



# Twin Temple of Gandharadi, District Boudh, Odisha

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## Abstract:

*The twin temples of Siddhesvara and Nilamadhava (Longitude: 84°12'19" East, Latitude: 20°52'29" North and Elevation: 340 Feet) are located at Gandharadi, a village twelve miles west of Boudh town on the right bank of the river Mahanadi. One can approach to the site on the National Highway No 57 from Boudh to Balangir branching at Janhapank Chowk at a distance of 3 Kilometre. These twin temples stand on a 34 mtrs square platform. This is a protected monument of the Archaeological Survey of India and belongs to the transitional phase of Kalingan style of temple architecture (Fig. 1).*

*Key Words: Siddhesvara, Nilamadhava, Gandharadi, Vidyadharas, kirita mukuta, vanamala, sikhara, jagamohana, vimana, amalaka.*

## Introduction

The presiding deity of the Siddhesvara temple is a Sivalingam within a square *yonipitha* made of chlorite stone. Rituals like *Sivaratri*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Sravana Somavara*, *Danda Yatra*, etc are celebrated within the temple premises. On the other hand the presiding deity of Nilamadhava temple is a four- armed Visnu standing in *sambhanga* pose. The deity stands on a shallow platform having two female divinities at the base identified as Sridevi and Bhudevi. The deity has crowned with a *kirita mukuta* and wearing a *vanamala* on the shoulder. At the top of the image there are two flying *Vidyadharas* holding garlands in their either hands. The image is made out of chlorite stone.

Gandharadi is situated in the ancient Khinjali-mandala of the upper Mahanadi which was under the sovereignty of the Bhanjas and was probably the ancient capital of Gandhamardana, a king ruling sometime in the early 9<sup>th</sup> Century AD<sup>1</sup>. This Gandhamardana is identified with Gandhata Satrubhanja after whom the village was named (Gandhapati) as we know from the Boudh plates of Ranabhanja issued at Dhrtipura<sup>2</sup>.

These two temples were built on one platform which is exactly similar to each other. The one on the left hand is dedicated to Siva namely Siddhesvara and its *sikhara* is surmounted by a Sivalinga (Fig. 2). The second is dedicated to Visnu namely Nilamadhava and its *sikhara* is surmounted by a Wheel of blue chlorite stone (Fig. 3). The principle of construction of the *jagamohana* at Gandharadi is slightly different than that of

other temples. Their roofs are built on the cantilever principle and originally it appears to have been supported on twelve large pillars arranged as a hallow square. Thus each side had four pillars of which the central ones flanked an opening. Originally these two *jagamohanas* appear to have been open on all sides but later on the lintels on all sides appear to have given away and then it became necessary to fill in the gaps between pillars with the exception of the four openings with ashlar masonry. At the same time the side openings were filled up with a *jali* or lattice of blue chlorite towards the bottom and a frieze of four miniature temple *sikharas* over it. This arrangement is not followed in later temples where the ingress of light into *jagamohana* is through four or five stone pillars in the opening used as window bars<sup>3</sup>. The style of ornamentation in the *jagamohanas* of the Gandharadi temples is altogether different. Even stylized *chaitya* windows are rarely to be seen at Gandharadi except at the bases of the pilasters of the *vimana*. The ornamentation of these two *jagamohanas* is very simple and much less overcrowded. The importance of the Gandharadi temples lies in the fact that they provide a link in the chain of the evolution of the medieval Odishan temple type. The Gandharadi temple is also known as *Charisambhu mandir* (the temple of four *sambhus* or Sivalingas). In the Siva temple Siddhesvara is the presiding deity. In the *jagamohana* to the left of the door leading to the sanctum is the Sivalinga called *Kapilesvara*. At a little distance from Siddhesvara stands the temple of Paschima Somanath (Siva), the door of the temple openings to the west. Some images of considerably antiquity are found worshipped in shrines nearby. Notable among them are the image of Ganesa in the temple of Paschima Somanath and a beautiful image of eight armed Durga worshipped under a banyan tree. The later image is being badly damaged due to the vagaries of weather. These images probably once adorned the Siddhesvara temple. The badly damaged images of Sun-god, Hanuman etc are found located within the *jagamohana* of the temple.

