

Mythical Narratives in Kalinga Architecture: A Study of the Sculptural Tradition in Bhubaneswar Temples

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Abstract: Bhubaneswar the capital of Odisha, is a city where the hustle of modern life meets the peace of devotion amidst its numerous temples. Built during 6th to 13th century CE, the temples were devoted to the worship of Tribhuvaneswara Śiva, the lord of the three realms. These ancient temples are perpetuated through an intricate relationship of sacred belief and the brilliance of Kalinga architecture. However, unbeknownst to the hundreds of devotees and visitors, these temples are also the repository of myths of the Hindu mythology. The present research paper *Mythical narratives in Kalinga architecture: A study of the sculptural tradition in Bhubaneswar temples* searches for the mythical narratives that are expressed in the sculptural tradition of the temples of Bhubaneswar. Acting as excellent mythographers, the temples of Bhubaneswar offers a tangible medium where the intangible essence of myth finds shape. The sculptural friezes which are a vital part of the Kalinga architecture are not mere aesthetic embellishments, but a valuable medium of story-telling which regenerates new meanings and cultural values within these heritage landmarks.

Keywords: Bhubaneswar, Kalinga Architecture, Hindu mythology, Sculptural reliefs, Temples

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Introduction

Myth may be considered as a whisper of ancient voices which binds generations together through its sacred narrative of supernatural beings, battle of good and evil and the swift dispense of justice. The intangible concept of myth is constructed on the foundation of ancient knowledge, wisdom, thoughts

and feelings, which together guides humanity not through instructions, but through its enchantment. In India, Hindu mythology originated as an oral tradition, known and practiced by a handful of learned people. But these confines were soon escaped, as humanity began to express the mythical narratives in different media. Through human history, the different forms of mythical expression appeared in art, literature, and rituals of daily life. The present research has chosen to discuss one such medium of mythical expression that can be found in Indian temple architecture. The Indian temples are renowned all over the world for their meticulous execution of architectural and sculptural designs. In these temples devotion and art exists side by side surrounded with walls and columns where myths have been etched in stone. In this context, the state of Odisha occupies a prominent position, preserving a substantial number of temples distinguished by their refined art and architectural excellence. The present study focuses on the temples of Bhubaneswar built in Kalinga architecture during 6th to 15th century CE. Bhubaneswar, the 'Temple City of India', is situated on the east coast, within the Puri district of Odisha. It is popularly believed that the city was named after the legendary Tribhuvaneshvara temple built by King Śaśānka. Tribhuvaneshvara is an epithet of the Hindu deity Śiva which means, 'Lord of the three worlds' (Schellinger & Salin, 1996).

The temples of Bhubaneswar were built in the Kalinga style of architecture, which has a very close resemblance to the Nagara style of architecture that was practiced in North India. The Kalinga style of architecture offers three basic structures of temples- Rekha deula, Pidha deula and Khakhra deula. Each temple again, has two primary components in the architectural scheme- the sanctum and the porch. The main temple which houses the deity is the *vimana* which is built in the style of the *rekha*. The frontal porch, subordinate to the main temple is called the *jagmohana*. However, in course of time this architecture passed through many evolutions and due to the growing need for space, the *natmandira* and the *bhogamandapa* were added. The temples also show incredible architectural details in elevation. In the vertical plane, both the *vimana* and the *jagmohana* can be divided into four parts. From bottom to top these are- *pista*, *bada*, *gandi*, and *mastaka*. Named after the different parts of the body, the different components of the temple symbolise the body of a Cosmic Being. Another significant salient feature of the Kalinga style of architecture are the sculptural elements. The temples of Bhubaneswar aside from their incredible architectural designs are also evidences of the artistic expression that flourished in India. The sculptural reliefs of the Bhubaneswar temples can be classified into- hieratic deities, domestic scenes, animal figures and floral and geometric patterns. In the temples of the early period like the Paraśurāmeśvara, Svarṇajāleśvara, and Śatrughneśvara, the sculptures are modest and reposed emitting a homely feeling. The reliefs are flat, but the details of the anatomy have been captured through soft lines and curves. The figures of the deities possess a serene expression, detached elegance and quite poise. The temples of the later period like Vaital, Sisireswara, and Markandeshwara temples present an evolution in sculpting technique, with the figures appearing more round and delicate. The deities of this period are more self-composed, radiating spiritual grace and elegance (Mitra, 1961). However, the sculptures are not mere aesthetic decorations, they act as a visual medium through which different narratives of Hindu mythology are expressed. This research thus attempts to document those mythical narratives associated with the sculptures that have been given expression by the ancient craftsmen of the Bhubaneswar temples.

