

# Impact of Tribal Iconography on the Architecture of Temples in Odisha in India

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## Abstract

Odisha is a cultural melting pot of not only the North and the South, but more so the coastal non-tribal culture and the Western hinterland tribal cultures of India. The state is home to the 3rd largest number of Scheduled Tribes in India, which includes 62 tribes. The artforms and culture of Odisha have evolved as a result of the interactions between such varied communities over the ages. The Nagara style of temple architecture adapted by the Odishan architects has been skillfully blended with tribal artforms and motifs emanating from the systematic inclusion of vernacular and tribal knowledge and customs. This paper examines this phenomenon. Its intention is to establish possible links between tribal art and the temple architecture of Odisha.

It employs a comparative analysis of built forms, structures, decorations, and motifs. The tribal roots of many deities were also explored. Data was collected by personal visits to temples, interviews with subject experts, and from published literature.

The paper concludes that there is a profound influence of tribal iconography on the temples of Odisha. This influence has been in the form of decorations, artforms, motifs and symbols.

**Keywords:** Iconography, Tribal artforms, Odisha, Temple architecture, Nagara Style, Motifs, Symbolism, Built-form.

## Introduction

Iconography has been used in tribal art and architecture from pre-historic times to date. They are developed typically in the rural areas and are often religious and ceremonial. Tribal art was not just about decoration, but was used for marking or commemorating special occasions like celebrations, thanking deities, harvests, births, marriages, and cultural festivals. It was also utilized to pacify negative forces of Nature. Indeed, these forms of art have been used by different ethnic groups across the world and depict symbolic meanings behind colours, patterns, and shapes. The essence of tribal art continues to inspire creative activities of all kinds and is appreciated for its cultural significance and beauty evolved in temples in India.

Most religions are outcomes of the fear of human beings, of Nature and natural phenomena. Indeed, the development and establishment of many religions can be attributed to the fear of and protection from (then) inexplicable natural phenomenon like the rains, floods, thundering clouds, lightning strikes, the turbulent winds, the trembling earth, or lava-spitting

mountains, vast oceans and rivers, and awe and reverence for the sun and the fire. They have led palaeolithic societies to believe in supernatural powers. In fact, some religions have also come into being in response to the fears of life and the afterlife. Compassion for the dead, endeavors to protect their mortal remains, and meticulous additions to the bucket-list of what they carry for the journey after life have also reinforced the development of religions and rituals associated with them.

Moreover, often, God-heads have begun to represent these natural elements. Slowly, the world progressed from neolithic societies to establish river-valley metal-age cultures, and gods and deities too found places and built structures dedicated to them within villages and settlements. These have necessitated the construction of shelters, which have resulted in the construction of structural edifices. The main intention has been to make ‘God’ feel at home. Thus, there came into existence ‘temples’ with different purposes and innumerable duties. However, there is a lack of evidence—documentary and extant—related to the use of non-durable building materials in the ancient architecture of the Indian sub-continent, as well as about when the Indo-Aryans started building temples. Nevertheless, as Fletcher (1992), points out, it all started with the idea of Gods perceived in anthropomorphic forms.

The prolific panorama of Indian temple architecture holds an extensive range, associated with diverse geo-climatic locations and materials available—beginning with the simple Gupta Temple at Sanchi in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE to the huge temples of Kanchi, Madurai, Bhubaneswar, Puri-Konark, Somnath, Gwalior, Parihaspora, etc.—having a broader aspect of art forms and symbolism.

The schools of art and paintings of Odisha consist not only of classical styles but also of folk and tribal styles. The range is myriad, from silver filigree, *dhokra* art, paintings (*pattachitra*, *saura*, etc.), brass and bell metal work, wood craft, stone work, papier mâché, applique work, tie and dye, terracotta, handloom textiles, etc., to performing arts such as dance forms (*Odissi*, *Gotipua*, *Chhau*, etc.), music (*Odissi*, folk, etc.), theatres (traditional, shadow puppetry, etc.), festivals, food, and architecture. The folk art of Odisha includes the *dhokra* art and papier mâché whereas the classical style includes palm paintings, the ikat styles, and the famous *pattachitra*. Odisha also has a prosperous tradition of tribal art and culture. Different communities like *Saura*, *Juang*, *Kondha*, and *Kissans* have their own individual styles, which represent their rich cultural traditions.