The Bhanjas were feudatories who owed allegiance to the Bhauma-karas. Their capital at this time was Dhritipur which has not as yet been identified. During the period of turmoil in the closing years of the Bhauma supremacy the Khinjali Bhanjas appear to have achieved an independent status as evidenced by the title Maharaja assumed by both Vidyadarabhanja and his son Neṭṭabhanja-II in their copper-plate grants, the latter using this title as late as 933 AD. It is probable that the Bhanjas at this time played a role in supporting the last female rulers of the Bhauma-kara dynasty. From the Taltali copper-plate of Dharma Mahadevis it is recorded that Vakula Mahadevi was born in the Bhanja family. Although their relationship with the Somavamsi rulers at this time is not clear, evidence seems to suggest that Yayati I Mahasivagupta reduced them again to their feudatory status in his Quest to annex Utkala. In a copper-plate grant issued during his 13th regnal year (A.D. 935), Yayati donated a village in the *mandala* of Gandhatapaṭi (Gandharadi) which suggests that the Bhañjas had been subdued by that time<sup>4</sup>.

The area near the twin temples shows signs of other ruins, one of which may have been testifying to the importance of the site in ancient times. The twin temples of Siddheśvara and Nilamādhava, dedicated to Siva and Visnu respectively, are erected side by side on a large platform, or *pitha*, and testify to the continued dual worship of these two sects noticed at Simhanātha, Baidyanath and Charda, in the latter two temples noticeable primarily on the sanctum doorframe. The sides of the *pitha* are ornamented with a set of *pabhaga*

mouldings and a *jangha*. The *jāngha* is decorated with miniature mundi designs, minus crowning members, alternating with pilasters and thus simulating the decorative program or the walls of the temple proper. Though only portions of the decoration remain this is the earliest surviving example whereby the sides of the supporting *pitha* or platform were accorded a decorative program, or where the *pitha* was high enough to add such decoration. The temples are exact duplicates, except for the *ayudha* crowning the *amalaka*, and were surrounded at the four corners of the platform by a small shrine so that as a unite formed the centre shrine of a *pancayatana* plan. All that remains of the corner shrines, however, is scattered debris. The temples are of the *rekhä* order with a flat-roofed *Jagamohana*. From a distance their general appearance is similar to earlier Odishan temples but closer scrutiny reveals innovative features which appear for the first time and become decoration on temples of the 10th-11th centuries in coastal Odisha. Stylistically the temple can be ascribed to the opening years of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, probably just prior to the construction of the Kapileśvara temple at Charda where the decorative program of the *deul* a near duplicate of that on these twin temples.

### Architectural Features of Siddhesvara and Nilamadhava Temple

#### Bada Decoration:

On plan temple has a *rekha vimana* and flat roofed *jagamohana*. On elevation the *vimana* has a *pista*, *bada*, *gandi* and *mastaka* from bottom to top. The *bada* of the *deul*, measuring 15 feet square at the base, is a full-fledge *pañca-ratha* plan with a recess separating each projecting *paga*. The *pabhaga* is 36 inches high and consists of four mouldings a *khura*, *kumbha*, *paṭṭa* (fillet-like moulding, here with crowning *pidha*) and *basanta* (horizontal band, here as an inverted *pidha*) (Fig. 4). A diminutive *caitya* carved in the centre of the *khura* and is aligned with the *campaka* leaf on the *kumbha* above. This vertical alignment is continued by a bar which extends from the lower face of the *paṭṭa* to the upper face of the *basanta*, the bar decorated with *Jāli* patterns or a standing temple figure. The indentation beneath the *anuratha* niche is filled with a *tala garbhika* designed as an elongated *khakhara mundi* with a *vajra-mastaka* carved on its crowning member. This is the earliest example of *tala-garbhikas* appearing beneath the niches of subsidiary *pagas*. A similar design, though wider and more ornate, is placed beneath the *raha* niche. The decorative program of the *pabbhaga* thus consists of standard horizontal mouldings alternating with vertically oriented *khākharā mundis*, an arrangement which becomes standard on temples of the early Somavamsi period at Bhubaneswar.

