

Sovaneśvara temple of Nuagaon in Odisha: A Study on Art and Architecture

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Introduction

The temple of Sovaneśvara is one of the important Śaiva shrines of the Prachi Valley in Odisha. It is situated about 1 km from the Niali Bazara in the district of Cuttack. The temple is located at the village Nuagaon near Niali and it is about 50 kms from Bhubaneswara on the left bank of river Prāchī.¹ This temple is generally considered as one of the “Dvādasa Śambhus” on the bank of river Prachi.² The site of the temple is famous as *Muktiṭrtha*, *Arkaṭṭrtha*, *Sangamanatṭrtha*, etc.³ From the architectural point of view, the temple is a good specimen of the Kalinga style of architecture (Figure 1). One of the stupendous architectural undertakings during the Ganga period was the construction of the Sovaneśvara temple of Nuagaon. The temple is remarkable for its majestic size, massive vehemence, nobility and dignity. The architectural style of the Mādhavānanda temple of Mādhava village of the Prachi Valley is mostly similar like the architectural pattern of the Sovaneśvara temple of Nuagaon.

The present Sovaneśvara temple is a renovated temple and its site is considered as an important historical place of the Prachi Valley. Now, this temple is under the protection of the State Archaeology Department of Odisha. This temple is one of the important historical monuments of the Ganga period. The eastern side outer bāda wall of the temple contains an inscription of the 12th century C.E. Hence the temple is very significant from the historical point of view. The inscription records that the temple was built by a Nāgavamsi king named Śrī Baidyanatha, most likely a vassal king of the Ganga rulers.⁴ The poet Udayana Āchārya who composed this epigraph was also the composer of the commemorative inscription attached to the Meghesvara temple of Bhubaneswar built by Svapneśvara Deva, the brother-in-law of the Ganga king Rajraj-II (CE 1170-1194).⁵ Udayana Āchārya, the composer of this inscription appear to be a contemporary of

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Jayadeva, the author of famous *Gita-Govinda*.⁶ The Sovaneśvara temple is a close contemporary of the Megheśvara temple of Bhubaneswar, on the ground of commemorative inscription. The present article attempts to highlight the detailed art and architecture of the temple of Sovaneśvara.

Art and Architecture of the Temple

The temple of Sovaneśvara initially consisted of four structures such as *vimāna*, *jagamohana*, *nāṭamaṇḍapa* and *bhogamaṇḍapa*. But the last two structures of the temple are broken in the subsequent period. The pillars of the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* and the *bhogamaṇḍapa* are *in situ* indicate that these two structures were initially the pillared *maṇḍapas*. The temple is built in sand stones, which is locally called *Baulamalapātharas*. It faces to east.

A. *Vimāna*

The *vimāna* of the temple is a *nava-ratharekhādeula* and its height is about 45 feet from the surface of the temple complex (Figure 2). The structure of the *vimāna* has four parts such as *piṣṭha*, *bāda*, *ganḍi*, *mastaka*. The *piṣṭha* of both the *vimāna* and *jagamohana* is of same design and height. It is mostly buried under the earth. The upper part of the *piṣṭha* is about one foot high and it is visible. The *bāda* of the *vimāna* is *pañchāṅga* type i.e. having fivefold division, such as *pābhāga*, *talajāṅgha*, *bāndhanā*, upper *jāṅgha* and *baraṇḍa*. The *vimāna* (*deula*) is *navaratha* in plan. The *pābhāga* of the *bāda* is decorated with five conventional mouldings of *khurā*, *kumbha*, *paṭṭa*, *kāni* and *basanta*. Vertical bands carved with scroll work are joined at the centre of each *paga*. The *khurā* and *kumbha* are completely plain. The *paṭṭa* portion of the *pābhāga* is carved with scroll work. The *kāni* is decorated with small *ṭaṅkus* in both the upper and lower parts of it. The *basanta* of the *pābhāga* is relieved with scroll works. The *pābhāga* measures 4 feet 6 inches in height. The *talajāṅgha* of the *bāda* is decorated with *khākharāmuṇḍis*, which contain figures of *Aṣṭadīkpaḷas*, *sikṣādāna* scenes, seated *ṛishis*, bordered line designs, scroll work and worship of *Śivaliṅga* by a *Cāmuṇḍā*. The upper part of all the *khākharāmuṇḍis* of *talajāṅgha* are carved with *chaitya* medallions. Observing the iconography of the *aṣṭadīkpaḷas*, T.E. Donaldson remarks that these *dīkpaḷas* of the lower *jāṅgha* of the *deula* depicted in the niches of the *kānikapagas* as on the Megheśvara temple with each *dīkpaḷas* seated in *lalitāsana* on their respective mounts.⁷ In the *sikṣādāna* scene the main figure is seated on a low couch facing two rows of figures who are bearing gifts with one on all four limbs touching the floor with his head. The seated figure has right hand raised. A herd of cows is carved in standing posture on the lower part of the *sikṣādāna* panel. Here P. K. Ray identifies the scene as a hermitage illustrating the Sunasepha episode from the *Rāmāyana*.⁸