In terms of land area, Odisha is the 8th largest state, and in terms of population, it is the 11th largest. The state is home to the 3rd largest number of ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in India, which includes 62 tribes out of which 13 tribes are identified as ‘Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups’ (PVTGs) (Ota, 2015).



**Fig. 1:** Block-wise distribution of the tribal population in Odisha

Source: Ota, 2018

Thus, Odisha has become a cultural melting pot with historical monuments, archaeological remains, indigenous dance, music, arts, and sculpture where the North meets the South. The artforms and culture of Odisha is as diverse as its indigenous inhabitants. Having substantial diversity and number of both tribal and non-tribal populace, its art forms have evolved with both aesthetic as well as utilitarian qualities. With such a juxtaposed communities of tribal and non-tribal ethnicities living throughout its history, interchange of ideas, beliefs, customs, and rituals has been inevitable. This paper examines this phenomenon. Its aim is to understand the influence and profundity of tribal iconography and the cultural, religious, and artistic intersections between tribal traditions and the temples in Odisha.

Its objectives are:

1. To examine the influences of the indigenous tribes on development of religious cults and, hence, regional iconography and architecture by cataloging specific instances of tribal iconography in selected Odisha temples.
2. To evaluate tribal and vernacular influences in sacred icon representation, architectural and decoration motifs.

### Temples, Rituals and Ceremonies in Odisha

Odisha, with its rich legacy of a substantial number of temples, poses a unique attraction for tourists, scholars, and many others alike. For nearly a millennium, from the 6th-7th century CE to the 15th-16th century CE, there has been an unbroken continuity of progress in the architectural practices of this style (which style? This paper did not talk about any style so far) of temples, unique to the region. The cult, regional practices, and temple constructions have continued without any interruptions with the changes in the ruling families. Later, according to Fletcher (1992) and Thomas (1986), the sub-style of Northern temples, known as the *Nagara* style, has been adapted by the Odishan architects, and the temples have flourished here with a systematic evolution called the *Kalinga* style of temples. This style had expressions distinct from the other styles of temples in terms of structure, the architectural expression through forms, the decorations and motifs of the exterior and interior, and the deities as well. This has been a result of the systematic inclusion of both the vernacular and tribal indigenous knowledge and customs. In this regard, Das (2018) points out that, over a long period of time, the tribal people have played a significant role in transforming Hindu rites and religious beliefs.

The tribal provenance of the *Jagannatha* triad is acknowledged by scholars of the *Jagannatha* cult. Academics such as B. M. Padhi, A. Eschmann, G. C. Tripathy, H. Kulke, B. Schnepel, H. von Stietencron, and K.C. Mishra, have also studied and acknowledged the tribal origins of the *Jagannatha* cult and its subsequent assimilation into Hinduism. The *Jagannatha* trinity is worshiped as crassly carved wooden images, with disproportionately large heads with short fingerless arm stumps and a cylindrical body devoid of legs. They reveal its primordial or tribal origin. As opined by Tripathy (1978), the tribal origin of the figures, being too loud and apparent, was never concealed, suppressed, or changed. Rather, even after the total assimilation of the triad into mainstream Hinduism, traditional religious texts, ballads, hearsay tales, stories, etc. propagating the glory and divinity of the *Jagannatha* figures expounded this tribal origin (Tripathy, 1978).

In fact, another instance of such a phenomenon is observed in the *Samalei* temple at Subarnapur (Sonepur). Goddess *Baunthi* - represented by a wooden post wrapped in a sari - is worshiped daily along with the presiding deity, Goddess *Samalei*. During the *Maha Dashami* (Dussehra) day, Goddess *Baunthi* is taken out for a ritualistic procession to the temple of *Shiva*, manifested as the *Budha Raja* (an old tribal deity). Similar examples of wooden posts wrapped in *sari* acting as the *chalanti pratima* (movable deities) are witnessed in the *Khilamunda* Temple, Ranapur, and as *Kathi Thakurani* of Banpur *Bhagawati* (Eschmann, 1978).