The *kanika* design on the *jangha*, measuring 76 inches in height, consists of an engaged pilaster decorated with a diminutive *vajra-mundi* at its base and hanging garlands at the top. Consistent with practices noticed on the temples based on Chattisgarh prototypes, where the major sculptures were placed within the *mandapa*, the niches of these diminutive *mundis* are extremely small and perhaps were not intended to house permanent sculpture. The *anuratha* design on the *jangha* is in the shape of a slender miniature shrine with its crowning *vimanika* or spire consisting of multiple horizontal mouldings as on the Simhanātha but with the addition of a small *vajra-mastaka* at the top. The miniature shrine is *triratha* in plan with a vertical segment, in the form of a *tala-garbhika* beneath the niche and an *urdhva-garbhikā* at the top of the niche, running up the centre and partly obfuscating the horizontal mouldings of its *vimanika*. The *urdhva-garbhika* at the top of

the niche both restricts the size of the niche and casts a strong shadow on the image housed within, again playing down the importance of sculpture in the overall decorative program of the exterior.

The *raha* is designed as a large *vajra-mundi* flanked on either side by an offset pilaster crowned at the level of the *baranda* by a *kalasa*. The *vajra-mundi* is also *triratha* in plan with a *tala garbhika* inserted beneath the niche and a small *urdhva-garbhika* at the top, both *garbhikas* also *triratha* in plan. The pilasters framing the niche are relieved with scroll work on their shaft while at the base of the flanking offset pilasters is a small *kiriṭa*. The niche is capped by a projecting *pidha* moulding and crowning *vajra-mastaka* though the surface details of the latter are obliterated. Surmounting the *vajra-mastaka* is a small *mundi* which extends above the *baranda* and pierces the large *vajra-mastaka* design at the base of the *gandi*. This is one of the first examples of two superimposed major *vajra-mastakas* appearing on each face of the *deul*. On later temples this lower *vajra-mastaka* is elevated to the *baranda* and is reduced in size, becoming subordinate to and dominated by the larger *vajra-mastaka* above. The major *vajra-mastaka* here extends the width of the *rahā* so that it unifies the offset pilasters into its design as on the Vaital Deul.

### Gandi Decoration

The *baranda* consists of a large moulding, curving inward at the top, and a recess above. The *gandi* is *pañca-ratha* in design continuing the fivefold arrangement of the *bāda* so that the *pāga* divisions extend uninterrupted up the height of the *deul* giving an overall vertical fluidity to the design. The *kanika-pāgas* are divided into seven *bhumis* by *amlās* with each *bhumi* subdivided into four additional *barandis*. Little in the way of decoration on these *bhumi-barandis* has survived though their arrangement, with the top two joined by *caitya* motifs, is similar to the design on earlier Odishan temples. The *anuratha-pāgas* are divided into horizontal mouldings decorated with triple *caitya* motifs repeated ad infinitum to the top, as on earlier temples, but with the addition of vertical bars or ribbons which join the *caitya* motifs. The *rāhā-pāga* above the now missing *vajra-mastaka* designs is decorated in a similar manner though there are five *caitya* motifs aligned on each *barandi* rather than three. Little surface decoration on these *bhumi-barandis* has survived or was actually completed. On the front facade of the *gandi*, immediately above the root of the *jagamohana*, is triangular opening which leads into the interior of the *garbha-griha* so that the sanctum is better lighted than those of most Odishan temples. That this opening was not part of the original design is event in the manner in which the lower portion of the central facet was removed, leaving the plain stones under the facing visible. The portion removed would have contained the major *vajra-mastaka* motif, the most auspicious motif appearing on the act consider temples now exist none of the *vajra-mastakas* have survived, a rather curious fact considering the importance of this decorative motif. There are also no *anurāhā* recesses Visnu an *akāsalinga* while on the Nilamādhava there is a *cakra*, the emblems of Siva and Vishnu respectively. An innovation is the placement of seated figures on the *bisama* above which serves as a harbinger for *beki* figures on later temples.