The intervening recesses between the *pagas* of the *talajāṅgha* are filled with *gajaviḍāḷas*, scroll work, etc. There is a seated male figure, possibly a *ṛishi* housed in a niche of the *talajāṅgha* in the southern side. A royal scene is depicted in the western side *talajāṅgha* of the *bāda*. A humped bull is depicted in a niche of the *talajāṅgha* in the side. The *talajāṅgha* measures 3 feet 10 inches in height. The *bandhanā* of the *bāda* consists of three horizontal mouldings, which are exquisitely carved with scroll work and miniature flower medallions. Vertical band is joined at the center of each *paga* of the *bāndhanā*. The upper *jāṅgha* of the *bāda* is decorated with elongated *piḍhāmuṇḍi*, scroll works, bordered line designs, etc. The *piḍhāmuṇḍi* niches of the upper *jāṅgha* house various

deities of the Hinduism. They are Ardhanārīśvara, Ajaikapāda Śiva, Sūrya Devatā, dancing female figures (*alasakanyas*), four armed Cāmuṇḍā, standing ṛiṣhi figure, two armed Cāmuṇḍā, Śiva holding *māyāmṛiga*, Birañci-Nārāyaṇa (Sūrya) on the north-east corner wall, *mithuna* figure, Śiva-Pārvatī depicted on the north-west corner wall, seated ṛiṣhi figure depicted on the south-east corner wall, etc. Most of the *alasakanyā* figures are not *in situ* though a few of their pedestals are intact. The *baraṇḍa* of the *bāḍa* consists of ten horizontal decorative mouldings.

The central niches of the three sides of the *bāḍa* of *vimāna* are housed with the *pārśvadevatā* images of Gaṇeśa, Kārtikeya and Pārvatī. The image Gaṇeśa is the *pārśvadevatā* of the southern side (Figure 3). The four armed image of Gaṇeśa is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The lower part of the pedestal is decorated with kneeling devotees, sacrificial *yūpas* in both sides and lotus bud with stalk. Mouse, the conventional mount of the deity is carved on the left of the pedestal. Diminutive attendant figure holding jack fruit is carved on both sides of the deity. The backside of the head of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch; female figure at the base and the *kirtimukha* motif at the apex. *Vidyādhara* and *apsarā* figures holding garlands, musical instruments, *cāmaras* are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image Gaṇeśa displays broken tusk in upper right hand, rosary in lower right hand, a pot of *laḍus* in upper left hand and a *kuthāra* (hatchet) in lower left hand respectively. Gaṇeśa is ornately be jeweled with his *yajñopavita* and anklets being formed by serpents. The image of Gaṇeśa measures 4 feet 5 inches in height and 2 feet 3 inches in width. There is a small stone, which contains an image of Gaṇeśa noticed at the right side of the deity (Gaṇeśa). It is also considered as the side deity of the temple. This image is made of granite stone. There is a *niśā-garvakṇa* (shrine) of the *piḍhā* order erected in front of the Gaṇeśa image. It is about 18 feet high from the surface of the temple complex. The pyramidal superstructure of the *niśā*-shrine is surmounted on the four square sized pillars. It is an open *niśāgarvaka* and has usual element of the *gaṇḍi* and *mastaka* of the *piḍhādeula*. Kārtikeya is the *pārśvadevatā* of the western side. The four armed image of Kārtikeya is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. He displays an indistinct object in upper right hand and *varadamudrā* with a small lotus mark in lower right hand. The upper left hand holds the rooster cock and the lower left hand lies on the tail of the rooster cock. Devaseṇā is lifting the legs of the rooster cock. Peacock, the conventional mount of the deity is carved on the right of the pedestal. There is a small attendant figure holding a staff depicted on the right of the pedestal near the peacock. Diminutive male and female figures are flanked on either side of the deity on the lower part of the slab. They are depicted in the *piḍhāmūṇḍi* niches. The *gajavidala* figure is carved at the centre of both sides of the slab. The backside of the head of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. Small images of Gaṇeśa and Pārvatī are flanked on either side base of the trefoil arch. *Vidyādhara* and *apsarā* figures holding garland, *cāmara* and musical instruments are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Kārtikeya measures 4 feet 6 inches in height and 2 feet 4 inches in width. There is a similar *niśā* shrine of the *piḍhā* order like of the southern side erected in front of the Kārtikeya image. The *pārśvadevatā* images of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya are notable for their fine workmanship. Devī Pārvatī is the *pārśvadevatā* of the northern side. The four armed image of Devī Pārvatī is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The bottom part of the pedestal is decorated with female devotees, who are depicted in kneeling posture. Lion, the conventional mount of the Devī Pārvatī is carved on the right of the pedestal. Vairabhi figure is carved on the opposite side of the lion figure. The

upper right hand holds an indistinct object, the lower right hand displays rosary, the upper left hand possesses *nāgapāsa* and the lower left hand holds the stalk of a full blown lotus flower. The image of Pārvatī is made of chlorite stone. Female attendant figure is found depicted on both sides of Devī Pārvatī. *çauri* bearer figure is carved on the centre of each side of the slab. The backside of the head of the Devī Pārvatī is decorated with trefoil arch. Diminutive figures of Kārtikeya and Gaṇeśa are flanked on either side base of the arch. Here Devī Pārvatī is housed in the *piḍhāmūṇḍi* niche, which is projected out of the *bāḍa* wall. There is also a *niśā* shrine of *piḍhā* order erected in front of Devī Pārvatī. Its height is about 18 feet from the surface of the temple complex. The *rāhāpaga* of the *bāḍa* is designed as a truncated *piḍhāmūṇḍi* as on the Megheśvara temple of Bhubaneswar.⁹