**Fig. 2:** Goddess *Baunthi* (wooden post wrapped in *sari*) beside presiding deity Goddess *Samalei*, Subarnapur.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 3:** *Kathi Thakurani* of Banpur *Bhagawati* inside the temple during non-festival days.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 4:** Procession of *Kathi Thakurani* of Banpur *Bhagawati* during Dussehra *Jatra*, 2023.  
Source: Author

At Raj-Ranapur, a bronze image of Goddess *Maninageshwari- istadevi* (tutelary deity) of the feudatory *Rajas* is worshiped by the *Brahmins* in the temple adjoining the palace. However, the original shrine of the goddess exists atop a nearby hill, with an original aniconic image of an unhewn round stone being worshiped by the *Khond* priests. This may indicate towards gradual acceptance and acknowledgement of the powerful but not fully Hinduized goddess who resided atop a hill in the border area between the non-tribal Mahanadi delta and its tribal hinterland (Eschmann, 1978).

The tutelary deity of the *Sulki* and *Bhanja* dynasties, Goddess *Stambheswari*, is widely worshiped in Western Odisha in the form of a wooden post or a stone under a tree. Incarnations of the Goddess may be addressed to an anthropomorphic image. However, the Goddess is deliberately represented iconically. It is to be noted that, according to Kulke (1978) such representations of iconographically well-defined Hindu gods using just symbols, heaps of mud, stone platforms and wooden posts are not uncommon in Odisha (example: Maa *Hingula* Temple at Gopalprasad, Maa *Mahuri Kalua* Temple at Kanthigada, etc.) ().



**Fig. 5:** Heap of earth, plastered over with vermilion and sandalwood paste, representing Goddess *Khambeshwari* Temple, Asika.  
Source:Author



**Fig. 6:** Stone image of *Maa Hingula* Temple at Gopalprasad.  
Source:Author



**Fig. 7:** An earthen mound and two stones represent *Maa Mahuri Kalua* Temple at Kanthigada.  
Source:Author



**Fig. 8:** Carved wooden post used for religious purposes in a *Kondh* Village.  
Source:Author

The use of symbols is not restricted to just representations of the divine. Symbols also find their application in architecture to represent cultural and religious beliefs. Indeed, the tribal influence on the temples of Odisha can still be discerned from various symbolic elements in the motifs or patterns of the temple carvings, incorporated to convey social or religious ideas. The inclusive social character of tribal communities have also influenced the temples, which have been dedicated to such assimilated Godheads and decorated with cultural and religious motifs accessible to a wide range of people, fostering a sense of inclusiveness and openness.

It is notable that one of the most common themes of carvings in the temples are scenes from everyday life. Scenes of a king's court, soldiers marching for battles, *gurukuls*, dancing girls, hunting expeditions, and even building construction and ship building are effortlessly depicted by the master craftsmen (Behera, 1982). For example, a dramatic scene described by Ganguly as a 'Lion Hunt' exists in the northern facade of the *Parshurameshvara* temple (Ganguly, 1912). Similar themes of day-to-day life are also depicted in the paintings of the Saura tribes.

It is believed that even the spatial arrangements of the tribal settlements may have influenced the layout and the design of the temples in Odisha. As Mohapatra and Majhi (2020) point out, the integration of open courtyards, communal spaces, and interconnected structures also reflects the social and architectural practices of the tribal communities.

### The Research Methodology

This paper employs case study as a methodology within which data from both primary and secondary sources have been acquired by means of three data gathering techniques as follows.

1. Field visits to Temples.
2. Survey of Literature.
3. Interviews and discussions with experts.

Field visits to temple sites have been made to gather the primary data related to the architectural, structural, and sculptural features of the temples in Odisha. 21 temples were visited and they are as follows:

1. *Baital Deula*, Bhubaneswar
2. *Sisireswara* Temple, Bhubaneswar
3. *Parashurameswara*, Bhubaneswar
4. *Mukhteswara*, Bhubaneswar
5. *Siddheswara*, Bhubaneswar
6. *Swarnajaleswara*, Bhubaneswar
7. *Kotiteertheswara*, Bhubaneswar
8. *Sampoornajaleswara*, Bhubaneswar
9. *Subarnajaleswara*, Bhubaneswar
10. *Chitrakarini*, Bhubaneswar
11. *Ananta Basudeva*, Bhubaneswar
12. *Rajarani*, Bhubaneswar
13. *Chausath Yogini*, Hirapur
14. Konark Sun Temple, Konark
15. *Samaleswari* Temple, Subarnapur
16. *Hingula* Temple, Gopalprasad
17. *Stambeshwari (Khambeshwari)* Temple, Asika
18. *Mahuri Kalua* Temple, Kanthigada
19. *Bhagabati* Temple, Banpur
20. *Maninageswari* Temple, Raj-Ranapur
21. *Biraja* Temple, Jajpur.

