

HIRAPUR: A CIRCULAR YOGINI TEMPLE OF ORISSA

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Abstract

Ancient India was the land of many religions, cultures and traditions. From the early medieval period Tantric tradition emerged and expanded throughout the Indian subcontinent. By the influence of Tantrism, many local or village deities, especially the Mother Goddesses of Brahmanical religion were transformed and depicted into Tantric goddesses. The origin of the Yoginis also routed at the local level and influenced by Tantric traditions. From the beginning of the 9th century CE, Orissa gradually became one of the major centres of Tantrism. Hirapur, located at Khurda district of Orissa, where one of the important sixty-four Yogini temples of India is situated. This circular Yogini temple was built in the 9th century CE by the patronization of contemporary ruling power Bhaumakara dynasty of Orissa. Chausath Yogini temple of Hirapur is not only a major centre of Tantric tradition but also a significant example of distinctive architectural features and sculptural representations, which distinguished this temple from other contemporary temples of Orissa. Main objective of this paper is to discuss the distinctive and significant features of the Architecture and Sculptures of Chausath Yogini temple of Hirapur and searching the impact of Tantric tradition and worship in this temple.

Keywords: *Hirapur, Sixty-Four Yogini, Bhairava, Katyayani, Chamunda.*

1. Introduction

‘YOGINI’ means the power of union or the power that facilitates union. The emergence of the Yogini cult in the Indian subcontinent is a complicated matter. It is difficult to conclude from which period the cult of Yoginis started to be worshipped. But in the early medieval period, more specifically from the end of the 9th century CE to the 12th century CE, the Yogini temples emerged as a place of worship among the Tantric followers in different regions of the Indian subcontinent. Interestingly, during this period i.e. 9th-12th CE many *Puranas* and most of the Tantric texts were compiled.¹

2. Concept of Sixty-Four Yoginis

The origin of the Yoginis routed at the local or village level of the Indian subcontinent, where the local and village deities or goddesses transformed and rose as the Yoginis by the influence and expansion of Tantrism in Indian society. We know the culture of worship of the Mother Goddesses in India was the oldest religious phenomenon. From the time of the Harappan civilization worship of mother goddess became one of the major features of Indian religious tradition. Many stone and terracotta ‘Matrika’ sculptures were visible throughout the subcontinent. Indeed, the cult of the mother goddesses with the Tantric mode of

¹ Roy, Anamika, *Sixty-Four Yoginis Cult, Icons and Goddesses*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2015, p.1

worship is widely evident from the early medieval period, as archaeological evidences are concerned.

The practice of worshipping sixty-four Yoginis was one of the most drastic and occult of all Tantric practices. From the 9th century onwards the cult of Yogini became very much popular among Sakta-Tantrism. The village goddesses which were transformed by tantric worship were mostly presented as a group rather than as alone. Many Tantric texts and *Puranas* mention about the yoginis and their origin.

3. Literary Sources

Many kinds of Puranic texts and tantric records describe about the Yoginis distinctively. As I mentioned earlier, Yoginis were mostly seen in a group of Forty-Two, Sixty-Four, Eighty-One rather than alone. These different number of Yoginis are found in the early Indian literary texts. According to one of the most important tantric traditions *Kaula Tantra*, each *Ashta Matrikas* turned into eight divinities i. e. *Shaktis*, thus resulting in sixty-four tantric Yoginis. One of the earliest mentions of sixty-four Yoginis in a Brahmanical text was found in *Agni Purana*, which was compiled during the 9th century CE.² More specifically 52nd chapter of *Agni Purana* discusses about sixty-four Yoginis. In this context historian Vidya Dehejia argued that from the 600 to 850 CE Yogini Cult had been accepted in mainstream Hinduism.³ Another important work, which also briefly discussed about the sixty-four Yoginis, was the *Matottara Tantra*, a tantric text of Nepal. According to the *Matottara Tantra*, the eight main goddesses of the Yogini Chakra were