The *gaṇḍi* of the *vimāna* is a curvilinear superstructure and it continues the *navaratha* plan of the *bāḍa*. The *gaṇḍi* is mostly covered with plaster so the original decorative works of the earlier are not found at present. The base of the central *rāhāpaga* of the *gaṇḍi* is decorated with a large *aṅgaśikhara* on each side. There is a niche, above the central *aṅgaśikhara*, which houses a figure of peacock of modern cement work. *Gajakrānta* motif is projected at the centre of the *rāhāpaga* on each side. The *anurāhāpaga* of the *gaṇḍi* is completely plain. *Aṅgaśikharas* are decorated on the top of the *gajakrānta* motif of the central *rāhā* in successive order. The *anurāhāpaga* is relieved with four elongated *aṅgaśikharas* in successive order one above another. The *parirathapaga* of the *gaṇḍi* is bereft of decorated elements. The *kāṇikapaga* of the *gaṇḍi* is divided into 9 storey's, which demarcate by *bhūmiāmāḷs*. The entire *gaṇḍi* of the *vimāna* is thickly plastered with lime mortar. *Dopichhā* lion figure is projected on the top of the north-east corner only. But other three top corners of the *gaṇḍi* are completely plain having no lion figures. *Beki Vairabhas* are inserted in the four cardinal directions of the *beki* above *rāhās*.

The *mastaka* of the *vimāna* consists of *beki*, *āmaḷakaśilā*, *khapuri*, *kalasa*, *āyudha* (trident) and *dhvaja*.

The sanctum preserves the *Śivaliṅga* within the *Śaktipitha* as the presiding deity of the temple. There is a large sized *Śaktipitha* found worshipped at the centre of the sanctum sanctorum. The temple priest says that it is a *Pātālaphuṭā* Mahādeva. Here the *Śivaliṅga* is not visible. The *Śaktipitha* has a large hole. The *Śivaliṅga* of the sanctum is differently called as Purneśvara, Brahmeśvara and Sovaneśvara.¹⁰ A big sized *nāga* of the modern period is found installed on the *Śaktipitha* of the sanctum-sanctorum. The back wall niche of the sanctum contains the images of Chandraśekhara and Umā. Due to restriction, the iconographies of these two images could not be documented by the present author. The *Śaktipitha* is surmounted by a wooden *kanakamaṇḍapa*, which is supported by circular pillars. The floor of the sanctum is about 4 feet below the road level. Masonry steps of the descending order are provided for approach towards the interior of the sanctum.

The sanctum has one doorway towards the *jagamohana*. The doorframe of each side is carved with three sections in vertical order. These are decorated with scroll works, creepers with the frolicking boys and lotus flowers in successive order. The bottom part of the doorframe contains a *khākharāmūṇḍi* on each side. Figures of Nandī and Bhṛiṅgī are housed in either side of

khākharāmūṇḍi niche of the door frame. The upper part of the doorframe is decorated with *apsarā* figures holding musical instruments in their hands. The centre of the doorway lintel is carved with an image of Gaja-Lakṣmī, which is housed in the *piḍhāmūṇḍi* niche. Here Devī Gaja-Lakṣmī is depicted in *abhiṣeka* pose. *Navagrahas* are carved on the architrave above the doorway lintel. They are depicted in *yogāsana* pose with usual attributes in their hands. All the *grahas* are engraved in the *piḍhāmūṇḍi* niches.

Sandhisthala

The *sandhisthala* is found erected between the *vimāna* and the *jagamohana*. The *bāḍa* wall of the *sandhisthala* measures 43 inches in width and it is decorated with a *pābhāga* duplicating that of the *vimāna*.¹¹ The *sandhisthala* connects both the structures of *vimāna* and *jagamohana*. The lower storey of the *sandhisthala* wall is decorated with a *jagrata* motif. The leonine monster leaping on its hind legs with a *sandhisthala* wall is relieved with its back. The upper storey of the *sandhisthala* wall is relieved with a Bhairava type guardian figure with legs crossed and his arms placed in front of his chest resting on a weapon. This *jagrata* motif is an important decorative element on the *sandhisthala* walls of the most of later temples of Odisha.

