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REVIEW ARTICLE

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BHRINGESWARA MAHADEVA TEMPLE, BAJRAKOT, DISTRICT, ANGUL

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ABSTRACT

Although the extant temples dating from the 6th-7th centuries are confined to Bhubaneswar, the architectural remains from the 8th-9th Centuries appear scattered throughout the districts of Odisha, suggesting an unprecedented expansion of architectural activity due developing local patronage. Among the surviving temples dating from this period outside of Bhubaneswar, the ruined temples and detached sculpture at Jajpur, the Bhingeswara Mahadev temple at Bajrakot and the Kanakeswara Siva temple at Kualo in Denkanal district; the Manikeswara Siva temple at Sukleswara, the Pascimeswara temple near Khanderpur, the small Durga temple at Baideswar, Simhanatha temple on an island of Mahanadi in Cuttack district; Siva temples at Bankoda Punjiyama and Badgaon in Ganjam district; the Madhukeswara temple at Mukhalingam (now situated in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh); the Pataleswara and Mallikeswara temples at Paikapada and the Mallikeswara temple at Padmapur in Rayagada district; and Someswara temple at Ranipur-Jharial in Balangir district. All of these temples can be assigned to the 8th or 9th Century AD. The temples at Bajrakot, Sukleswara, Badgaon, Paikapada and Simhanatha are of the Pancayatana class with subsidiary shrines at the four corners of their compound.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bhringeswara Mahadeva temple (Lat: 21° 12' 52" North, Long: 85° 02' 38" East, Elev: 330 ft.) is located in Bajrakot village of Angul district. It is located on the right side of the road leading from Talcher to Rengali dam. It is about 50 kms north of Talcher town. The temple is situated on the right bank of the river Brahmani and almost at the center of the village Bajrakot. The temple is of the *Panchayatana* class. The *jagamohana* and the corner shrines have collapsed since long. The pillars of the *jagamohana* and parts of the *pabhaga* mouldings of the subsidiary shrines do exist. The temple is of an early *rekha* style of the Kalingan order. It is a living temple that enshrines a Sivalinga within a circular *yonipitha* according to the Canonical text of Odisha. The temple was constructed by the Sulkis of Kodalaka mandala, the feudatory of Bhaumakaras in the 7th-8th Centuries A.D. This is a protected monument of Archaeological Survey of India. Rituals like *Sitalasathi*, *Sivaratri*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Bada Osha*, etc are observed here along with the social functions like Marriage and thread ceremony. The architectural and sculptural features also assign the temple to the later part of the 8th century AD. The temple doorframes resemble with that of Ratnagiri Mahavihara, monastery no.1 and stylistically with Sisireswara temple in Bhubaneswar which are dated to the 8th century A.D. Lord Ganesa is represented here without the vehicle mouse.

Plan & Elevation: On plan the temple originally has a *vimana* and a flat roofed *jagamohana* but presently the *vimana* is square on plan whereas the *jagamohana* was rectangular (Fig-1). The subsidiary

shrines of the temple are also square on plan. The temple precinct is enclosed by a compound wall that measures 26.60 mtrs in length and 17.35 mtrs in breadth. The temple is decorated with scroll work, pilasters design carved with scroll work, *vajramundi* niches in *kanika paga*, and the sculptural embellishments such as Lakulisa, Ardhhanariswara, Parvati, Aja-ekapada, amorous couple, exotics etc. The temple is triratha on plan and *triangabada* in elevation. It is a *panchayatana* temple of early Kalingan order. The temple was constructed in Ashlar dry masonry with building material of Sandstone. The temple most closely aligned to those at Bhubaneswar and the Buddhist doorframes at Ratnagiri in the Assia hills¹. The Dhenkanal and Angul reigon was under the direct administration of feudal chiefs paying allegiance to the Bhauma-karas and was divided into different Mandalas under the various ruling dynasties during this period. One of the earliest ruling dynasty of this area appears to have been a branch of the Bhanjas who had their headquarters at Angulaka-Pattana², as recorded in the Baudh copperplate grant of king Nattabhanja, though the genealogy and dates for these rulers has not been worked out with any degree of certainty. Towards the end of the 8th century they appear to have been driven towards Baudh by the Sulkis who thereafter occupied the Angul area and ruled over an extensive territory known as Kodalaka-mandala with their capital located at Kualo which is about five miles east of Talcher. Although the Sulkis were an ancient family, mentioned in the Haraha inscription of samvat 611 as having been defeated by the Maukhari king Isanavarman³, this present ruling dynasty, as known from nine copper-plate inscriptions was probably started by Kancanastambha



Fig.1. General view of Bhringeswara Mahadeva temple

who ruled at the end of the 8th century and was most likely a feudatory of the Bhauma king Sivakaradeva- II⁴. Stylistically the Bhringeswara Mahadeva temple is most closely related to the Sisiresvara temple and can tentatively be assigned to the late 8th century though it is impossible to discern whether the Bhanjas or Sulkis were responsible for its construction.

