

Konark Sun Temple

Sun Temple, Konark



Konark Sun Temple is a 13th century Sun Temple (also known as the **Black Pagoda**), at Konark, in Orissa. It was constructed from oxidized and weathered ferruginous sandstone by King Narasimhadeva I (1238-1250 CE) of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty. The temple is an example of Orissan architecture of Ganga dynasty. The temple is one of the most renowned temples in India and is a World Heritage Site. It is one of the Seven Wonders of India (as per the poll collected by NDTV). Legend has it that the temple was constructed by Samba, the son of Lord Krishna. It is said that Samba was afflicted by leprosy, brought about by his father's curse on him. After 12 years of penance, he was cured by Surya, the Sun God, in whose honour he built the magnificent Konark Sun Temple.

Etymology

The name Konark is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kona* (meaning *angle*) and word *Arka* (meaning *sun*) in reference to the temple which was dedicated to the Sun God Surya

Architecture



Nata Mandir

Located on the shoreline, now a little over 3 km from the sea, the temple takes the form of the chariot of Surya (**Arka**), the Sun God, and is heavily decorated with stone carving. The entire complex was designed in the form of the God's huge chariot drawn by seven spirited horses on twelve pairs of exquisitely decorated wheels at its base. The huge wheels carved at the base of the temple are one of the major attractions. The spokes of the wheels serve as sundials and the shadows cast by these can give the precise time of the day. The pyramidal roof soars over 30 m (98 ft) in height. The temple complex also contains erotic sculptures similar to the temple in Khajuraho.

The entrance is guarded by two giant lions, which are each shown crushing a war elephant. Each elephant in turn lies on top of a human body. The temple symbolizes the majestic stride of the Sun God. At the entrance of the temple is a **Nata Mandir**. This is where the temple dancers used to perform dances in homage to the Sun God. All around the temple, there are various floral and geometric patterns. The temple is now partly in ruins, and a collection of its sculptures is housed in the Sun Temple Museum, which is run by the Archaeological Survey of India. The poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote of Konark: "*Here the language of stone surpasses the language of man.*"



Konark Sun Temple Chariot Wheel

The Sun Temple, built in the thirteenth century, was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with twelve pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses. Majestic in conception, this temple is one of the most sublime monuments of India, famous as much for its imposing dimensions and faultless proportions as for the harmonious integration of architectural grandeur with plastic allegiance. Every inch of the temple is covered with sculpture of an unsurpassed beauty and grace, in tableaux and freestanding pieces ranging from the monumental to the miniature.

The subject matter is fascinating. Thousands of images include deities, celestial and human musicians, dancers, lovers, and myriad scenes of courtly life, ranging from hunts and military battles to the pleasures of courtly relaxation. These are interspersed with birds, animals (close to two thousand charming and lively elephants march around the base of the main temple alone), mythological creatures, and a wealth of intricate botanical and geometrical decorative designs. The famous jewel-like quality of Orissan art is evident throughout, as is a very human perspective which makes the sculpture extremely accessible.



Konark Sun Temple at night



Konark Sun Temple Panoramic View

The temple is famous for its erotic sculptures, which can be found primarily on the second level of the porch structure. It will become immediately apparent upon viewing them that the frank nature of their content is combined with an overwhelming tenderness and lyrical movement. This same kindly and indulgent view of life extends to almost all the other sculptures at Konark, where the thousands of human, animal, and divine personages are shown engaged in the full range of the 'carnival of life' with an overwhelming sense of appealing realism. It is admittedly the best in Orissa. Its fine traceries and scrollwork, as well as the beautiful and natural cut of animal and human figures, give it superiority over other temples.

The Sun temple belongs to the Kalinga school of Indian temple architecture. The *Main Sanctum* which (229 ft. high) was constructed along with the *Audience Hall* (128 ft. high) having elaborate external projections. The *Main Sanctum* which enshrined the presiding deity has fallen off. The *Audience Hall* survives in its entirety, but only small portions of the Dancing Hall (**Nata Mandir**) and the Dining Hall (**Bhoga-Mandap**) have survived the vagaries of time. The Temple compound measures 857 ft (261 m) by 540 ft (160 m). The alignment of the Sun Temple is on the East-West direction. The Temple is located in natural surroundings, abounding with casuarina plantations and other types of trees such as mahogany, rosewood, eel which grow on sandy soil.

History



Kalapahad

A notice at Konark Sun Temple premises declaring it as a World Heritage monument.

The large structure seen today is actually the mantapa (mandap). Of the main tower, which once stood in the front, only the remains can be seen. This tower (deul) was perhaps 200 feet (60 metres) tall, higher than any other temple in India.