B. Jagamohana

The *jagamohana* of the temple is a *pañcarathapiḍhādeula* and its height is about 35 feet from the surface of the temple complex. The structure of the *jagamohana* has four vertical divisions such as *piṣṭa*, *bāḍa*, *ganḍi* and *mastaka*. The *piṣṭa* is buried in the northern side while the southern side appears 8 inches of high. It is the same height like the *piṣṭa* of the *vimāna*. The base of the *bāḍa* of *jagamohana* measures 37 feet on the northern and southern sides and 35 feet 10 inches on the eastern-western directions respectively. The *bāḍa* of the *jagamohana* is *pañcāṅga* type i. e. having five component parts such as *pābhāga*, *talajāṅgha*, *bāndhanā*, upper *jāṅgha* and *baraṇḍa*. The *pābhāga* of the *bāḍa* contains the conventional mouldings of *khurā*, *kumbha*, *pattā*, *kāni* and *basanta*. Vertical bands carved with scroll work are joined at the centre of all *pagas*. The *pābhāga* of the *bāḍa* is decorated with elongated *khākharāmūṇḍis*, *nāga-nāgini*, pilasters and scroll work. The *pābhāga* of the *bāḍa* measures 3 feet 5 inches in height. The *talajāṅgha* of the *bāḍa* is decorated with *khākharāmūṇḍis* and elongated *khākharāmūṇḍis*. The niches of the *khākharāmūṇḍis* of the *talajāṅgha* are housed with the images of *aṣṭadīpālas*, Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa, *çauri* bearers, female figures in different poses, king seated on a couch, *sikshādāna* scene, female figure holding *kaḷasa*, *sikshādāna* scene of a *ṛishi*, standing *ṛishi* figures, worship of Śivaliṅga by ascetics, erotic scenes, Gaṇeśa (southern side), female figure with tree branches (*dālamālikās*), a female figure possible queen on a *simhāsana*, a figure of *ṛishi* depicted in *dhyana* pose on the pedestal, etc. The *mastaka* of the *khākharāmūṇḍis* of the *talajāṅghas* are carved with scroll works. The intervening recesses between the *pagas* of *talajāṅgha* are filled with *gaja-vidālas* and *simhavidālas*. The *talajāṅgha* measures 2 feet 11 inches in height. The left side eastern *bāḍa* wall of the *jagamohana* contains an inscription of the Gaṅga period. Having an inscription incised on the outer *bāḍa* wall of the *jagamohana*, the temple is considerable of historical importance. The inscription with opening verses in praise of Lord Śiva refers to the village Nialisasana and performance of *Debādāsī* dance in the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* of this temple.¹² This inscription is possible the earliest known inscription that

explicitly states that *devadasis* performed in the *nāṭamandapa*. The inscription mentions Nialisasana famous in Utkal where the vassals of the Ganga emperors of Orissa were ruling.¹³

The *bāndhanā* of the *bāḍa* consists of three horizontal mouldings. All the three mouldings are decorated with different architectural elements. The upper *jāṅgha* of the *bāḍa* is decorated with *piḍhāmūṇḍis*. The niches of the *piḍhāmūṇḍis* are housed with the female counterparts of the *aṣṭadīkṣpālas*, dancing female figures, erotic scenes, female figure in standing posture with a baby in her waist, seated royal figure on a couch or bed, *ṛṣhi* in *yogapattās*, *nāyikā* figure holding a mirror, female figure in different postures, female figure with *veenā*, female figure with tree branches (*dālamālikā*), mothers fondling the babies, amorous couples, mounted horses, erotic scene, Lord Śiva in meditating posture, seated female figure, king on a couch, *alāsakanyās* in different moods and poses, king and queen depicted on the *simhāsana* (western side upper *jāṅgha*), etc. The intervening recesses between the *pagas* of upper *jāṅgha* are filled with *mithuna* figures and erotic scenes. In the north-east corner recess of the upper *jāṅgha* contains a figure of *ṛṣhi* who is begging a child from a female. Here the female (lady) is donating the child to the *ṛṣi* (*sanyāsi*). This sculptural panel (scene) is very attractive for visitors as well as scholars.

The *baraṇḍa* of the *bāḍa* consists of six horizontal decorative mouldings. It is covered with modern cement mortar. The *baraṇḍa* measures 24 ½” in height.¹⁴

Gavākṣhā

The central niche of the *bāḍa* of *jagamohana* in the northern side is fixed with a balustraded window, which contains six undecorated balusters. The *gavākṣhāmaṇḍana* of the northern side is bereft of any sculptural panel. The lower *gavākṣhā* of the northern side is decorated with three *khākharamūṇḍ* is intervened by *nāga-nāgini* pilasters. The southern side central niche of the *bāḍa* of *jagamohana* has same designed balustrade windows. The *gavākṣhāmaṇḍana* of the southern side is also devoid of sculptural scene. Most probably the sculptural panels of the *gavākṣhāmandanas* of both the northern and southern sides are detached in the subsequent period.

The *gaṇḍi* of the *jagamohana* is a pyramidal superstructure. It consists of two potalas; the lower and upper, which contain four and three *piḍhās* respectively. Each *piḍhā* of the *gaṇḍi* is decorated with *tāṅkus* in all sides. The *gavākṣhā* panel at the centre of the upper *piḍhā* of the lower *potala* is projected with *jhampasimha* in all sides. *Deuḷa Cāriṇi* figures and *dopichhā* lions are completely absent in their respective places above the *gaṇḍi*.

The *mastaka* of the *jagamohana* consists of *beki*, *ghaṇḍā* (bell shaped member), above which there is another *beki*, *āmaḷakaśilā*, *khapurī*, *kalasa*, *āyudha* (trident) and *dhvaja*.