Dakini, Rakini, Lakini, Shakini, Hakini, Kakini, Yakini, and Kusuma, each of them includes eight aspects, in this way a total number of sixty-four Yoginis included in the Yogini Chakra.⁴ *Matottara Tantra* also confirms the partner of the eight main Yoginis were eight Bhairavas, so the earliest mention of Aahta Bhairavas along with the eight main Yoginis found in this text.⁵ Apart from these texts, number of other Puranic and tantric records mention about sixty-four Yoginis. *Skanda Purana*, *Chaturvarga-Chintamani*, and *Shrimahattarat Tantra* describe the name of sixty-four Yoginis along with their *vahanas*. There are also some regional texts which mention about sixty-four Yoginis. *Oriya Kalika Purana* is an interesting one among them, which recorded sixty-four Yoginis were created by Devi Durga.⁶ But we did not find any inscriptional reference which dealt with the names of all the sixty-four Yoginis. Although mention of the Yogini Cult and tantric Mother Goddesses is found in various inscriptions. For example, the Gangadhar Stone Inscription of Aulikara King Visvavarmana of 5th century CE is notable. Here we can find the earliest mention of 'Dakini' as one of the tantric mother goddesses.⁷

4. Sixty-Four Yogini Temple of Hirapur in Orissa

From the 9th century CE establishment of Yogini temples became so popular in the Indian subcontinent that the cult of Yoginis appeared in groups like forty-two, sixty-four, and eighty-one. At present there are only two surviving sixty-four Yogini temples in Orissa, they are situated at Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial. I visited sixty-four Yogini Temple of Hirapur twice for my field work

² Dehejia, Vidya, *Yogini Cult and Temples A Tantric Tradition*, National Museum New Delhi, New Delhi, 1986, p.72.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Donaldson, E. Thomas, *Tantra and Sakta Art of Orissa*, Vol. II, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, New Delhi, 2002. pp. 661-665.

⁷ Fleet, J.F, *Inscriptions of the Gupta kings and their Successors, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1888, pp. 76-78.

(Figure 1). This temple, one of the major sixty-four Yogini temples of India, is located on the bank of Bhairavi River, about 15 km away from Bhuvaneshwar. This temple is located in an inaccessible place far from the populated area. Yogini temple of Hirapur is believed to have been built by the queen of the Bhaumakara dynasty of Orissa Hiradevi in the 9th century CE. The temple was explored and restored in 1953 by art historian Sri Kedarnath Mahapatra. In the early medieval period, the tantrics usually choose an isolated place for their worship in an outlying area from the city or village. This is one of the main features of any Yogini temple where Tantric rituals are followed.

5. Architectural Details

The architectural pattern of Yogini temple is somehow different from the traditional types of Brahmanical temple architecture. The main structure of the sixty-four Yogini temple of Hirapur was totally different from that of early medieval Orissan temple architecture. The cause of this distinct nature is found in the explanation of Tantric tradition about the structure of Yogini temples. The terminologies like *Mandala*, *Yantra*, and *Chakra* denote the Tantric geometrical diagrams and confirm the circular structure of a Yogini temple as discussed in some important Tantric traditional texts, e. g. the *Nispannayogavali* and the *Devi Purana*. In Indian subcontinent all sixty-four Yogini temples are circular and Hypaethral which means a building or a temple having no roof and is open to the sky.

Hirapur sixty-four Yogini temple was built in coarse sandstone blocks. Like other sixty-four Yogini temples, this is also circular in shape and hypaethral. Thomas Donaldson wrote in details about the architectural features of this temple. The entrance of the temple is in the east and 4 feet in height, which give a Yoni shape to the structure.

On both sides of the main entrance of the temple there are two male Dvarpala figures carved. The entrance gate of the temple is small in height, so a person has to bend down when he is entering the temple. The inner walls of the circular temple have sixty niches and the sculptures of sixty Yoginis are carved in Muguni stone (Muguni stone is a kind of black marble or fine-grained dark chlorite stone, especially found in Orissa) have accommodated there. The height of the wall from the floor is near about 6 feet.⁸