Mythical Narratives Represented in the Temples of Bhubaneswar

Śatrughneśvara Temple

The Śatrughneśvara temple is one of the three temples situated to the east of the Rameswara temple. Named after the three brothers of Ram- Bharat Lakhsman and Satughna, these are earliest surviving temples of Bhubaneswar. Most of the architecture of these temples have fallen to ruin, leaving behind the bare cores of the temples, which has been recently renovated by the Department of Archaeology in Orissa. The Śatrughneśvara temple was constructed during the Sailodbhava period around 575 CE (Behera, 1993). The surviving western facade of this temple gives some idea about its original sculptural design. Among the notable sculptural panels of the temple are several depictions associated with Shaiva mythology. The most prominent iconographic frieze of the temple that has survived despite the ruin is the **Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti** or the scene of Rāvaṇa shaking mount Kailāśah, visible at the front *raha*. According to the Uttarakhand of the Ramayana, after defeating Kubērā, the supreme lord of the Rakshasa was travelling back on his chariot Pushpaka, when the vehicle suddenly halted. The place where Dasha-nana stopped was the great mountain where Kārttikeya was born. As Dasha-nana and his attendants were contemplating why the chariot stopped, Nandi appeared in front of them and commanded, that his lord Śaṅkara resides on this mountain and he has forbidden the passage of all birds, serpents, Yakshas, Devas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas. Upon hearing Nandi's words Dasha-nana was overcome with fury and questioned the audacity of Śaṅkara. As an answer to his demands, Nandi showed him the divine image of the lord, where he himself was standing by his side. Dasha-nana laughed at the revelation. Thus provoked, Nandi cursed the great demon king that his pride and prowess as well as his entire race shall be destroyed by monkeys. However, Dasha-nana completely disregarded Nandi's prophecy and warnings and proceeded towards Kailāśah with the intention to uproot it. Thus seizing the mountain, he started shaking it violently. Pārvatī and the attendants of Śiva became extremely terrified by the sudden tremors. Mahadeva simply pressed the mountain with his great toe and crushed Dasha-nana underneath. Thus trapped, he cried out in pain which caused the Three Worlds to tremble. He immediately sought to pacify the god, bowing before him and reciting hymns from the sacred texts. Mahādēva (Śiva) was gratified after he observed the courage and endurance of the demon lord. He gave Dasha-nana the name Rāvaṇa, 'he who causes the worlds to cry out' (The Ramayana of Valmiki, 1932).

Another icon that crowns the Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti is the **Kīrtimukha**. The image of Kīrtimukha has a recurring appearance in the temples of Bhubaneswar. At the Śatrughneśvara temple, the image of Kīrtimukha is displayed in a niche present in the front *raha*. The Skanda Purāṇa (1950) documents the myth of this fierce visage. It narrates that Nārada had once mischievously sparked the flame of animosity between Jalandhara and Śiva. Nārada had casually mentioned that he had seen the divine couple Śiva and Pārvatī at the peak of Kailāśa. The scene had instilled the belief in him that no one is more prosperous than Śiva, for Pārvatī is truly a jewel among women. He further stated that Jalandhara may have a glorious life, but without a better half like Pārvatī by his side, his life is incomplete. After Nārada took his leave, Jalandhara became afflicted with his desire for Pārvatī. He sent Rāhu to Kailāśa. Once in the presence of Śiva, Rāhu spoke the words of Jalandhara, that Śiva is undeserving of a jewel like Pārvatī. Thus angered, a terrible form manifested itself from forehead of Śiva.