Inner walls of the *jagamohana* are devoid of decorative ornamentation in contrast to the outer walls. There is a *dāru* image of Lord Jagannatha found in the south-western corner of the *jagamohana*. Here Lord Jagannātha is installed on the pedestal of 1½ feet high. An image of Dola-Govinda made of brass is found preserved in a brass *khatulī* and it is noticed inside the *jagamohana*. Other deities like Anthua-Gopala, Lakṣhmī, Gaṇeśa, etc. are also kept for public worship. The image of Hara-Pārvatī (Umā-Maheśvara) is found worshipped inside the

jagamohana. A series of miniature *Śivaliṅgas* within *Śaktipīṭhas* are found preserved inside the *jagamohana*. A good number of *nāgas* are also noticed in the floor of *jagamohana*. There is a *Śivaliṅga* containing a head of Lord Śiva. It is considered by the local people as the head of Bellalasena. This *Śivaliṅga* is made of copper. The *Śivaliṅga* is very notable for its sanctity. The local people say that any theft (case) of that region is solved by touching this *Śivaliṅga*. By the name of Lord Śiva, all most all the people of that locality say the true fact of the case/theft. So this Linga is conceived by the local people as representative of Lord Sovaneśvara Śiva. There is a small figure of Garuḍa installed on the square sized pillar of 5 feet high. Here the figure of Garuḍa is depicted in kneeling posture with folded hands. It is noticed at the eastern side doorway of the *jagamohana*. There is a bell stand kept in the south-east corner of the *jagamohana*. This bell stand contains near about 80 (eight) small bells and it is made in the modern period.

The *jagamohana* has one doorway on the eastern side. The doorframe is decorated with creepers with lotus flowers. Rahu head is carved at the centre of the doorway lintel. *Navagrahas* are not found on the architrave above the doorway lintel. Two circular pillars are erected on both sides of the doorway. Two female figures (*dvārapālikās*) are flanked the base of door frame. Both the structures of *vimāna* and *jagamohana* were possibly built in the same period.

C. *Nāṭamaṇḍapa*

The temple inscription records that king Vaidyanātha “built in front of Śiva a *maṇḍapa*, which is the abode of pleasure for the eyes.”¹⁵ Most probably, it was initially an open pillared *maṇḍapa*. But now the roof of the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* is not found. It is a ten pillared *maṇḍapa*. The earlier (original) pillars of the *maṇḍapa* are found existed till today in perfect condition. The platform of the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* is about 1½ feet high. The pillars of the *maṇḍapa* are made of sand stone. Bull, the conventional mount of Lord Sovaneśvara Śiva is noticed at the centre of the floor of the *nāṭamaṇḍapa*. It is now covered by a small *piṭhāmaṇḍapa*. This is evident in the commemorative inscription where it is recorded that Devādasīs danced in the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* of the temple during the time of *Bhoga pūjā*.¹⁶ So, the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* can be assigned to the time period of the main *deula*.

D. *Bhogamaṇḍapa*

The *bhogamaṇḍapa* of the temple is also an open pillared *maṇḍapa*. There are as many as 16 pillars noticed at the floor of the *bhogamaṇḍapa*. Perhaps, the roof of the *bhogamaṇḍapa* was destroyed by nature in the later period. It is quite possible that temporary roofs, made of bamboo, and thatch, were erected as need demanded. The *maṇḍapa* probably serving various functions in addition to dance festivities and the platform of it measures 53 inches in height.¹⁷ The base of the ruined structure of the *bhogamaṇḍapa* is a square of 30 feet 3 inches.¹⁸ All the pillars of the *bhogamaṇḍapa* are made of sand stone. Observing the style and sculptural art of the temple, the poet Udayana has rightly remarked in the inscription that this beautiful temple was the stone house of all arts and the gentle abode of *dharma*.¹⁹ Most probably, all the four structures of the temple were built by King Vaidyanātha.

Sculpture shed

Besides the four structures of the temple, there is a modern flat roof shed built in the northern side

of the temple complex. It has been built by the Orissa State Archaeology Department in 1971-72 for the preservation of the loose sculptures of that locality.²⁰ It preserves a good specimen of the loose sculptures of Vaiṣṇavite deities and an image of Yama, the Lord of death. These images are 1. Varāha, 2. Vishṇu, 3. Vishṇu, 4. Vishṇu, 5. Vishṇu, 6. Vishṇu, 7. Vishṇu, 8. Vishṇu, 9. Vishṇu and 10. Yama. Most of the above images are made of chlorite stone. All the deities of the shed are being discussed here from the right side of the entrance. The first deity is Varāha-Vishṇu. The four handed image of Varāha is carved in standing posture on the plain pedestal. The right leg of deity puts on the lap of a *nāgini* figure while the left leg has been installed on the belly of a female figure (Figure 4). The uplifted left arm bears the image of goddess *Prithvī* and the lower left hand displays *śaṅkha* respectively. Flower medallion is carved on both side top corners of the slab. The image Varāha measures 1 foot 8 inches in height and 1 foot in width.