## Jagamohana

The *jagamohana* is rectangular in shape and measures 26 feet 8 inches by 20 feet 4 inches. The root is sloped in two tiers as on the Paraśuramesvara though there are no ventilators between the tiers and it is built on the cantilever principle similar to the Sisiresvara temple<sup>5</sup>. An additional covering slab appears at the top. The projecting eaves of these tiers and the crowning slab are progressively stepped, or receding, on both the east and west that the silhouette, for the first time, assumes a triangular shape, though flattened. At Simhanatha and Padmapur, where an additional slab was likewise added, the roof was not stepped at the west end but abutted the *gandi* of the *deul* so that the lower medallion of the *vajra-mastaka* was housed within the *jagamohana*. This is avoided here, and probably on the original root of the *mandapa* at Charda, and this flattened triangular shape serves as a harbinger to the development of a *pidha* design. Originally there may have been four pillars arranged as a square in the center of the interior to help support the root but these have not survived. The pilasters set at intervals against the interior walls are devoid of decoration except for a small *caitya* design at the base and a single heart-shaped left on the capitals. The *sandhi-sthala* is very small, measuring only 17 inches, so that its exterior walls above the *pabhaga* are plain in contrast to Charda where an elongated *khākhará-mundi* is carved duplicating the design of the *anuratha*. The doorframe leading to the sanctum is devoid of decoration except for a *pābhaga* design at the base of two framing pilasters and the outline of a *dvāra-lalāṭa-bimba* panel on its lintel.

On the exterior the *jagamohana* is *trianga* in design with the center projection, or *gavaksa*, given added emphasis by *naga/nāgī* *stambhas* placed at the corners and flanking the entrance portal on the east (**Fig.5**). The *pabhaga* consists of four mouldings as on the *deul* though measuring only 29 inches in height. The flanking units of the long sides of the *jagamohana* are decorated with three *pagas* designed as elongated *mundis* crowned by a *vajra-mastaka* as on the *anuratha* of the *deul* alternating with thin pilasters similar in design to the *kanika* of the *deul* though lacking the diminutive *vajra-mundi* at the base. The *mundis* abutting the *naganagi stambhas* of the *gavaksa* and entrance portal are sliced in half suggesting that these *stambhas* were added after the decoration of the walls was completed. This alignment of *mundis* alternating with pilasters becomes popular on later temples at Bhubaneswar as does the addition of *nāgastambhas* at the corners of the *gavaksa* or flanking the entrance portal.

The base of the *nāga/nāgī* is decorated with a double *gaja-krānta* motif of lions springing on the backs of crouching elephants. The torso of the serpents, male on the proper right and female on the left appears near the top of the *stambha* with the coils winding below to suggest an ascending movement. The *gavaksa* window between the *stambhas* occupies only the lower half of the wall and is framed by three plain mouldings. The shorter east end of the *jagamohana* is similar in design though there are only two *pagas* and pilasters on each side of the portal. The decoration of the doorframe no longer remains. A *baranda*, 142 inches in height and consisting of a single moulding, appears the top of the *jangha*. The consistency of design and decorative motifs of the *jangha*, identical in style and form those on the *deul*, would seem to rule out the possibility that the *jagamohana* was originally open on all sides and filled in with walls at a later date as has been suggested.

The overall design of the *jangha*, repeating the decorative motifs of the *deul*, is more sophisticated and harmonious than earlier *jagamohanas* and the windows of the *gavaksa* appear to be contemporary with the walls rather than converted doorways.