Figure 1: Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti



Figure 2: Kīrtimukha

It had blazing eyes and a leonine face. Just as the form rushed to devour Rāhu, he sought the protection of Śiva. Śiva commanded the terrible form to set Rāhu free. But the form uttered that it is famished. Śiva again commanded it to devour the flesh of its own limbs. The form did as command and was left with only the head. Upon seeing this phenomenon, Śiva was struck with wonder. He named this form Kīrtimukha and stated that he should always be situated above the doorways at his temples. Henceforth, Kīrtimukha is stationed at the doorways of all the temples dedicated to Śiva (Skanda Purāṇa, 1950).

A third sculpture, notable among those that survived is the solemn image of the Hari-hara form of Śiva. It is situated in the northern niche of the western façade of the temple. The Skanda Purāṇa

recounts, that once the devotees of Śiva and Vishnu had a great dispute. Each wanted to establish their dominance over the other. In order to resolve this great dispute, Śiva assumed the divine form of Hari-hara. One half of this divine body was Śiva and the other half was Vishnu. Upon seeing their lords united in one physical form, the devotees abandoned their ideas of separate ways of devotion and started following the same path towards salvation (Skanda Purāṇa, 1950).

Paraśurāmeśvara temple

Among the temples from the early phase of Kalinga architecture, the Paraśurāmeśvara temple stands as one of the most enduring specimens. A copper plate inscription resembling the style of Madhavaraja II of the Sailodbhava dynasty (619 CE) suggests that the temple was also constructed during the same period. Another set of inscriptions carved above the south door of the *jagmohana* gives insight into the fact that the temple originally gained its name from Pasupata teacher Parasara who succeeded Kuśika, who was one of the four disciples of Lakulīśa (Behera, 1993). The Paraśurāmeśvara temple is known for its varied and creative sculptural decorations.

The most prominent among these is the image of **Kārttikeya**, which is located in the eastern niche of the *deula*. Kārttikeya the son of Śiva and Pārvaṭī is worshipped as the divine commander of the celestial armies of heaven. His birth, however, is marked by an extraordinary and complex mythological episode narrated in the Bālakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa. After the marriage of Śiva and Pārvaṭī many years passed without the birth of a child. The gods were anxious regarding the powers that such a child born of this extraordinary union would possess. Consequently, they approached Śiva and implored him to abstain from producing such an offspring. Though Śiva listened to their plea, he asked what was to happen to the seed he had already discharged. The gods counselled that it should be received by the Earth and nurtured by Agni and Vayu.

Eventually Kārttikeya was born. However, Pārvaṭī the consort of Śiva was enraged as she was deprived



Figure 3: Hari-hara



Figure 4: Kārttikeya

Image Source: Author

of the happiness of bearing a child and becoming a mother. She cursed the gods that just as she was denied the fortune of being a mother, all the wives of the gods would become barren, giving them a fate, similar hers (Rao, 1971).

The Paraśurāmeśvara temple also preserves the unique and comparatively rare sculptural representation of **Candra** or the moon. In the Kalinga style of architecture, Candra is conventionally depicted above the doorway of the sanctum as part of the Navagraha panel. But in the Paraśurāmeśvara temple, Candra is sculpted in a rare singular manner. Candra was the husband of the 27 daughters of Dakṣa and his wife Asikini. However, the Salya Parva of Mahabharata narrates that the moon was negligent in performing his duties as a husband. Rohini, who was one of the wives of Candra, was the most beautiful of all the daughters. Rohini was the nearest and dearest to Candra's heart, which made the rest of his 26 wives furious with his partial treatment. They complained to their father Dakṣa stating their intention of leaving their husband, restricting their diet and residing in Dakṣa's abode instead. Dakṣa advised the moon to love all his wives equally or he shall be tainted by sin. However, the moon did not heed the words of warning of his father-in-law. When the daughters complained again, Dakṣa cursed him with the disease of consumption. The moon could not get rid of the curse no matter what he tried. As the moon continued to wane, the plants, herbs, and the living creatures who depended on him also began to wither. The moon pleaded to Dakṣa. Unable to retract the curse, Dakṣa advised Candra to bathe in the water at the confluence of the western ocean and the River Sarasvati. Thus the curse was partially lifted and henceforth

Candra had to wane for the first half of every month and wax for the second half (Mani, 1975).