The second deity is Lord Vishṇu. The four handed image of Lord Vishṇu has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand holds *çhakra*, the lower right hand is broken from the elbow portion, the upper left hand displays *śaṅkha* and the lower left hand possesses a *gadā* respectively. Garuḍa, the conventional mount of deity is carved on the right of the pedestal. Female devotees are carved in kneeling posture on the bottom of the pedestal. Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī figures are carved on either side of the deity *çauri* bearer figure is depicted at the centre of both sides of the slab. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. The figures of Brahmā and Śiva are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. Flying *apsarā* figures are depicted on the upper part of the trefoil arch. They are displaying flowers, garlands, necklace, musical instruments, etc. in their hands. The image Vishṇu measures 3 feet 3 inches in height and 1 foot 9 inches in width respectively.

The third deity is also of Lord Vishṇu. The four armed image is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand holds *çhakra*, the lower right hand displays *varadamudrā*, the upper left hand possesses *śaṅkha* and the lower left hand holds *gadā* respectively. Female devotees are carved in kneeling posture on the bottom part of the pedestal. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Lord Vishṇu is carved on the right of the pedestal. Female attendant figure is depicted on both sides of the deity. Both side centres of the slab of the image are decorated with diminutive female figures. The backside of the head of the deity is relieved with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. Diminutive figures of Śiva and Brahmā are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. Flying *apsarā* figures are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Vishṇu measures 2 feet 7 inches in height and 1 foot 4 inches in width respectively.

The fourth deity is of Lord Vishṇu. The four armed image is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. Female devotees are decorated at the base of the pedestal. Garuḍa, the conventional mount of deity is carved on the right of the pedestal. Female attendant figures are depicted at the base of the pedestal. Above the female figure, a diminutive *çauri* bearer figure is carved on the centre of each side of the slab. He displays *çhakra* in upper right hand and *varadamudrā* in lower right hand. The upper left hand of deity is broken from the elbow portion and his lower left hand possesses a *gadā*. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. Brahmā and Śiva figures are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. *Apsarā* figures holding musical instruments are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Lord Vishṇu measures 1 foot 9 inches in width and 3 feet 1 inch in height.

The fifth deity is Lord Viṣṇu. This image is larger than the other Viṣṇu images of that shed. The four armed figure is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal (Figure 5). The bottom part of the pedestal is decorated with scroll work and kneeling devotees holding garlands in their hands. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu is carved on the left of the pedestal. Female figure is carved on both sides of the slab. The upper right hand possesses *chakra*, the lower right hand displays *varadamudrā*, the upper left hand exhibits a *śaṅkha* and the lower left hand holds a *gadā* respectively. The backside of the head of deity is relieved with *prabhāmaṇḍala*. Flying *apsarā* figure is carved on both side top corners of the slab. This image measures 4 feet 10 inches in height and 2 feet 4 inches in width. The slab of deity is made of chlorite stone.

The sixth deity is Lord Viṣṇu. The four armed image is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. Female devotees and scroll work are carved on the bottom part of the slab. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu is carved on the right of the pedestal. The upper right hand holds *chakra*, the lower right hand displays *varadamudrā*, and the left side both hands are broken from the elbow portion. Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī figures are carved on either side of the deity. They are depicted as attendant figures of Lord Viṣṇu. Diminutive female figure is carved at the centre of both sides of the slab. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. Brahmā and Śiva figures are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. *Apsarās* are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image Viṣṇu measures 3 feet in height and 1 foot 8 inches in width respectively.

The seventh deity is Lord Viṣṇu. The four handed image of Lord Viṣṇu is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand holds *chakra* and the rest three hands of deity are broken from the elbow portion. Female devotees are carved on both sides of the bottom part of the pedestal. Garuḍa, the mount of deity is carved on the left of the pedestal. The *piḍhāmūṇḍi* is decorated on each side base of the slab and it contains female attendant figure. The middle portions of both sides of the slab are decorated with diminutive female figures, who are displaying *çauri* in their hands. The backside of the head of deity is carved with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. The figures of Śiva and Brahmā are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. *Vidyādhara* and *apsarā* figures are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Lord Viṣṇu measures 2 feet 6 inches in height and 1 foot 4 inches in width respectively.

The eighth deity is Lord Viṣṇu. The four handed image is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. Tree branches are decorated on the bottom part of the pedestal. The figures of kneeling devotees are depicted on the right side bottom part of the pedestal. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu is carved on the right of the pedestal. Female attendant figures are carved on both sides of the deity. *Cauri* bearer figures are flanked on either side centre of the slab. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch. Female figure holding *veenā* is carved on each side base of the trefoil arch. Flying *apsarā* figures are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The upper right hand displays *chakra* and other hands of deity are completely broken. So the attributes in the rest hands are not found. The image of Lord Viṣṇu measures 4 feet 3 inches in height and 2 feet 3 inches in width respectively.