### Sculpture and Decorative Motifs of Siddhesvara & Nilamadhava Temple

There is very little in the way of sculptural imagery remaining on the exterior of the temples. None of the *parsva-devatās* are in situ and most of the niches of the subsidiary *pagas* are empty. An exception is the niche south of the entrance of the Siddhesvara temple which is filled with a badly-worn image of Gajalakṣmi, a motif generally appearing on the lintel. Lakshmi is seated in *padmāsana* holding a long-stemmed lotus in each hand, though her hands are now broken off. Within the sanctum of the Nilamādhava temple is an image of Nilamādhava (Viṣṇu) carved in chlorite and measuring 6, feet in height. He stands in a *samabhanga* pose holding a *cakra* and conch in his uplifted hands (**Fig. 6**). His lower left hand rests on a mace while the lower right arm, extended in *varada*, is broken off at the elbow. A second image of Visnu, measuring only 4 feet in height is placed against the back wall of the *jagamohana*. The image is nearly identical in style and iconography though less well preserved as all of the arms are broken-off at the elbows. A third image of Viṣṇu, broken off just above the knees, placed along with scattered fragments within the interior of the *jagamohana*. The iconography was slightly different, however, as the back arms were not uplifted but rather end outward while the halo behind the head is rimmed with flames.

Numerous other sculptural images, mostly fragments carved in sandstone and smaller in size, appear loosely placed inside the *jagamohanas* of both temples and obviously were originally placed within exterior niches. Included among these images various *avatar* of Vishnu (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha and Vāmana fragments recognizable), Mahiṣamardini and Surya. In one fragment of Sūrya all that survives are the charioteer Aruna and the seven horses standing on their hind legs. There are two images of Mahiṣamardini which are broken and badly worn<sup>6</sup>.

Of the decorative motifs insitu the largest are the naga /nagi stambhas .Other figure motifs including Standing female figures and *mithunas*, are small in size and generally appear on the of the *pabhaga* mouldings. Though very little of the decorative scrollwork has survived it is mostly the garland *vana-lata* motifs of foliage unrelated to any stalk which becomes the dominant art scroll motif on 10th and 11th century temples. The method of carving is oblique rather that perpendicular. A reticulated *caitya* scroll, with interlacing ribbons, was planned for the mouldings on the *anuratha* and upper *rāhā* of the *gandi* but appears not to have been completely carved. The motif of a *kirtimukha* mask dripping festoons of pearls carved on the pilasters framing the niches, with the strands of pearls overlaying the scrollwork, is one of the first examples of this motif which likewise becomes popular on later temples<sup>7</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

The twin temple of Gandharadi namely Siddhesvara and Nilamadhava is a famous Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and Visnu affectionately called as Charisambhu in the outskirts of the town Boudh in

Odisha. The temple dating back to early medieval times of 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. shows a fashion of Kalingan and central Indian style of temple architecture.

Located 17 kms away from Boudh, Gandharadi stands proud with the 9<sup>th</sup> century shrine. The presiding deity here is known to be the combined form of Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva) as is the case with Sri Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar. The festivals and rituals of Sri Siddhesvara are also so similar to that of the Lingaraja temple and Nilamadhava to that of Lord Jagannatha temple at Puri. This shrine is the most prominent one from amongst a good number of Saivite shrines dotting the region. Pilgrims from far flung places flock to Gandharadi on the occasion of Mahashivaratri and Panasankranti. However the temple requires conservation and restoration work very soon as it is in a dilapidated condition. People misuse the property and awareness should be spread to preserve this historical monument for posterity.

## References

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## ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig.1. General view of Gandharadi temple



Fig. 2. General view of Siddhesvara temple



Fig.3. General view of Nilamadhava temple



Fig.4. Bada of Siddhesvara temple



Fig.5. Naga-Nagi Stambha



Fig.6. Presiding deity, Nilamadhava temple