Sixty Yoginis are carved in sixty niches, they are either in standing or dancing poses and depicted with their respective *vahanas*. The upper portion of the inner circular wall is decorated with *chaitya* motifs and each niche contains a relief carving of an arch in the upper portion which is quite popular in the Orissan temple architecture. The floor of the temple is paved with stone slabs. All the Yoginis depicted in the niches have two or four hands but no. 31 Yogini which is located at the central position of the inner wall facing towards the entrance, is an exception. This Yogini is known as *Mahamaya*, with ten arms. At the central position of the circular temple, there is a small rectangular pavilion reconstructed above the earlier one. This structure is known as '*Devi Mandapa*' according to the local purohits.⁹ *Devi Mandapa* has eight niches in total, out of them four niches are carved with Bhairava sculptures and the other four are with four yoginis. Out of the four Bhairavas, three are in a seated position with ten arms and the rest one is in the standing posture with one leg. This image is known as Eka-pada Bhairava. On the other hand, out of the four Yogini sculptures in the central pavilion, one is missing and according to Donaldson local purohits informed that it was taken into a place called Yamunkuda. On each side of the pavilion, one can notice, there are fragments of the earlier built pillars which were mentioned as

⁸ Donaldson, E. Thomas, *op. cit.* pp. 661-665.

⁹ *Ibid.*

‘Pillared Mandapa’ by T. E. Donaldson.¹⁰ The outer wall of the circular temple contains nine niches with sculptures.

6. Sculptures

Sculptures of the Chaushat Yogini temple of Hirapur are one of the most innovative and astonishing examples of the Yogini cult in the Indian subcontinent. Out of total 81 sculptures carved in the inner and outer walls of the temple, sixty-four are the sculptures of Yoginis. These goddesses are the Tantric forms or the Yoginis of the various mother goddesses of the Brahmanical religion. The name of the sixty-four Yoginis of Hirapur temple are: 1) Chandika 2) Tara 3) Narmada 4) Yamuna 5) Mahananda 6) Varuni 7) Gauri 8) Indrani 9) Varahi 10) Padmavati 11) Ushtragriva or Murati 12) Vaishnavi 13) Panchavarahi 14) Bhadrarupi 15) Charchika 16) Vaitali 17) Chinnamasta 18) Bindhyavasini 19) Jalagamini 20) Ghatavarahi 21) Karkari 22) Saraswati 23) Virupa 24) Kuberi 25) Bhalluka 26) Narasimhi 27) Viraja 28) Vikata Nayana 29) Mahalakshmi 30) Kaumari 31) Mahamaya 32) Rati 33) Karkari 34) Sarpasa 35) Yasha 36) Aghora 37) Rudra Gali 38) Ganeshani/Vinayaki 39) Vindhya Basini 40) Shivani 41) Maheswari 42) Ambika 43) Kamakhya 44) Chandra Kanti 45) Parvati 46) Kali 47) Narayani 48) Bhagavati 49) Samudri 50) Brahmani 51) Agnihotri 52) Agnihotri 53) Aditi 54) Stuti 55) Svaha 56) Chamunda 57) Maruta 58) Ganga 59) Dhoomavati 60) Gandhari 61) Missing 62) Sarva Mangala 63) Surya Putri 64) Vayuvega.

Apart from Yogini sculptures in black stone, four Bhairava sculptures made of sand stone are also carved in the center pavilion of the temple. On the outer wall of the temple, nine sand stone sculptures of Katyayanis are carved as guardian deities. Two Bhairava images as guards in the

entrance corridor and two Dvarpalakas or gatekeepers at both the sides of the entrance of the temple are also important as well as significant sculptures of the temple of Hirapur. This is the most remarkable characteristic feature of Chaushat Yogini temple of Hirapur.

The two skeletal Dvarpalakas wearing necklaces made of skulls and snake anklets are represented here. One of them holding a severed head of a human. The faces of these two skeletal figures are so ferocious. Nine Katyayani images on the outer wall are also an important feature of the Brahmanical religion. They are the nine forms of the Mother Goddess Parvati. According to *Kalika Purana* when Devi Durga killed Mahishasura at that time Katyayani was created as a Shakti form of Devi Durga.¹¹ All the nine Katyayani figures are either in standing or in dancing posture and have some distinctive features. These images are bedecked with ornaments like necklaces, anklets, bracelets, etc. The most common feature of these Katyayani sculptures is the presence of a jackal and a dog as *vahanas* on the pedestal. Some exceptional features are also carved in these images. For an example, one Katyayani figure is carved with a sword and two male figures playing musical instruments carved on the pedestal (Figure 2). Another Katyayani image carries a skull in her left hand and a cutlery in her right hand. A small female attendant figure is holding an umbrella over the head of the Katyayani. Another figure of Katyayani out of nine sculptures is the smallest in size, she holds a curved sword in her right hand and a skull cup in the left one. On the pedestal there are two jackals are also visible.

