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The glory of traditional terracotta temple town “Bishnupur”

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ABSTRACT

The temple town “Bishnupur” is one of the oldest famous and very important places in West Bengal, India. The popular town is located in the Bankura district. It is culturally, artistically, and historically interesting and large enough to be noticed because of the Terracotta Temple. There are especially few Terracotta temples, which are very much fascinating with their decorative ornamentation style of monumental architecture. As historians have been noticed these temples were built by the Malla Dynasty. The Malla rulers were the believer and followers of Lord Vishnu, so they built many iconic monumental temples in this area. Due to this the temple town was famous with the name of “Bishnupur”. During the construction of temples, the artisans opted for local material like Terracotta and plaques which is available easily in the surrounded area. Particularly terracotta plaques fixed on temples comprise valuable elements for reconstructing the mythological, historical and socio-cultural heritage. The decorative temples have been made based on Mythological stories. Those fixed Terracotta plaques on the temples always remind and convey the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The iconic monumental architectural temples have incredible vibes and it gives the impression of those earlier artisans who have sculpted are respected today. The style of architecture and the ornamentation of the temples of this area reveals the aristocracy of the artisan. The temple town is famous all around the world which fascinates the tourists to visit and enjoy the charm and beauty of this monumental terracotta temple. It also has different verity temples in numbers. If we start to differentiate the architecture of the terracotta temple of Radh Bengal, it has four categories like Chala, Ratna, Deul, and Dalan (Roy, 1998: 57). This area has a high value in the archeological survey, in our society as well as the Indian cultural heritage. In this paper, the subjects would be presented about the style, types, decorative motifs, and themes of the terracotta temples of the Bishnupur area.

Keywords: Terracotta, Plaque, Temple Architecture, Decorative Motifs & Heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The temple town “Bishnupur” is one of the oldest famous and very important places of West Bengal, India. The popular town is located in Bankura district. It is culturally, artistically and historically interesting and large enough to be noticed because of the Terracotta Temple. There are especially few Terracotta temples, which are very much fascinating with their decorative ornamentation style of monumental Architecture. As historians has been noticed these temples were built by the Malla Dynasty. The Malla rulers were the believer and follower of Lord Vishnu, so they built many iconic monumental temples in this area. Due to this the temple town was famous with the name of “Bishnupur”.

During the construction of temples, the artisans opted for the local material like Terracotta and plaques which is available easily in the surrounded area. Particularly terracotta plaques fixed on temples comprises valuable elements for reconstructing the mythological, historical and socio-cultural heritage. The decorative temples have been made based on the Mythological stories. Those fixed Terracotta plaques on the temples always remind and convey the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The iconic monumental architectural temples have the incredible vibes and it gives the impressions of those earlier artisans who has sculpted are respected today. The style of architecture and the ornamentation of the temples of this area reveal the aristocracy of the artisan. The temple town is famous all around the world which fascinates the tourists to visit and enjoy the charm and beauty of these monumental terracotta temple. It also has different verity temples in numbers. If we start differentiate the architecture of the terracotta temple of Radh Bengal, it has four categories like: Chala, Ratna, Deul and Dalan (Roy, 1998: 57). This area has the high value in the archeological survey, in our society as well as the Indian cultural heritage. In this paper, the subjects would be presented about the style, types, decorative motifs and the themes of the terracotta temples of the Bishnupur area.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The above description is all about the analysis of Terracotta Temple Architecture of Bishnupur of West Bengal, it is called the territory of Radh Bengal. This region is commonly famous for the red soil as we say its laterite soil. Due to the lack of stones availability those temples are made of the red soil. As above said, there are four different types of temples have been seen till today. The one “Chala” temples are differentiated because of its stylized structure of its roofs, even from “Ek-Chala” this could be again extended into twelve Chala as well. In the comparison of other temples, the Chala temples roofs are very much flattened (Roy, 1998:57). In the roof of Chala, Chandni and Dalan temples is the new kind of temples are constructed as the highest point of development of the temple. This particular style is called as “Ratna”. Again, it has been categorized into different classes is known for: Ek-Ratna, Pancharatna, Nabaratna, Ekbingshatiratna, Tryodashratna, Panchabinshatiratna etc. (Roy, 1998:58). Bankura is the district of Bishnupur, where there are many temples can be found like “Deul” technique in the nearby villages. In current days there are still these temples are existed which is the combination of Nagar Style (North-Indian) and Rekha and Pida Style (Odisha). It is mostly found in the Bishnupur in comparison of other places of Radh Bengal (1998:62). But still Bishnupur is famous for their decorative Terracotta temples. “Rasa-Mancha” is one of the antiques, famous temple as “Ratna” architecture. The other one is also “Malleshwar” Temple is significantly known for the “Deul” style of Architecture. One among is “Madana-Mohana” temple, very much well known for its architecture style called Ektratna temple, and many of the temples in Bishnupur are similar. There are other outstanding temples are “Jorbangla” and “Pancharatna” it made out of bricks which is a splendid visual treat for the audience.

3. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Structure and Ornamentation of the Terracotta temple

As per the current survey by historians, only four terracotta temples are in existence in Bishnupur. They are “Rasa-Mancha”, “Shyama-Raya Temple”, “Jorbangla” and “Madana Mohana Temple”. Those are the combination of North Indian “Nagara” style and “Rekha” style of Odisha (Biswas, 2003:61). These temples are belonging to Lord Jagannath and Lord Shiva. In the surrounding of Bishnupur there are Chala, Ratna and Deul temples can be noticed and it is made out of bricks and stones (Biswas, 2003: 62). The detail of temples is given below:

3.1 Rasa-Mancha

This temple was built by Bir Humbir, the king of Bishnupur during the year of 1587-1600. It is one of the oldest temple is 35ft high and 80 ft length, placed on the square plinth, 1.5 meter high. Each side of the measurement is 24.5mtr long and rise to a height of about 10.7mtr to reach a flatten roof at the above. The temple is called Rasa-Mancha because it looks like a stage or mancha, one of the prestigious structures which stands for its decorative and stunning terracotta architecture. The top of the temple is built in the pyramidal shape and the other half of the temple has been made out with the shape of Chala of Bengal. The very interesting part is the entrance of the temple. It is an imitation of Islamic architectural style. The temple has one of the most complicated style included with different components like: the arched galleries, the terrace around the pyramidal elevation and the domed style canopy provide a stunning architectural form of the temple architecture of Bengal.

The specialty of this temple is during “Rash festival” 108 Brahmins used to worship and 108 numbers of idols of “Radha-Krishna” along with 108 numbers of candles. These idols were shifted to “Garbha-Griha” during the festival and the entire temple has to be divided into three different special parts. The below images are the reference to understand about the stylization of the artistic, decorative and distinguish terracotta temple architecture.



Image-1, Both Side view of Rasa-Mancha



Image-2, Front view of Rasa-Mancha



Image-3, Corridor view of Rasa-Mancha

3.2 Shyama-Raya Temple (pancharatna)

This fabulous gigantic temple was constructed during in the year 1643, by the ruler king Mullaraj Raghunath Singha. “Shyama-Raya is the god, worshipped by the local people so the name of this temple known as Shyama-Raya temple. The special quality of attraction of this temple has five “Shikharas” and there is also the “Deul” designs of architecture in the Shikharas. The attendant of this temple was Sri Bishnudas Sarkar who planned to make newly this temple in the shape of Chala temples of Bengal. This temple was highly decorated with the ornamentation of terracotta plaques and it was facing towards the South and in the North, there was an alternative door as well. There is pathway with veranda which was opened by three decorative arches on four side to access for the people. The major factor of this temple is 35ft high and 30ft at the length.



Image-4, Three decorated Arches

Image-5, Shyama-Raya temple

Image-6, Octagonal shape of Shikhara

These temples have been presenting the mythological stories which has inspired from the Puranas. The decoration of the temples always inspired to the current artisans and the common people about the culture and traditions. The temples are the most significant and made the remarkable features in the History of Temple Architecture. It is typically dynamic but traditionally located in Bishnupur, West Bengal. These temples are always an intense concentration with expressing the beauty and its an artistic resource for the contemporary world.

3.3 Jorbangla Temple

Bishnupur is a town in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. Malla kings built many Bishnu and Krishna temples in and around Bishnupur during 17th and 18th centuries. The terracotta temples of Bishnupur are the finest examples of classical temple architecture of Bengal. Bengal style of architectures may be classified into two groups: 'Chala' type and 'Ratna' type. The central shikhara is octagonal, while the rest four are square. The walls are richly decorated with terracotta carvings featuring aspects of Lord Krishna's life. It's known for its Hindu temples made from local terracotta, such as the pyramid-shaped Rasmancha. Established around 1600. King Durjana Singh Deva built the temple in the ekaratna style, a square flat-roofed building with carved cornices, surmounted by a pinnacle. Highly decorative carvings adorn the walls of Jor Bangla Temple. In town, the Bishnupur Museum displays manuscripts and ancient sculptures. It is famous for its terracotta temples and Baluchari sarees. The town has a glorious past that is reflected in its rich architecture, music and handicrafts such as pottery and weaving.