Another unique sculptural representation in the Paraśurāmeśvara temple is that of **Arddha-nārīśvara**. The image of an eight-armed dancing Arddha-nārīśvara can be observed on the southern wall of the temple. Arddha-nārīśvara is one of the divine forms of Śiva that presents both the male and



Figure 5: Candra

Image Source: Author



Figure 6: Arddha-nārīśvara

Image Source: Author

the female form in one physical body. The mythical narrative in the *Linga Purāṇa* states that during the event of creation, *Brahmā* created five mind born sons. However, these sons detached themselves from worldly attachments and devoted themselves solely towards the meditation of *Śiva*. *Brahmā* became distressed when he realized that his progeny had failed and that his sons were not inclined to carry forward the process of creation and multiplication. *Brahmā* asked *Śiva* for aid. *Śiva* realised *Brahmā*'s need and thus manifested himself in a half male and half female form which emerged from between his eyebrows. *Brahmā* prayed to the female half of this form to create female subjects to carry on with the act of creation (*The Linga Purāṇa*, 1951). The sculptural friezes of the seven **Mātṛśaktis** also occupy a prominent position in the sculptural design of the *Paraśurāmeśvara* temple. The seven mother goddesses or *Mātṛśaktis* are *Brahmāni*, *Vaiṣṇavī*, *Maheśvarī*, *Kaumārī*, *Vārāhī*, *Māhendrī* and *Cāmuṇḍī* (Mani, 1975). The goddess *Maheśvarī* (a form of *Sakti*) manifested these seven forms during the battle with *Raktabīja*. The *Vamana Purāṇa* narrates, that during the battle when the demon *Raktabīja* rushed to attack, the goddess emitted a fierce roar and *Brahmāni* emerged from her mouth riding a swan. From her throat appeared *Kaumārī*, riding a peacock. From her arms emerged *Vaiṣṇavī*, riding on *Garuḍa*. From the goddess's back *Vārāhī* appeared mounted on *Śeṣanāga*. From the breasts of the fierce goddess emerged *Māhendrī* wielding a thunderbolt in her hand. The goddess *Nārasimhī* originated from the heart of *Maheśvarī*. The *Mātṛśaktis* of the *Paraśurāmeśvara* temple however depicts *Cāmuṇḍī*, the slayer of *Caṇḍa* and *Muṇḍa* instead of *Nārasimhī* (*Vamana Purāṇa*, 2005).



Figure 7: Mātṛśaktis

Image Source: Author

Svarṇajāleśvara Temple

The *Svarṇajāleśvara* temple belongs to the early group of Orissan temples and was built during the *Sailodbhava* period. The temple is located in a secluded part of the city and stands in an extremely dilapidated condition having withstood the ravages of time. Among the sculptural friezes on the walls

of the temple certain that are still discernible, the most notable is the scene depicting the **marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī** carved above the lintel of the northern niche (Behra, 1993). The Vamana Purāṇa narrates that the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī was a joyous affair. All the divinities were in attendance and gathered at Kailāsa, where the pre-wedding rituals were performed. Śiva was decorated by Aditi, the mother of the gods. From Kailāsa, the wedding party consisting of divinities like Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra, Sarasvati, Yamuna and many others marched towards Himalayas, where the marriage ceremony was to take place. In due course, the marriage rituals took place and Śiva and Pārvatī accepted each other as husband and wife in the presence of the sacred flame (Vamana Purāṇa, 2005).

Śiśireśvara Temple

The Śiśireśvara temple of Bhubaneswar is another representative of early Orissan temple architecture. It may have been erected under the patronage of the Bhaumakaras around 775 AD. Similar to many others, the temple is dedicated to Śiva under the epithet 'Śiśireśvara' which roughly translates to the Lord of the cool season. The temple shares its grounds with the Vaital temple which is located to its south (Panigrahi, 1985). Many notable mythical figures can be observed within the Kalinga style architecture of the temple.