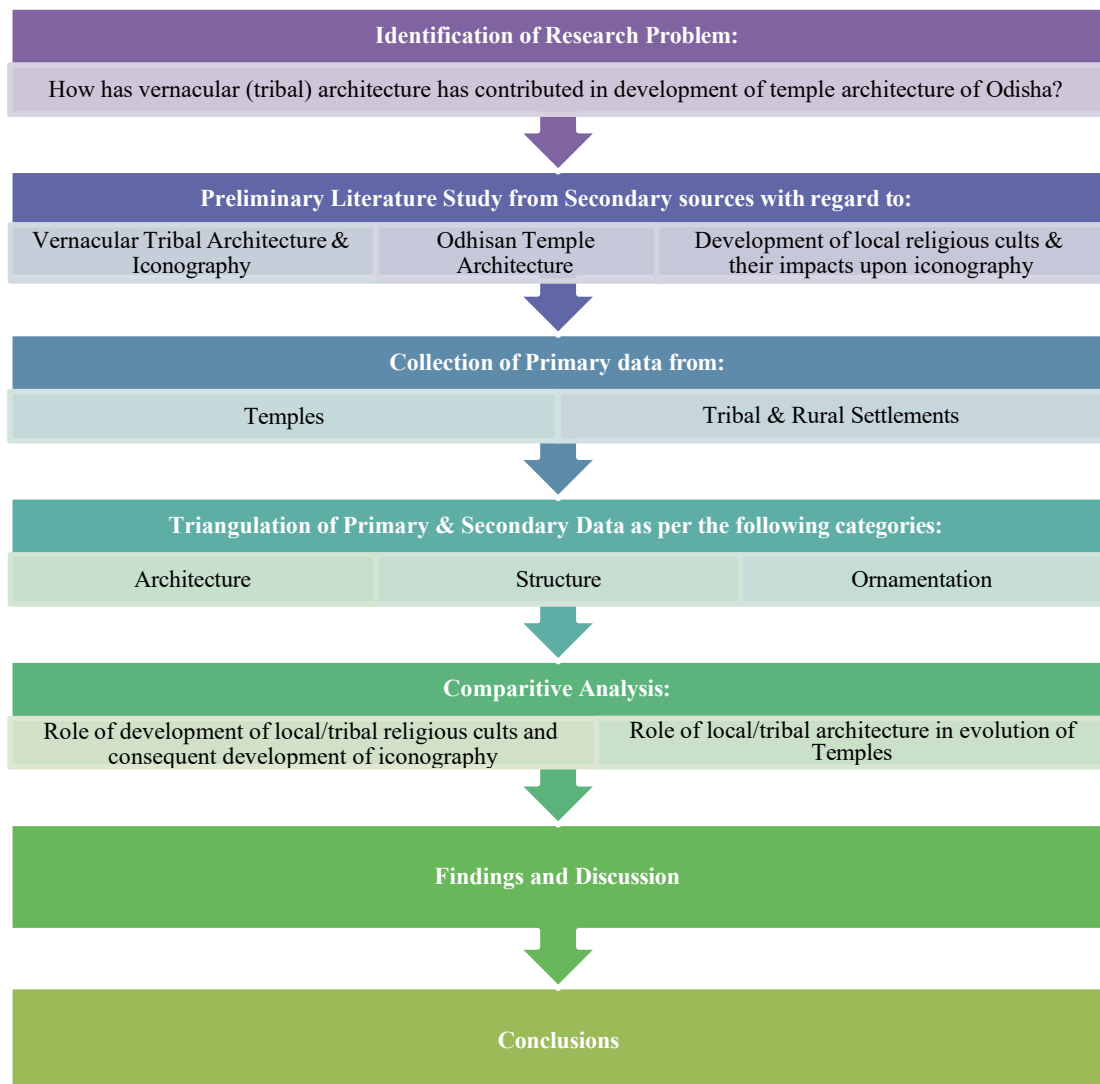
Field visits involved in-situ observations in the above-mentioned temples, and recording the specific architectural and structural features, ornamentation details of sculptures and geometrical patterns by means of photographs.