The ninth deity is Lord Viṣṇu. The four handed image is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The bottom part of the pedestal is decorated with scroll work. Garuḍa, the

vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu is carved on the left of the pedestal. The upper right hand holds *chakra* and other hands completely broken. The figures of Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī are depicted on either side of the deity. Diminutive female figures are finely carved on both side centers of the slab. The backside of the head of the deity is decorated with trefoil arch. Figures of Brahmā and Śiva are carved on either side base of the trefoil arch. *Apsarās* holding garlands, musical instruments are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image Viṣṇu measures 3 feet 1 inch in height and 1 foot 8 inches in width. All the above nine Vaiṣṇava images of the shed are made of chlorite stone. Iconographical features of these images contain the artistic tradition of the Gaṅga period. Most of the Viṣṇu images are worshipped by the local people as Mādhavas in the whole length and breadth of the Prācī Valley. The above mentioned Viṣṇu images of the shed along with other two Viṣṇu images were restored from a pond near the Brahmā temple of Niali.²¹ Out of these, two rescued Viṣṇu images are found preserved in the Nīlakantheśvara temple of Niali.²² It can be easily believed that once the Prācī Valley civilization was influenced by the Mādhava cult.

The last deity is Yama, god of death. The two handed image of Yama is carved in *lalitāsana* pose on the single petalled lotus pedestal. The image Yama is made of sand stone. He holds *kālapāśa* in left hand and the right hand is completely broken. Buffalo, the vehicle of Lord Yama is carved on the centre of the pedestal. Male attendant figures are depicted on both sides of the buffalo. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with a diadem, which is carved with bordered line designs. The image is slightly different from other Yama images of Orissa.

Additional Śivaliṅgas

Besides the main Śivaliṅga i.e. the presiding deity, some additional ancient Śivaliṅgas bearing the names of Sūryeśvara, Paśchimesvara, Śaṅkareśvara, Dhavaleśvara, Garuḍeśvara and Mukundeśvara are also reckoned with at this place.²³ An earlier inscription consisting of four lines badly mutilated, is engraved on a Śivaliṅga known as Sūryeśvara, one of five such *Liṅgas* within the temple complex, suggesting the existence of earlier shrine of that site.²⁴ Palaeographically, this inscription is older than the Sovaneśvara temple inscription. According to the local tradition the Sūryeśvara Śivaliṅga was established here to mark the penance undertaken by Sūrya Devatā at this place.

Though the temple is dedicated to Lord Sovaneśvara Śiva but it also preserves some important sculptures of Lord Viṣṇu, which one worshipped as Lord Mādhava. The presence of Viṣṇu images indicates that the temple was not exclusively a Śiva shrine. The inscription of the temple also says that the temple was dedicated to both Viṣṇu and Śiva.²⁵ It can be rightly said that the shrine is a coordinating place of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Date of the Temple

On the basis of the available inscription and extant images of the temple, most of the scholars accept that the Sovaneśvara temple near Niali was constructed in the Gaṅga period. G. S. Das is of the view that the temple of Sovaneśvara may be placed as almost contemporary with the temple of Mādhavananda of Mādhava, which was possibly built in the last quarter of the 12th century CE.²⁶ He also mentions that the architect of the temple was Dvija Savana, who has been linked with the

engineer Maya of epic fame by Udayana, the writer of the Sovaneśvara temple inscription.²⁷ P.K. Ray opines that the date of the Sovaneśvara temple can be fixed within 1170-1190 CE. when the poet Udayana Archarya flourished.²⁸ R. P. Mohapatra has suggested that the temple of Sovaneśvara was built towards the last part of the 12th century CE.²⁹ T. E. Donaldson remarks that the temple of Sovaneśvara can be ascribed to the closing years of the 12th century possibly during the reign of Anangabhima Deva-II (CE 1190-98).³⁰ In this connection K.S. Behera has mentioned that the Sovaneśvara temple was built by King Śrī Baidyanātha, the son of Hari and grandson of Mādhava of the *Kaśyapagotra*. The actual architect of the temple, according to the inscription, was a Brāhmaṇa named Savana.³¹ On the basis of the architectural style, iconographical features of the *pārśvadevatās* and the available inscription in the outer *bāḍa* wall of the *jagamohana*, the construction period of the Sovaneśvara temple can be tentatively assigned to the last quarter of the 12th century CE. (i.e. from 1175 to 1200). Most probably, this temple was built in the same period when the construction work of the present Jagannatha temple of Puri was completed.

Boundary Wall

The temple complex is enclosed by a boundary wall, which is made of laterite stone. It is about 9 feet in height. The temple is placed in the middle of a court measuring 185 feet in length and 105 feet in width respectively.³² There is an image of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā affixed to the boundary wall on the western side. A few earlier scholar remarks that the image Mahiṣamardinī Durgā is earlier, possibly belongs to the 11th century CE.³³ The image of Durgā is mutilated. This image is ten armed and puts her uplifted right leg on the back of the decapitated buffalo from which Mahisa is attempting to escape. Except the *nāgapāsa* and quiver of arrows behind her shoulder all of the attributes and hands are missing.³⁴ The worship of *Daśabhuja* Mahiṣamardinī Durgā image was in vogue in many places of the Prāchī Valley either as *Piṣṭadevī* or as side deity. Iconographical features indicate that this Durgā image is earlier than the present temple. Initially, this image was found worshipped as side deity of the temple as mentioned by P. K. Ray.³⁵ The presence of ancient Durgā image in the temple premises indicates that the worship of Goddess Durgā was also popular in that locality.