Figure 8: Marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī

Image Source: Author

Two iconographic friezes of **Mahiṣāsūramardinī**, one eight armed and another ten armed can be observed in the sculptural design of the temple. Mahiṣāsūramardinī is a form assumed by Sakti in order to defeat the demon Mahiṣa. According to the Skanda Purāṇa, the demon Mahiṣa was the result of a boon given to the demon Rambha, who after performing a great penance had asked Brahmā to grant him a son who would not be defeated by devas or Asuras. As a result, Mahiṣa was invincible and prideful. He defeated the gods and cast them out of heaven in order to become the supreme one. The gods under the leadership of Brahmā sought the help of Śiva and Viṣṇu. The acts of Mahiṣa have angered all the gods including Śiva and Viṣṇu. Having reached a consensus on slaying the evil demon, they combined their celestial energies to give birth to a superior being. This being took on a female form and her radiance lit up the world. The gods even armed her with weapons that were similar to the most

powerful weapon possessed by each god. Śiva gave her a trident, Viṣṇu gave her a discus, Varuṇa gave her a conch, Agni a spear, Maruta gave her a bow and a quiver full of arrows. Indra, the king of the gods, gave her a thunderbolt. Viśvakarmā gave her many polished weapons and armour that could not be pierced. Thus manifesting the power of the gods and carrying their weapons, the goddess rode into battle on a lion. When the demons saw the goddess approaching they engaged in a fearsome battle with her. At the end of this great battle, Mahiṣāsura was finally slain (Skanda Purāṇa, 1950).

The image of **Lakulīṣa** is another recurring feature of the Kalinga style of architecture. In the Śiṣīreśvara temple, it is located in the centre niche on the southern side (Donaldson, 1985). Lakulīṣa was known to be the 28th incarnation of Śiva. The Linga Purāṇa speaks of the prophecy that when the twenty-eighth cycle of the four Yugas occur, Śiva will take the form of yogic soul and will be born in the body of a religious student in an awe inspiring phenomenon (Linga Purāṇa, 1951). The Vayu further narrates that with the aid of his yogic powers, Śiva shall enter a dead body abandoned at the cremation grounds and henceforth this renewed

life shall be dedicated towards the welfare of Brahmāns. Accompanied by Viṣṇu and Brahmā, Lakulīṣa will reside in the holy caves of Meru, which shall gain the name Kayarohana and will become a spiritual location until the end of the earth. He further states that four sons will be born to Lakulīṣa named Kuśika, Garga, Mitra and Kauruṣya. These prodigious sons will become great ascetics having mastered the knowledge of the Vedas. They will maintain celibacy and will live free from the impurities of luxury and sin. After they have attained the Yoga of Rudra, they shall depart to Rudraloka, never to return (Vayu Purāṇa, 1960).

Vighnaharta Gaṇeśa is one of the most common representations in the temples of Bhubaneswar. In the Śiṣīreśvara temple, the image of this deity occupies a niche in the central projection of the *deula*. The most popular myth attached to this deity is the one that narrates the story of his head being cut off and replaced by that of an elephant. In one version of the myth as stated by the Śiva Purāṇa, Brahmā narrates that, once Jaya and Vijaya who were friends of Pārvatī, conferred with her that though she is surrounded by attendants and servants, they all carry out the wishes and order of Śiva. They advocated that Pārvatī does not have any personnel whom she can call her own. Jaya and Vijaya advised that Pārvatī must create someone, who will be solely hers to command. This suggestion suited Pārvatī and she created from the dirt of her skin a boy who will be a servant of her own, and an expert in



Figure 9: Mahiṣāsūramardini

Image Source: Author



Figure 10: Lakulīśa

Image Source: Author



Figure 11: Gaṇeśa

Image Source: Author

his duties. Upon his birth, she named this boy her son and entrusted him to be her gatekeeper. She further emphasized that he must not let anyone intrude in her apartment. However, when Śiva came to Pārvatī's apartment, unknown to his identity the heroic gatekeeper Gaṇeśa obstructed his way and warded him off. Śiva became furious at his insolence and cut off Gaṇeśa's head with his trident. However, after learning about this incident, Pārvatī was enraged and her lamentations started causing worldwide destruction. Thus in an effort to pacify her, Śiva and the devas decided to bring her son back to life. Śiva instructed the devas to go in the northern direction and cut off the head of the first person they meet and attach the head to the body of Gaṇeśa. During their search, the devas came upon a single tusked elephant, which was therefore cut off and attached to the body of Gaṇeśa. The boy was restored to life much to the delight of Pārvatī (The Śiva Purāṇa, 1950).