Interviews and discussions with selected experts with knowledge of the temple architecture in were also carried out to generate primary data. The details of the experts are as follows.

1. Ar. Maitreyee Mishra, Professor, Piloo Mody College of Architecture: With more than 25 years of experience and expertise in Architectural History & Heritage of Odisha.
2. Dr. Partha Sarathi Mishra, Associate Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Sri Sri University: A researcher with in-depth knowledge in areas of symbolism, sacred geometry, and cosmology of Odishan temples.

3. Ar. Deepak Kumar Jena, Conservation Architect: A conservation architect with practical experience, having worked in many conservation projects in collaboration with INTACH.

The secondary data have been collected from surveys of literature, such as journal and conference papers, books, magazines and e-magazines, periodicals related to the history of temple architecture of Odisha. They have provided information related to the tribal communities of Odisha, their socio-cultural and religious systems, tribal settlements, and their influence on the development of religious cults and architecture. The works of academics and researchers such as Padhi (year), Eschmann (year), Tripathy (year), Kulke (Year), von Stietencron (year), Mishra (Year), and Ota (Year) were thoroughly studied to understand the tribal culture and its impact on the temples in Odisha. Following flowchart illustrates the research process adopted.



**Fig. 9:** Flowchart of the Research Process.  
Source: Author

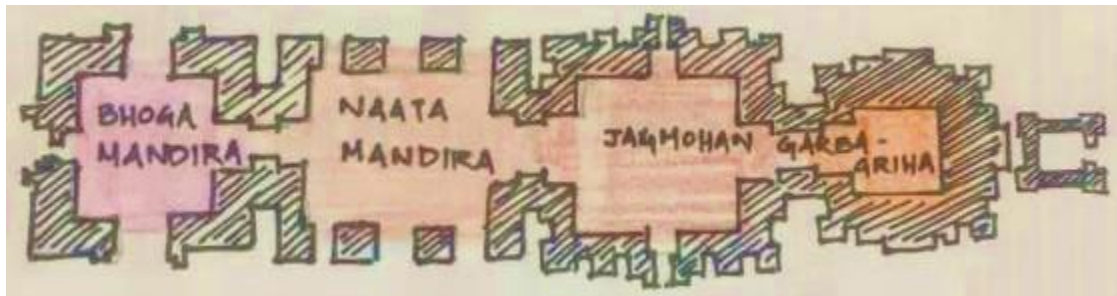
Data collected was qualitative with literary evidence, pictorial data of various temples, tribal huts, as well as tribal art of Odisha. Therefore, the method of analysis adopted was also qualitative. It employed a comparative analysis. This method allows instancing various entities

within the same framework so as to analyze, understand, and explain their characteristics as a function of their varying relationships to the framework as a whole (Tilly, 1984).

## Findings

### 1. Architecture: Form Evaluation

The *Brahmin* system of worship increasingly has become complex and ritualistic. The concept of protecting the sacred elements has given rise to the erection of these edifices, which has a main cella, which is the inner sanctum. Also known as the *Garbhagriha* (literally meaning the womb house), it is believed that the God resides. In fact, it has become mandatory to feed, bathe, clothe, and entertain the deity as if God himself was there in the sanctum. In order to carry out various rituals with pomp and glory, therefore, halls able to accommodate huge crowds have been added to the inner sanctum (*Jagamohan*, *Natamandap* and *Bhoga Mandap*).



**Fig. 10:** Sketch of the plan of *Ananta Basudev* temple, Bhubaneswar (a typical plan of Odisha's temple) showing: *Jagamohan*, *Natamandapa*, and *Bhogamandapa* as prelude to the *Garbhagriha*.

\*Source: Author

This is also because, according to Bose (1932) and Patnaik (2018), people who had lived with limited resources in the past, have not thought of having separate rooms for religious activities or for *Puja* and praying in their houses. In other words, a designated house has been chosen for performing the '*Bhagabata Tungi*' (a house commonly built for reciting the Holy *Bhagabat Geeta*).