BADA DECORATION: The temple is modest in size, measuring only 16 feet 6 inches square at the base, and is *tri-ratha* in plan with the *raha* designed as a truncated *rekha* similar to the 7th century temples at Bhubaneswar. The subsidiary *pagas* are likewise designed as *vajra-mundis* terminating beneath the *baranda* division. A thin *kumbha-stambha* is added at the corners, as on the Uttaresvara temple, and is probably inspired by examples from Telingana, such as the Sangamesvara temple at Kudaveli, where these pilasters were standard decoration. The *pabhaga*, partially buried, consists of four mouldings with the middle two joined by a projecting *purna-ghata* as on the Sisiresvara and Vaitala Deul. The *vajramastaka* consists of two *caitya*-medallions with the lower medallion housing various Brahmanical deities or *maithuna* images. The upper *caitya* is crowned by a *kirtimukha* and flanked by *atlantid* type figures. The niches of these *mundis* house various aspects of Siva, as on early temples and an *alasa-kanya* and a *mithuna* as on the Vaital Deul.

GANDI DECORATION: The *gandi* is extremely squat in proportions and heavily plastered so that it is impossible to discern whether its decorative program was completed. It most likely is *panca-ratha* in plan similar to the temples of the 7th century. The *kanika* is divided into five *bhumis* by *bhumi-amlas* with each *bhumi* subdivided into *barandis* in standard fashion. The major *vajramastakas* at the base of the *raha* consist of two superimposed *caitya* designs with surmounting *kirtimukha* as on 7th century temples. Most of the figure motifs within these *caitya* designs are covered with plaster except for a Ganesa on the south and Nataraja in the upper medallion on the east. The *raha* above these *vajra-mastakas* tapers rapidly as on the Mohini and Markandesvara temples in Bhubaneswar. These *rahas* are now decorated with rather crudely carved figures of recent vintage which are mostly erotic in nature. The *bisama* crowning the *gandi* does not partake of the *paga* divisions. *Dopichha-simhas* are placed in the *beki* above the *kanikas* as well as a few modern figure motifs and even a large house. The crowning members of the *mastaka* are intact and include an *akasalinga* surmounted by a trident.

PORTAL DECORATION: The entrance portal projects out strongly and its exterior decorative program extends above the *bada*, eliminating the *baranda* division on the front façade, so that the *vajramastaka* motif appears above the roof level of the *jagamohana*. The doorframe of the sanctum is flanked on each side by a large projecting pilaster relived with scrollwork as on the Sisiresvara and Vaitala Deul. The doorframe consists of four bands of varying size on each side. The outside two bands are narrow in width and decorated

with *jalapatra* and *malipbula phadika* scrollwork respectively. The wider inside bands being above the *dvarapala* niche at the base and are decorated with the *gelaba* and *ratikera* scrollwork. Included among the figures climbing the vine of the *gelaba* scroll is one in a swing, a motif which also appears at Ratnagiri, on the Sisiresvara, at Suklesvara and Mukhalingam.