Brahmeśvara Temple

The Brahmeśvara temple of Bhubaneswar is associated with the Somavamsi dynasty. According to an inscription (whereabouts presently unknown), its construction was commissioned by Kalavati devi, the mother of Somavamsi king Uddyota Kesari around 1060 CE. (Panigrahi, 1985). This temple built in Kalinga style architecture is accompanied by four other small temples in the same courtyard. This aesthetically unique temple has abundant sculptural friezes of Hindu deities and mythical scenes similar to the Paraśurāmeśvara temple.

The **Andhaka-vadha-mūrti** appears on the southern façade of the temple. The Vamana Purāṇa describe that once, Uma had playfully closed the eyes of Śiva when he was in meditation. But this

minor incident caused major consequences as all of creation descended into darkness. This darkness birthed an entity with a complexion as blue as the clouds and he was named Andhaka. This son was fostered by Hiraṇyākṣa, who had previously prayed to Śiva for a son. Soon Andhaka committed a great sin. While visiting earth, Andhaka came across Pārvatī and was mesmerised by her beauty. Blinded by his desire, he ordered the demons to capture her. Despite numerous warnings by Prahlada, Andhaka did not cease his attempt. He ordered the demon Samabara to demand Pārvatī from Śiva. To this message of Sambara, Pārvatī replied that if Andhaka was able to defeat Śiva in a game of dice, she would accept him. Andhaka marched to Mandara with his army but was sorely defeated and was humbled by the powerful Śiva. Upon his defeat, Andhaka requested to be purified of his demon form. Śiva accepted the request of the repenting Asura and restores him in a new form as Ganapati Bhṛṅgin (Vamana Purāṇa, 2005).

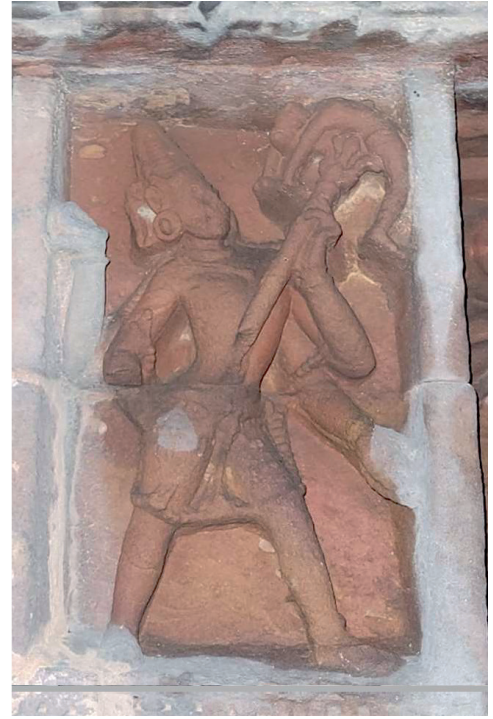


Figure 12: Andhaka-vadha-mūrti

The Brahmeśvara temple is also renowned for the sculptural depiction of the **eight Dipalakas**, each positioned according to its cardinal direction (Panigrahi, 1961). The Dikpalakas are the guardians of the eight directions. According to the Hindu mythological tradition, the eight Dikpalakas are- **Indra**, the guardian of the east. In the Hindu mythology, he is recognized as the king of the gods ruling over the heavenly realm. He is the god of Thunder and lighting and the commands the rain that soaks the earth (Mani, 1975). **Agni**, the god of fire, is the guardian of the south-eastern direction. Though an immortal Agni is the only divinity who resides with the mortals as their guest (Wilkins, 1913). **Yama**, the god of death, presides over the southern direction. He is the son of Sūrya and has been entrusted with the solemn duty of guiding departed souls to the afterlife and dispensing justice according to their deeds. In Vedic tradition, Yama is described as the first mortal to die, thereby becoming the ruler of the dead and guardian of the path to the other world (Mani, 1975). **Nirṛuti** is the guardian of the south-west (Rao, 1971). **Varuṇa** is the guardian of the western direction. He is the Vedic god of the waters and protector of the cosmic ocean, dwelling at the heart of the seas. In Hindu mythology, he is closely associated with Soma or Candra, for at the request of the gods he waxes and wanes with the Moon, which in turn brings about the rhythm of the tides (Wilkins, 1913). **Vāyu** is revered as the guardian of the north-west direction. He is the wind-god and the messenger of the deities. In Hindu mythology, Vāyu is celebrated as the father of Hanumān, the loyal and heroic vanara of the Rāmāyaṇa (Mani, 1975). **Kuberā** is the Dipalaka of the northern direction. He was extremely devoted to Brahmā, who in return granted Kubera immortality and lordship over wealth and riches (Rao, 1971). **Īśāna** or Śiva is worshipped as the guardian of the north-eastern direction (Rao, 1971).