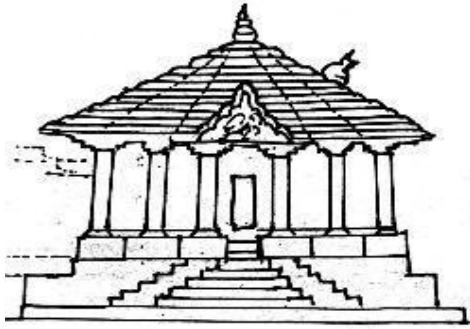
These houses have been made of cob and thatched roofs in pyramidal forms. In Odisha, the thatched roof structure is known as *Chala ghara*, and has been termed as *Pidha*, when stacked and cut in a pyramidal shape. For performing social rituals or any offerings, gathering spaces have been needed, and thus, a temporary thatched roof structure supported with the bamboo posts has been erected. At a later phase, this structure has been replicated and constructed with stones and has formed a prelude to the sacred *garbhagriha*-the *jagamohan*. According to Behera & Thomas (1998), the *Jagamohan* structure has had a stacked pyramidal appearance and has come to be known as the *Pidha Deula*.



**Fig. 11:** *Bhagabata Tungi* at Jajpur  
Source: A. K. Padhee, 2020.



**Fig. 12:** *Chala ghara*  
Source: Author.



**Fig. 13:** Nahachalia Pidha Deula.  
Source: Author

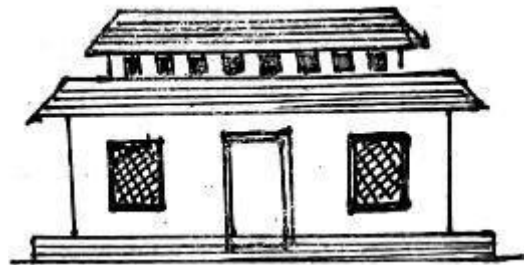


**Fig. 14:** Nahachalia Pidha Deula, Mukhteswar Temple, Bhubaneswar.  
Source: Author

This research has found that *Asta-Prahari* is a Hindu ritual function that lasts for 8 *praharas* (approximately 24 hours) without any break. It is a mass ritual or prayer in devotional praise for Lord *Krishna*. For this function, a special kind of temporary pavilion is constructed with bamboo pillars and a stacked thatch roof, such that the *mandapa* has a central space for offering and a pathway surrounding it for the *parikrama* (circumambulation). In a similar manner, in the inner sanctum, the deity was placed and offerings made at the center, and surrounding the sanctum there is a pathway called *Pradkashina Patha* for the *parikrama*. In a number of temples (like *Parashurameswara*), this *astaprahari* pavilion has also been replicated as the *dwi-chalia pidha deula* (Patnaik, 2018).



**Fig. 15:** Temporary Ashtaprahari Mandapa.  
Source: Author.



**Fig. 16:** Sketch of Dwichalia Pidha Deula.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 17:** Parashurameswara Temple, Bhubaneswar.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 18:** Dwichalia Pidha Deul of Parashurameswara temple, Bhubaneswar.  
Source: Author

It was observed during the field visit that a general feature found in both rural vernacular dwellings of coastal Odisha as well as the tribal dwellings of the Western Odisha, is the raised platforms or high plinths. The super-structures sit over this high plinth which circumscribes it on all sides. Apart from protection against dampness and inundation, this high plinth serves as a raised ground for sitting purposes besides other household activities. Though it may not be a compulsory element, as it is seen mostly in the later-period temple constructions. Sarangi (2017) points out that the temples of Odisha too rest upon raised platforms known as the *Pista*.



**Fig. 19:** Raised or High-Plinth (of tribal dwelling)  
Source: Author



**Fig. 20:** *Pista* or Raised/High-Plinth (of Konark Sun temple)  
Source: Author

## 2. Architecture: Decorations and Motifs

After the careful study literature, on-site observations, and the analysis of tribal iconography, it was noted that images of animals have played an important role in tribal art and the iconography of the temples in Odisha. Abstract patterns, human figures, and motifs with animal portrayals have served as the predominant elements in artistic compositions.