The stylization of the form and arrangements was totally different from the other Indian temples, the very famous and fascinated sequence of 'Bhogamandapa', 'Natamandapa' and the 'Garbhagriha' was absent. The architectural element was used very less in the plan of the temple like: rectangular, square, octagonal chambers and long rectangular corridors. These spaces are very limited in the sizes and it was vaulted or domed to establish. The triple arches were based on the pillars, which was built in the stone during Pala-Sena period. The pillars were used in the facades to increase the aesthetic beauty of the temple and it became the main feature, those were ornamented with the small size terracotta panels, the square base and the square capitals were changed to octagonal and the shaft became multifaceted. Thereafter the shafts were divided with two to five mouldings into smaller parts to decorate the temples with the terracotta panels.



Image-7, Both side Of Jorbangla

Image-8, Side view of Jorbangla

Image-9, Facades of Jorbangla

3.4 Madana Mohana Temple

This temple was constructed in 1694, and it has south facing. The height of this temple is 35ft and 40ft at its length. The deity worshipped in this temple is "Madana Mohana". The architecture of this temple is so impressive and much celebrated for its highly decorative ornamentations walls of this temple. The structure is placed on a large plinth which is made out of local laterite stone. It has got three arched opening on the three sides like, east, west and south sides and with a single tower on the top of the sloping roof. The temple also has a covered shelter projecting in front of the entrance of a building. There is a special feature of this temple in existence in the current days is called "Vogagriha", which is 45ft high towards south of the temple, in these days due to lack of care of the roof of this "Vogagriha" have been a ruining condition. In the image it is seen the temple looks very attractive and it stands for the aesthetic beauty of the three octagonal arches made with terracotta architecture.

The decorative motifs of ornamentation and the composed illustrative designs of these temples have their own identification with the innovative ornamentations. The renowned researcher Sri Chittaranjan Dasgupta said, there are not only 'Krishnakatha' but also 'Shaiba and Shakta katha' can be found on the walls of these temples of Bishnupur that leads to future inventions of the field of terracotta architecture (Dasgupta, 1998:81)



Image-10, Both side view of Madana Mohan temple



Image-11, Front Façade



Image-12, The decorative Pillar

3.5 Decorative Motifs of the Terracotta temples

As discussed above the terracotta temple architecture of Bishnupur is very much oldest monuments in the country which has the shining beauty till today. It has been constructed in the 17th century with its typical stylised decorative motifs and inspiration for the current age living artisans to look into the detail and make their work as remarkable. The temples have got high relief sculptures fixed as terracotta plaques and it was deeply influenced by the Indian mythology like, 'Rasa Shastra' 'Ramayana', 'Mahabharata' and 'Krishna Katha'. There is not only 'Krishna Katha' but also other 'Shaiba' and 'Shakta Katha' was described in the walls of these temples of Bishnupur which leads to the future inventions of the field of terracotta architecture (Dasgupta, 1988:81). But the most interesting thing in these architectures of the temple is the viewers can notice many decorative motifs that reflects the society and the lifestyles of common men of the society. There are many different types of motifs are found to see in these hyper creative temples, as few images have been placed below to catch the viewers eye to enjoy the narration of the stories.



Image-12



Image-13



Image-14



Image-15



Image-16



Image-17

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, wish to bring to the notice of everyone about the decaying the terracotta temple architecture of Bishnupur, West Bengal, India. The paper speaks about the origin, structure, decorative motifs and its stunning beauty of temple architecture. But gradually the temple is getting ruined with the time span. As a research scholar, the information of the temple has been given correctly based on the current scenario of the temple and it's a small step with special concern to preserve the valuable, monumental and unique terracotta temple architecture. These terracotta temples are not been seen anywhere in the world, which we have only in Bishnupur. It may be difficult for us to construct again these types of temples in this current era. Hoping the paper may draw attention towards the higher authority to preserve our own extraordinary terracotta temple architecture from the decaying situation.

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6. SOURCE OF IMAGES

Search engine of Internet: [motif of bishnupur temple architecture - Google Search](#)