The inner walls of the temple have four Bhairava sculptures, among them one in standing with one leg known as Eka-Pada Bhairava (Figure 3), an aspect of Siva found in Bengal, Orissa and South

¹⁰ Donaldson, E. Thomas, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, Vol. II, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1985. p. 561.

¹¹ Roy, Anamika, *op. cit.* p.143.

India, and occasionally in Nepal and Rajasthan also. The origin of Eka-Pada Bhairava is noticed in Vedic text where he is mentioned as Aja-Ekapada or Ajaikapada. The iconography of Eka-Pada Bhairava is a common feature in the Orissan temple, e. g. the Talesvara temple at Bhuvaneshwar of 8th century CE is notable. Eka-Pada Bhairava was also worshipped in an Orissan temple at Jagatsinghpur, which is known as Ajaikapada Bhairava Temple of the 10th century CE. All the Bhairava images are carved at the temple of Hirapur under discussion depicted with *urdhvalinga* which is a common feature of Orissa iconography.

Sixty-four Yogini sculptures of Hirapur are one of the major examples of Tantric traditions in India. Among sixty-four sculptures one is missing, but the other 63 Yoginis are stupendous display of constructive techniques and ancient artistic excellence of India. Well-shaped breasts, spherical hips, luscious posture, and proper expression made them so perfect. Among the sixty-four Yoginis, Mahamaya, who is the presiding deity of the Chaushat Yogini temple of Hirapur (Figure 4). She is the only goddess who has ten arms and larger than other Yoginis in height. She is standing on a lotus pedestal, ornamented with necklaces, anklets and other jewelries. As per views of the local people, this sculpture is the most important among other Yogini images of the temple. Local people of Hirapur called this temple 'Mahamaya Temple', because of the existence of the Goddess Mahamaya. In Eastern India, Mahamaya is worshipped as one of the aspects of Devi Durga, and worship of Devi Durga is very popular in Eastern India. Therefore, it can be easily understood that how the goddess Mahamaya became the prime deity of the temple.

The typical form of Devi Chamunda of this temple (Figure 5) is also a significant and distinctive example of the Chamunda goddesses of Eastern India. Here Devi Chamunda appeared with four arms and in a standing posture. The skeletal body of Chamunda is visible with saggy breasts and stands upon a mask deer (?).¹² Two lower hands of Chamunda filled with a *kartari* (dagger) and decapitated human head, and upper two hands hold a lion skin over her head. Lion skin in the upper two hands of Devi Chamunda is a distinctive feature of the icons of Chamunda in Eastern India. Usually, the Chamunda figure of Eastern India holds an elephant skin by her upper two hands but in Hirapur she holds lion skin instead of elephant skin which is an exceptional example of its kind.

Another remarkable sculpture of this temple is Devi Kamayani or Kamakhya. Devi Kamakhya is an important tantric goddess, developed in the ancient Kamrupa region i. e. modern Assam. She is originated from an ancient tribe of the Eastern Himalayan region 'The Kirata'. Two armed Devi Kamakhya is carved here with lots of ornaments. The palms of her hands are now broken.

We can see some animal-headed Yoginis in the temple of Hirapur also. They are:

- 1) Sow faced goddess Varahi,
- 2) Four-armed monkey headed female deity Murati,
- 3) Buffalo-headed goddess Bindhya-Vasini,
- 4) Lion-headed Narasimhi,
- 5) Elephant-headed goddess Vinayaki or Ganeshani.

Sixty-Four Yogini temple is also the amalgamation of many mother goddesses in a single temple. Tantric forms of Dasamahavidyas, Sapta-Matrikas, and Guardian deities like Ganga and Yamuna all are carved in the inner walls of the

¹² Roy, Anamika, *op. cit.* p.155.

temple, and for this reason, Chausath Yogini temple of Hirapur became historically unprecedented like other remaining sixty-four Yogini temples of India.