A sculpture of Surya - the Sun God at Konark

The most popular theory about the root of the fall of Konark temple rests with the Kalapahad, the general of Bengal Sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani. According to some accounts Kalapahad was formerly a Hindu Kayastha] officer, however he had converted to Islam. According to Afsanah-i-Shahan of Shaikh Kabir Batini he was a Batini Afghan. According to the history of Orissa, Kalapahad invaded Orissa in 1508. He destroyed Konark temple, as well as a number of Hindu temples in Orissa. The Madala Panji of Puri Jagannath temple describes how Kalapahad attacked Orissa in 1568. Including Konark temple, he broke most of the images in most of the Hindu temples in Orissa. Though the stone walls are of 20 feet (6.1 m) to 25 feet (7.6 m) thick, he somehow managed to displace the **Dadhinauti** (Arch stone) and thus caused the tower to collapse. He also damaged most of the images and other side temples of Konark. Due to displacement of the **Dadhinauti**, the tower gradually collapsed and the roof of the Mukasala was also damaged, due to the stones falling down from the temple top.

Orissa came under Muslim control in 1568. There were constant attempts to destroy the Hindu temples. The Pandas (priests) of Puri, to save the sanctity of the Puri temple, took away the Lord Jagannath from the Srimandir and kept the image in a secret place. Similarly, it is said that the Pandas of Konark took away the presiding deity of the Sun temple and buried it under the sand for years. Latter on the image was said to have been removed to Puri and kept in the temple of Indra, in the compound of the Puri Jagannath temple. According to others, the Puja image of the Konark temple is yet to be discovered. But others hold the view that the Sun image now kept in the National Museum of Delhi was the presiding deity of the Konark Sun temple.

The Sun worship in the Konark temple ended upon the removal of the sacred image from the temple. This resulted in the end of pilgrimages to Konark. The port at Konark was also closed, due to pirate attacks. Konark was as glorious a city for Sun worship as it was for commercial activities, but after the cessation of these activities, Konark became deserted and was left to be enveloped by a dense forest over the years.

In 1626, the then king of Khurda, Raja Narasimha Dev, son of Purusottam Dev, took away the Sun image to Puri along with two other moving deities - Sun and Moon. Now they are found in a temple in the compound of Puri Jagannath temple. As described earlier there was a big block of stone called **Navagraha Paata** placed in front of the **Mukhasāḷā**. The then king of Khurda removed the block. The king had taken away many sculptured stones from Konark and constructed some portions of Puri temple with them. During Maratha's time the outer compound wall of the Puri temple was constructed of stones from Konark temple.

It is reported that among all the temples the **Nāṭa mandira** or the Dancing hall, of Konark was in its original form for the longest period, and that it was broken intentionally since it was considered an unnecessary structure during the Maratha administration.

In the year 1779, a Maratha Sadhu had taken away the **Aruna Khamba** (Pillar) from Konark and put it in front of the Lion's Gate of Puri Jagannath temple. Thus by the end of 18th century, Konark lost all its glories and had been turned to a dense forest. In course of time, the temple area thus became devoid of people, covered with dense forest, filled with sand, overrun by wild animals and became the abode of pirates. It is said that even the locals feared to go to Konark in broad daylight.

Magnets and Floating Idol

The following are popular sayings from the local populace and the guides.

Legend has it that, the uniqueness of the temple lies in the fact that between every two stone pieces there lies an iron plate (this can be clearly seen). The temples higher floors have been reinforced using massive iron beams. This fantastic effort in human perseverance took 1200 workers about 12 years to complete and that the "Dadhinauti" (Peak) of the main temple had to be installed by the 12 year old son Dharmapada Moharana of the Chief Architect Bishu Moharana. The said peak being a 52 ton magnet. This magnet was the reason the entire edifice endured the harsh conditions (being on the sea front) for centuries without being affected. The main *pratima* (idol) was believed to be floating in the air because of the unique arrangements of the main magnets and other series of magnets. The placement of the temple had been aligned in a way that the first rays of the Sun falling on the coast would pass thru the *Nata Mandir* and would reflect from the diamond placed at the center of this idol in the *Main Sanctum*. This phenomena would last for a couple of minutes during the early morning. These magnets were later removed by the Britishers for acquiring the magnetic stone.

Other legends state that, the magnetic effects of the lodestone was so strong that it disturbed the ships compasses that passed by the coast and the ships would run aground. To save their trade and their ships, the Portuguese took away the lodestone. The lodestone that was acting as the central stone and keeping all the stones of the temple wall balanced, fell out of alignment because of its removal and eventually led to the destruction of *Main Sanctum*.

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Gallery