Ananta Vasudeva Temple

In a city dominated by the worship of Śiva and having numerous temples dedicated to him, Ananta Vasudeva temple stands unique in its dedication to Viṣṇu. The temple is situated near the sacred body

of water called the Bindusagar and faces west. This Vaishnavite temple was built around late 13th century A.D, in the Ganga period, when the reign of Ganga King Bhanudeva I, the son of Ganga King Narasinha was ending (Behera, 1993). The most complete sculptural frieze of the Ananta Vasudeva temple is an image of the **Varāhāvatāra** of Viṣṇu. This image serves as a *parsadevata* and is located at the southern side of the temple (Donaldson, 2001). The Varāhāvatāra is one of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu, who incarnated as Varāha in order to slay the demon Hiranyākṣa. The Bhagavata Purāṇa states that the inauspicious twins Hiranyākṣa and Hiranyakaśipu were born to parents Prajāpati Kāśyapa and his wife Diti. As soon as they grew up they started falling out with the Devas. Hiranyākṣa, the younger twin made a sport out of tormenting the Devas. After storming Svarga, the abode of the gods, Hiranyākṣa dived into the ocean and made his way to Vi-bhāvārī, the capital of Varuṇa. Hiranyākṣa challenged Varuṇa to a fight but was warned that his insolence would not go unpunished. In the meantime, Svāyambhuva Manu and his wife were tasked with the work of extending their progeny. But Manu reminded Brahmā that there was no place for his

progeny to reside, for the earth that is the residence of all living beings has been submerged in the great ocean. Brahmā pondered that when he was engaged in Creation, the earth was engulfed in water and sank down to Rasātala. While Brahmā was lost in his thoughts, the form of a boar suddenly issued from his nostril and began to take an enlarged form. Viṣṇu in his boar form, went in search of the earth. The Varāhāvatāra finally found the earth in Rasātala. When Hiranyākṣa learnt of the arrival of Hari he went to Rasātala, to challenge and defeat Viṣṇu like he did with the other Devas. Once there, he was greeted by the scene of the boar-headed deity lifting up the earth with the tip of his tusks. Hiranyākṣa obstructed his way and refused to let him take the earth away. Viṣṇu upon finding his way obstructed by the demon, placed the earth within his range of perception and turned his attention to the demon. A terrible fight ensued among the two of them. The gods pleaded to Viṣṇu to kill the demon and put an end to his atrocities. After a prolonged fight, Viṣṇu in his boar form struck the demon Hiranyākṣa with his mace and succeeded in killing him (Bhagavata Purāṇa, 1950).

Megheśvara temple

The Megheśvara temple was built during the rule of Ganga king Rajaraja (1170-90 CE). The temple was commissioned by Svapneswardeva, who was the brother in law of King Rajaraja. The temple is dedicated to Śiva, who has been honoured with the epithet Megheśvara (Behera, 1993). The most notable sculptural frieze of the Megheśvara temple is the complete **Navagrahā** panel above the



