup>1</sup> The figures hold two lotuses in two hands as usual. The images are sculpted as standing on chariots drawn by seven horses.

In general the temple exhibits the Kalingan style of temple architecture.<sup>2</sup> Architecturally, the temple consists of a *deula*, its *bada* or the wall portion pierced by an entrance portal on all four

sides. The temple stands on a platform which is 3'3" high and decorated with crudely carved wheels on its sides, imitating the chariot of Surya, suggesting influence from the sun temple at Konark. The manner in which the *pistha* juts out in front of the *rahas* indicates that the original ground plan incorporated *nisa*-shrines in front of the *parsva-devatas* which suggests that the temple dates to the 13th century or so.<sup>3</sup> The architectural fragments of the *jagamohana* and possibly a *nata-mandira* (dancing hall) scattered in front of the temple, are the essential architectural features of Orissan temple architecture during Ganga period.<sup>4</sup>

The *bada* of the temple is 20 feet square and has a *pancha-ratha* plan. The *pabhaga* is 2'10" high. The *jangha* is divided into *talajangha* and *upara jhangha* by a set of mouldings known as *bandhana*. The *talajangha* is 2'6" and the *upara jangha* 2'4" in height.<sup>5</sup> The decorative programme is completely obliterated by plaster or replaced by plain stone. Except for a few *vidala* and *alasa-kanya* motif inserted into the *anuraha* recesses there are no surviving traces of sculptural images on the *bada*. The *rahas* have been transformed into doors spanned by cusped arches with *makaras* at the sides and a *kirtimukha* at the apex surmounted by a small *mastaka* consisting of a *ghanta*, *amalaka* and *kalasa* all devoid of ornamentation. The face of the arch is relieved with scroll work consisting of floral rosettes framed by a meandering vine and decorated with a few *hamsas*; the design being quite modern. The conception of a four doors shrine with framing *toranas* again suggests influence from Konark

where the *jagamohana* was conceived with four doors framed by *toranas*.<sup>6</sup>

*Baranda* divides the *bada* portion from the *gandi*. The *gandi* continues the *pancharatha* plan of the *bada*. The *pagas* are heavily plastered and the underlying decorations, if any, are not visible. At the base of the *kanika* and *anuratha* is modern *Kirtimukha* mask above a *caitya* housing a face which possibly covers a *kirita* design generally found in the 13th century temples. At the base of the *raha* is a set of horizontal mouldings which serves visually as a *pabhaga* for a large *anga-sikhara* which extends half-way up to the *gandi*. The *anga-sikhara* is *tri-ratha* in plan and has a projecting *gaja-kranta*. Above the *anga-sikhara* is a *pida-mundi*, *torana* design or a large Hanuman on the various sides; all modern motifs and near the top of the *raha*, a second *gaja-kranta*.<sup>7</sup> There we find *dopichasimhas* and *bekibhairavas* in the *beki* which probably dates from the 13th century though the latter are normally associated with Saiva temples. Above the *raha* on the front facade the image of Garuda is inserted into the *beki*. The *khapuri* covering the *amalaka* is extremely pronounced and surmounted by a second, small *amalaka*. A *chakra* appears on the finial. There are in addition numerous modern figure motifs carved on the *anuratha* and *kanika*, most of them being erotic.

The peculiarities of the temple are the two door-jambs of the eastern door. Probably originally they belong to a Saiva temple and re-used in the present temple at the time of renovation. The sculptures and carvings of the two door-jambs bears close resemblance to the Siva temples of Bhubaneswar and Khiching of the 10th or 11th century A.D.<sup>8</sup>

The *dvarapalas* that have survived are also different. In the best-preserved set the guards twist their body and rest on an uplifted foot on the blade of an axe while one arm crosses the body to rest on the handle of the weapon, a rare Orissan pose which appears only in a few

temples.<sup>9</sup>

The temple has the unique distinction of four doors, absence of *jagamohana*, provision of a platform and installation of the God Biranchi Narayan facing to all directions.

The most interesting remains at Palia are three detached images now loosely placed within the sanctum, all of chlorite and having unusual iconographic and stylistic features.<sup>10</sup> The first is a ten-armed Mahisamardini accomplished with her usual attributes engaged in killing the demon. Stylistically the image can be ascribed to the late 11th or early 12th century. The other detached images are rare Orissan examples of Vishnu Anantasayana and Krishna Govardhana.<sup>11</sup>

Architecturally, the temple can be dated to the 13th century or so. The temple was renovated and reconstructed in the beginning of the 20th century by the generosity of a local zamidar.<sup>12</sup>

#### References :

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