Now the temple is being managed by a local committee of that village.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above discussion that the temple of Sovaneśvara is one of the *Dvādaśa Śambhus* of the Prāchī Valley. Many scholars of the Odishan art go to the site of the temple. Most probably, all the four structures of the temple were constructed in the same period. The present *pārśvadevatās* are the original side deities of the temple. Being an inscription incised in the wall of the *jagamohana*, the temple is very important from the historical point of view. Undoubtedly, this temple was built by the vassal king named Śrī Baidyanātha as recorded in the inscription of the *jagamohana* wall. Though the temple is dedicated to Lord Sovaneśvara Śiva, it also preserves a good number of sculptures of the Vaiṣṇavite deities. The iconographic features of the extant images of the Sovaneśvara temple exhibit the Odishan classical art of the medieval period. The available images of the Sovaneśvara temple are adorned with various types of decorative

ornaments such as anklets, wristlets, armlets, rich necklaces, jeweled tiara, *jaṭāmukuta*, *kuṇḍaḷas* (ear rings), bracelets, diadems and beaded *yajñopavīta*. These decorative ornaments of the images of the site obviously represent the traditional art style of Odisha. Some ancient *Śivaliṅgas* are found worshipped inside the temple complex. One of the *liṅgas* contains an inscription of a few lines, which indicates that before the present Sovaneśvara temple, this *Śivaliṅga* was being worshipped in that site. Considering the religious aspect, the site of the Sovaneśvara temple can be said as an important ancient Śaiva shrine of the Prāchī Valley in Odisha. On the whole, the artistic features of the Sovaneśvara temple of Nuagaon represent the fine specimen of the Odishan temple art of the Gāṅga period.

Acknowledgement

I am deeply obliged to Prof. P. K. Nayak, my guide for his encouragement and valuable suggestion in writing of this article.

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Figure 1 - The Sovaneśvara temple at Nuagaon; Niali, Odisha



Figure 2 - The *vimāna* of Sovaneśvara temple at Nuagaon, Niali

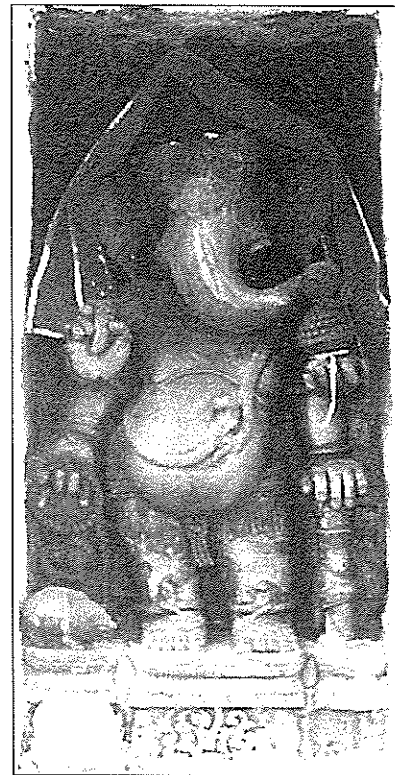


Figure 3 - The image Ganeśa is the southern side *pārsvadevatā* of the Sovaneśvara temple at Nuagaon, Niali

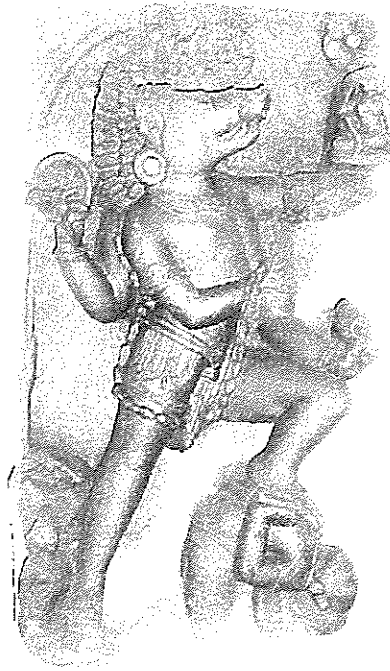


Figure 4 - The image of Varāha is found preserved
the modern flat roof shed built in the northern
side of the Sovaneśvara temple complex of Nuagaon, Niali

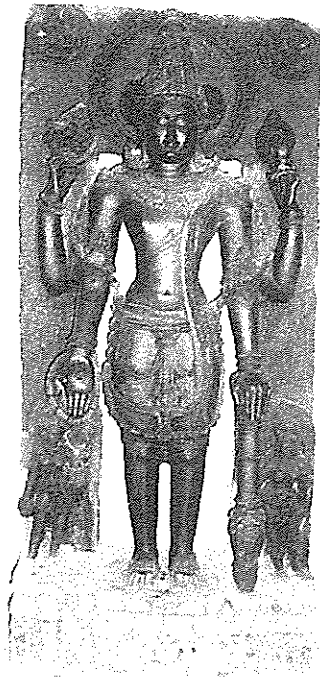


Figure 5 - The image of Lord Vishṇu (Mādhava) is found
preserved in the modern flat roof shed built in the northern
side of the Sovaneśvara temple complex of Nuagaon, Niali

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The Journal of Indian Art History Congress

(Vol: XXIII, 2017-18)

Editor

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