The lintel is badly damaged and only the coiffure of Laksmi and a louts remain of the *dvara-lalata-bimba* panel. The *astagraha* is in situ and the *grahas* are housed in shallow niches in typical Odishan fashion. The half-bust image of Rahu is depicted in three-quarter profile with hands extended similar to its counterpart on the Markandesvara. The *dvarapala* niche, extending the width of the inside two bands, is divided into two compartments by the trident held by the *dvarapala*. Both *dvarapalas* are in identical fashion with the lower right hand extended and the lower left placed on the hip. Their slightly flexed standing pose, coiffure arrangement and body ornamentation are nearly identical to their counterparts on the sanctum doorframe of the Sisiresvara. The attendant figure in the adjoining compartment is a female *cauri*-bearer rather than a *naga* as on the Sisiresvara. In pose, however, it closely approximates the *cauri*-bearers on the *jagamohana* door of the latter temple or those on the sanctum door of the Vaitala Deul with the *cauri* hanging down and one leg crossed. The overall decorative program of the doorframe thus most closely related to those of the Markandesvara and Sisiresvara temples but with perhaps a little more outside influence exerted. Related to the decorative program of the doorframe, though not actually part of the frame, is the positioning of the river goddesses in the *vajra-mundi* niches on the east facade flanking the entrance portal. A precedent for this placement appears on the Parasuramesvara temple where they flank the door rather than on the frame itself is peculiar to Orissa. In contrast to the example appearing on the Talesvara, where the goddess stands in a *sambhanga* pose, the figures here stand in a strongly flexed *tribhanga* pose.

CULT IMAGES: The *parsva-devatas*, though badly worn, are all in situ. Ganesa (Fig.2) is seated in *ardhaparyanka* and holds the traditional attributes in his four hands. His uplifted right knee is tried to his stomach with a serpent and his proboscis is curling up to place a sweet in his mouth as on the Sisiresvara image.



Fig. 2. Parsvadevata image, Ganesa

The other two images differ from their earlier counterparts. The image of Kartikeya (Fig.4) is covered with plastered and partially restored. He is represented sitting on his peacock-mount in *lalitasana* rather than on a throne or standing as at Bhubaneswar. He holds a *sakti* or staff in each hand in symmetrical fashion rather than a single *sakti* as standard on most representations. His coiffure is also quite unusual with long braids hanging down to the shoulders rather than being arranged in the conventional *sikhandana* mode with three chignons piled on top of the head. The facial features are modern restorations.



Fig.3: Image of Mahisasuramardini



Fig.4. Image of Kartikeya

In the Mahisamardini image (Fig.3) the demon Mahisa is represented in human form issuing from the decapitated carcass of a buffalo. This contrasts with the standard form at Bhubaneswar where the demon is represented with a human body and buffalo-head. This new iconographic form was popular elsewhere in India, including Daksina-Kosala, and again suggests outside influence.

The goddess has her uplifted right foot on the hind-quarters of the Carss and plunges a trident into its back. Her major left hand pushes down on the diminutive human figure attempting to escape. The deity is eight-armed and holds the traditional attributes in her remaining hands. Lakulisa is seated with legs crossed but not locked as in the standard *abyanasana* pose. He displays the *dharmacakra-pravarttana-mudra* and holds the *lakuta* against his left shoulder. He is flanked by two disciples on each side. Ardhanarisvara assumes a pose similar to its counterpart on the Markandeyesvara and Sisiresvara temples though the upper left hand holds a mirror and not a lotus as in the last named temple. The baby Karttikeya in the lower left corner is seated rather than standing. Nandi occupies the opposite corner. Among the images housed in these *caitya* designs is a female deity, probably Durga, seated with legs crossed and holding a vase and rosary in her two hands. There is the popular motif of a male figure seated in *lalitasana* with one hand resting on a knee and possibly holding a lotus. There is also a small image of Aja-Ekapada in the *vajra-mastaka* design above Lakulisa.

DECORATIVE MOTIFS: In terms of body proportions, facial features and pose the female figures, including the river goddesses and *cauri*-bearing attendants on the doorframe, correspond most closely to those at Ratnagiri and on the Sisiresvara temple. The most interesting female figure is the *alasa-kanya* enshrined in the *vajra-mundi* niche. She is depicted in the *padmagandha*⁵ mode of smelling the fragrance of a long-stemmed lotus mentioned previously. The stalk of the lotus begins in the lower corner on the left side and bends diagonally across her body so that the full bloom is opposite her face on the right. There is a small *atlandid* supporting a vase in the lower right corner. Most interesting is that there is something other than the lotus stalk in the lower left corner, possibly an attendant figure though it is badly defaced or plastered over, suggesting that the *alasa-kanya* may have represented a specific goddess. In addition, there is a flying *vidyadhara* in the upper left corner of the niche.

CONCLUSION

Rain water seepage from the roof of the sanctum during rainy season. The *jagamohanas* superstructure has collapsed and recently a modern G.I. sheet roof has been erected of the sanctum. This is one of the important transitional phase temple located in Central Odisha that needs conservation and preservation by the authority for posterity.

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