Figure 13: Varāhāvatāra

Image Source: Author

doorway of the temple (Behera, 1993). The Navagrahā of the Hindu mythology are the nine planets, each representing a day of the week (Wilkins, 1913). Their images form a part of temple built in the Kalinga style of architecture and can be found in the form of a panel (Rao, 1971). The nine planets include- **Sūrya**, the radiant sun god. He is worshipped as the source of life and light. According to the Purāṇas, he is the son of Kāśyapa and Aditi. He rides a golden chariot drawn by seven horses and is accompanied by his charioteer Aruna. He married Saṃjñā the daughter of Viśvakarmā who bore him the children Yama and Yamī. The moon or **Candra** is also known as Soma. According to the Śalya Parva of the epic Mahābhārata, the 27 daughters of Dakṣa were married to him (Mani 1975). **Mangala** is the personification of the planet Mars. After the death of Sati, Śiva mourned and grieved their separation for a long time. He abandoned his household and his material possessions and wandered about the earth in a distraught manner. When he realised that his wanderings were fruitless, he entered into a meditative trance to destroy his misery. After many years, exhausted, the deity gave up the trance. A few drops of sweat fell on earth from his forehead and took the shape of a child. The child was reared by the goddess earth and was given the status of a planet by the grace of Śiva (The Śiva Purāṇa, 1950). **Buddha** is identified with the planet Mercury. His birth was the result of an illicit relationship between Candra and Tārā, the wife of Br̥haspati, preceptor of the gods. Tārā, captivated by Candra, refused to return to her husband despite repeated pleas. This led to a fierce conflict between Candra and Br̥haspati, which eventually escalated into a war involving gods, Asuras, and their allies, until Brahmā intervened to restore peace. Later, when Tārā bore a child, Br̥haspati accepted him as his own, but Candra contested the right to his son. Once again war threatened to erupt, until Brahmā urged Tārā to reveal the truth. She declared Candra as the father, after which the child was acknowledged by all and named Buddha (The Srimad Devi Bhagavatam, 1921). **Br̥haspati** or the planet Jupiter was born of Aṅgiras and Vasudha and was designated as the preceptor of the gods. He once took the guise of Śukra (the preceptor of the demons) and infiltrated the demon realm. Br̥haspati tricked the demons with such great deception that even when the real Śukracharya came back from his seclusion, the Asuras rejected him and thought him to be an imposter (Vamana Purāṇa, 2005). **Śukra** is the personification of the planet Venus. He is the preceptor of the Asuras and therefore the arch nemesis of Brihaspati (who is the preceptor of the gods). Śukra was the son of Bhrigu and Puloma. Śukra received the powerful Mṛtasanjīvanī mantra from Śiva after severe penance. Using it, he revived fallen Asuras in battle, angering the gods. However, Śiva swallowed him and after centuries he was reborn as Śiva's son (Mani 1975). **Sani** is the planet Saturn. Saṃjñā the daughter of the Viśvakarmā was unable to withstand the heat of her husband Sūrya. Therefore, she created a shadow of herself called Chaya and deceived her husband by placing Chaya in his abode as her replacement. For many years, Sūrya believed Chaya to be his wife and Sani was born from their union (Wilkins, 1913). The last two of the Navagrahā are **Rāhu** and **Ketu**. These two are not planets, neither are they divinities like the rest of the grahās. Rāhu and Ketu are considered to be the personification of the ascending and descending nodes of the moon. The Purāṇas reveal that after the churning of the ocean, the gods and the Asuras fought to claim the pot of nectar. However, Viṣṇu, in the form of a beautiful Mohini, tricked the Asuras and acquired the pot of nectar for the gods. However, Rāhu disguised himself as a god and secretly drank the nectar of immortality. But his trick was exposed and Viṣṇu swiftly severed his head with the discus. The immortal head became Rāhu, while the decapitated body was transformed into Ketu (Mani 1975).



Figure 14: Navagrahā

Conclusion

The temples of Bhubaneswar stand prominently as a symbol of enduring devotion. Their ancient doorways still receive hundreds of visitors and their sculptured facade continues to evoke awe and admiration. For decades, the Kalinga style of architecture of the temples have attracted the attention of scholars, inspiring research and analysis. The present research, however isolates the sculptural program that form an integral part of the Kalinga style of architecture and studies it from a mythological perspective. Seen through this lens, the sculptures are not mere aesthetic decorations but function as a visual storytelling medium. The temples have also been subject to conservation and preservation in an effort to protect their tangible form. However, the mythical aspect of these temples often go unrecognized. The present research has thus chosen to narrate the myths associated with the sculptures thereby attempting to elevate the cultural value of these heritage structures.

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