7. Concluding Observations

Orissa gradually became as one of the major centres of Tantric tradition in the 9th-10th century CE. And the contributions of Chausath Yogini Temple of Hirapur is also noteworthy. Not only it is an important centre of ancient culture and heritage of Orissa as well as of Eastern India but also its architectural features and sculptural evidences have some significant role in Indian art. Its artistic charm and delicacy, use of fine stones made the sixty-four Yogini temple of Hirapur an example of inspired workmanship. Another important feature is the amalgamation between temple architecture and sculpture with early medieval Orissan culture, society and polity. In the outer wall of the temple, one Katyayani sculpture is a significant feature of this amalgamation, here Katyayani's figure is carved in a niche and an attendant holds an umbrella over her head. In the 9th-10th century Orissa, a fashion was introduced during the rule of the Bhaumakara dynasty, where the coiffure of a female figure was arranged in a chignon on one side of the head rather than on the top of the head. This feature is also evident in this Katyayani figure. Not only in the ancient period but also in the modern era this temple is very much connected with the life of the people and society of Orissa. Every year 23rd-25th December, Chausath Yogini Mahotsava is celebrated at Hirapur in Orissa with the performing arts and cultural practices of the Orissan state.

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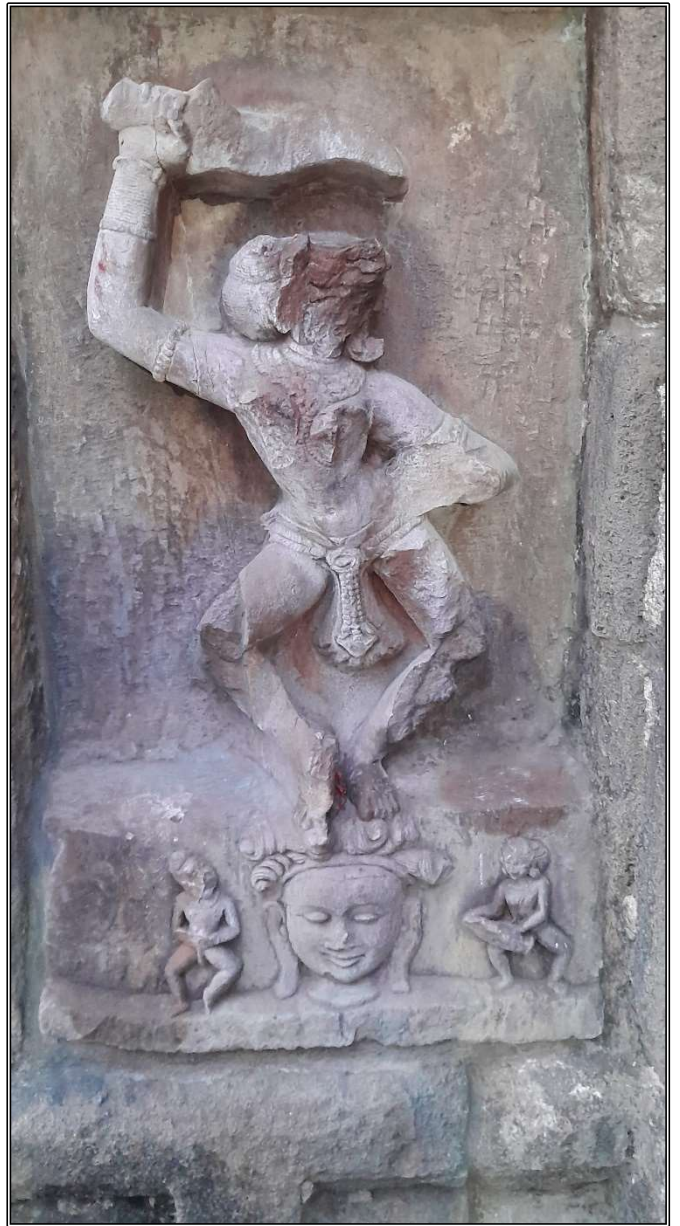


Figure 2 Katyani at the exterior wall



Figure 4 Mahamaya, the presiding deity



Figure 5 Chamunda holding lion skin