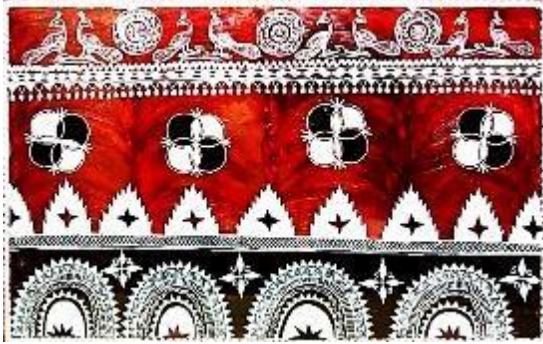


**Fig. 21:** *Saura* paintings depicting daily lives and chores  
Source: H. P. Satapathy, 2015.

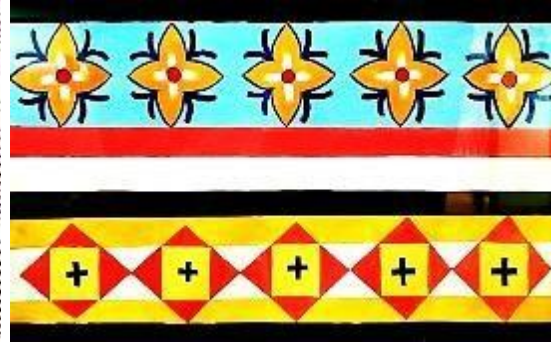


**Fig. 22:** Carvings on the door jamb depicting human figures in *Parashurameswar*, Bhubaneswar  
Source: Author

The motifs and patterns include rhomboids, honeycombs, grids, diamond chains, cross hatches, serpentine, and dots drawn in repeating patterns (Mohapatra & Majhi, 2020). These paintings often vary from simple dots and lines to more complex squares or rectangles with repetitive or independent patterns. The tribal people have used paintings as art forms to paint their walls or floors, and from there the idea of *Jhota -Chitta* may have come, which is a traditional white art of Odisha. It is prepared with rice soaked in water and then ground to prepare a paste, which is used to make intricate floral and geometric designs (Pradhan, 2009; Tripathy, 2011).



**Fig. 23:** *Juang* paintings with peacocks and geometric motifs  
Source: Odisha State Tribal Museum, 2018



**Fig. 24:** *Santal* paintings, typical geometric patterns  
Source: Odisha State Tribal Museum, 2018



**Fig. 25:** *Kolha* paintings with birds and geometric motifs.  
Source: Odisha State Tribal Museum, 2018



**Fig. 26:** Traditional *Jhota -Chitta*.  
Source: Author

It is noted that the ideas behind these floral designs have been used to carve different abstract pattern motifs or floral patterns on the temple walls. The tribal people have used to portray their daily life and other events through their art which can also be found in the art forms of the temples.



**Fig. 27:** Temple carvings with floral patterns, *Parashurameswar*  
Source: Author



**Fig. 28:** Temple carvings, *Baital Deula*.  
Source: Author

During the field visits, it was observed that the *Parsurameshwar* temple of Odisha, a 10th-century temple includes creepers, as well as human and animal figures. They have even included mythological stories depicting the marriage of Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* and Lord *Shiva* restraining the pride of Demon King of *Lanka-Ravana*. In temples like *Mukteswar*, *RajaRani* and many more, images of the *Nagas* are depicted as amazing human creature sculptures: a canopy of serpent hood, and a serpent tail (Sen, 1972; Sethi, 2017). The artistic representation of *Chamunda* on the exterior walls can also be seen in *Baital Deula* temple



**Fig. 29:** Human and animals depicting battle scenes, Konark Sun Temple.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 30:** *Shiva & Parvati* in *Parsurameshwar* temple.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 31:** *Naga* images of *Mukteswar* and *Swarnajaleswar* Temple.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 32:** *Chamunda Devi* on the exterior wall of *Parashurameshwar*.  
Source: Author



**Fig. 33:** *Chamunda Devi, Baital Deula*.  
Source: Author

### 3. Representations of Sacred Icons

In the process of acculturation, the indigenous people have started incorporating some of the Hindu traits in their art forms, as well as in their religious life. For instance, the anthropomorphic image of the Goddess *Laxmi* has been replaced by a Lotus as a symbolic representation. Hindu god Lord *Jagannatha*, considered as a tribal deity is also depicted in the icons. Scholars have traced that the origin of Lord *Jagannatha* is from *Daru* (the wood) as in pre-historic times. The tribal people have worshiped the trees as their *Kitung* (God) for which they have never cut any trees. They have believed that *Kitung* has had ten incarnations similar to the ten incarnations of Lord *Vishnu* (Dash, 2014; Eschmann, Kulke & Tripathi 1978).



**Fig. 34:** *Daru* of Lord *Jagannath* identified near *Sarala Temple*, *Cuttack* in 2015 during *Nabakalebara*.

Source: [www.bhubaneswarbuzz.com](http://www.bhubaneswarbuzz.com)



**Fig. 35:** A statue of lord *Jagannatha* at *Biraja Temple*, Jajpur.  
Source: Author.



**Fig. 36:** Ancient statue of *Jagannath* found at *Sabara Shrikhetra Jagannatha Temple*, Kutunipadar, Koraput.  
Source: A. Sarangi, 2017.

*Chamunda* (Sanskrit: चामुण्डा, Cāmuṇḍā), also known as *Chamundi*, *Chamundeshwari*, and *Charchika*, is a frightening aspect of the *Devi* (divine mother) and belongs to the pantheon of the *Sapta* (7) *Matrikas*. She is also included in the 64 or 81 *Tantric Yogini* pantheon of goddesses. With obscured tribal origins, *Chamunda* has been incorporated into mainstream Hinduism and later adopted by the Jains too. The worship of *Chamunda* involves animal sacrifices along with offerings of meat and wine. In ancient times, human sacrifices to the goddess also finds mention. According to Mubeen & Shah (2015), the tribal people of Sundergarh and Sambalpur have worshipped the Goddess, described to be wearing a garland of skulls or severed heads with four, eight, ten, or twelve arms holding a sword, a *damaru*, a *trishula*, a snake, a thunderbolt, a *panapatra* and standing or sitting on a corpse of a man or defeated demons. *Chamunda* was a fierce form of the *Devi* with a skeletal body, a sunken belly, terrifying countenance of protruding teeth and eyeballs, and long nails. She wears a sacred garland of skulls and a headdress known as *Jata mukuta* (disheveled dreadlocked hair). Sometimes a crescent moon adorns her head with hairs tied with snakes or skull ornaments usually seen sitting on her *Vahana* (mount or vehicle) i.e., an owl (Rai, 2020; Mubeen & Shah, 2015).



**Fig. 37:** *Chamunda Devi*, Dharmasala (Jajpur), 8th Century BCE.  
Source: Odisha State Museum, 2021



**Fig. 38:** *Chamunda Devi*, Chausath Yogini Temple, Hirapur.  
Source: Author

## Conclusions

Through a detailed introspection into the evolution of human settlements and subsequent establishment of societies and cultures, will discover that Nature and its phenomenon have played a critical role in the development of religion, which in turn has played a major role in the expression of art, architecture and cultures. Further with time, as these societies expanded over trade and conquest they came to know, learn, appreciate and adapt to each other. Such adaptations may have found extrovert expressions in food and chores, customs and rituals, and art and architecture.

This research shows that as tribal deities were reverentially accepted into mainstream Hinduism, so did tribal forms of dwellings act as inspiration for development of temple architecture. It concludes that tribal iconography, has had lasting impressions on the temple decorations, artforms, motifs and symbols and also even in design of temples in Odisha. This influence is evident in the elaborate ways that they have permeated the social, cultural, and spiritual fabric of the region in addition to the aesthetic appeal of these hallowed buildings. The harmonious coexistence of many cultural identities is symbolized by the merging of tribal features with conventional temple architecture, signifying the inclusive attitude of Odisha.

Upon closer examination of this fusion of creative forms, it is clear that the use of tribal symbols goes beyond aesthetics. They capture the story of the common cultural past and serves as a link between many communities, promoting harmony and understanding. Tribal-derived themes and symbols have deep significance that heighten the spiritual and philosophical ethos of the local communities.

This suggests that with an eye towards the future, the suggestions with distinctive cultural legacy through collaborative projects, community engagement, digital preservation, and cultural exchange may be initiated. In addition to preserving culture, these initiatives may provide a platform for promoting eco-friendly travel, business growth, and academic improvement. This paper suggests that the continuing legacy of tribal iconography in Odisha's culture could be a source of inspiration and a testament to the timeless beauty of cultural fusion.

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