

Tangible Cultural Heritage of Odisha; A Special Focus on Boudh Royal Palace

Sadananda Nayak, D. Litt¹, Deepanjali Sahoo²

¹Associate Professor Department of History Berhampur University

²Ph.D Scholar Berhampur University Bhanjabihar, Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Odisha's rich and diverse past is reflected in its culture and heritage. "Culture" is a word that has many meanings. In addition to being an item unique to a place or location, cultural heritage can also be found within a family, a people, or a group of individuals. There are two main categories to classify cultural heritage: Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage. Further sub-categorising cultural heritage into Tangible and Intangible cultural heritage, tangible heritage is defined as anything that exists today and can be touched and/or stored. Tangible heritage can be further categorised into movable and immovable heritage; movable heritage includes items that can be moved from one location to another, such as books, clothes, and artworks, while immovable heritage typically comprises structures, including buildings, monuments, industrial sites, and similar items.

Regarding visiting Royal palaces, Odisha offers visitors a wide array of thrilling experiences. Odisha's traditional architectural styles are evident in these Royal palaces. The Royal Palace of Boudh District reflects the blending of traditional Odia designs with European Colonial architectural styles. This former Royal Palace served as the royal residence and administration building of Boudhgarh. Royal palaces in Odisha provide the highest expression of royal authority, historical continuity, and Odisha's cultural identity.

Keywords- Culture, Heritage, Tangible, Royal Palace

INTRODUCTION

Odisha, located in eastern India, possesses a remarkable legacy shaped by centuries of historical developments, cultural traditions, and artistic creativity. The state's distinct cultural character is clearly visible in its material heritage, including temples, architectural forms, and diverse art traditions. Influenced by ancient dynasties and later colonial encounters, Odisha's historical trajectory has significantly shaped the evolution of its built environment and cultural practices.

The monuments of Odisha stand as enduring symbols of the region's architectural skill and cultural depth. Ranging from early temples to imposing forts and commemorative structures, these monuments illustrate a long tradition of craftsmanship, aesthetic refinement, and technical expertise. Within this broad heritage, the palace tradition of Odisha occupies a special place, representing royal authority, refined architectural planning, and artistic patronage. Constructed under different ruling houses, these palaces served not only as seats of power but also as centres for cultural and artistic activities.

Western Odisha, in particular, holds a prominent position in this architectural landscape. Deeply rooted in historical experience, the region is home to several notable royal palaces built by former princely rulers. These structures reveal a distinctive synthesis of indigenous Odia architectural elements and colonial influences, highlighting the region's layered cultural history and architectural innovation. Boudhgarh is part of western Odisha, famous for its culture and heritage.

Objectives of the Study:

- (a) To explore the existing Tangible heritage in Odisha.

- (b) To investigate the historical importance of tangible cultural heritage.
- (c) To conduct detailed surveys and document the architectural elements of the Boudh royal palace.
- (e) This study sheds considerable light on the heritage of Odisha through its history.

Review of Secondary Sources-

Almost everyone is familiar with the concept of a palace. The idea of palaces and royalty evokes a sense of awe and curiosity. Some scholars trace the origins of palaces back to ancient Rome. However, pinpointing the exact beginnings is difficult due to a lack of specific records.

In literature, tracing accurate information about Indian palaces can be challenging. Several scholars have significantly contributed to the study of Odisha's archaeological history, particularly in relation to palaces. Although many references do not follow a chronological order or present clear data, they still provide valuable insights into palace architecture and history.

Contribution of online data through articles on Indian Cultural Heritage: presenting the past, inspiring the future; Cultural Heritage of India, Great Heritage of Odisha by Hemanta Kumar Mohapatra; Exploring the majestic Ancient Royal palace and Rajabati in Odisha, etc., make my work more attractive through their writings.

Liza Nayak's Royal Palaces of Odisha: A Study from the 10th to the 19th Centuries CE is a significant contribution to the understanding of Odisha's royal palaces. She is doing well on her PhD thesis on the Royal Palaces of Odisha.

Amaresh Sahoo's research on Boudh, its history, and its heritage was also very helpful in writing this article. District Gazetteers of Odisha compile details from multiple authors regarding palatial structures across different districts.

METHODOLOGY

To carry out this study, a comprehensive research strategy has been developed, including archival research, Field surveys, Interviews, Literature reviews, etc. Historical documents, photographs, and maps will be collected from archives and libraries. The sites will be surveyed to document their current condition, architecture and layout. Key stakeholders, including local communities, conservation experts and govt. officials will be interviewed to gather information on the palace's history, significance and conservation challenges. The relevant literature on the history, architecture, and conservation of Odisha's Heritage will be reviewed.

DISCUSSION

The Country India has a rich cultural heritage. From the very beginning, India, also known as Bharata Barsha, has its own identity through its rich and diverse culture. The cultural Heritage of India reflects the country's deep and varied history. From the first Indian civilisation to today, the glorious and vibrant Indian Culture is blended with rich traditions, beliefs, art and architecture, and with strong religious feelings.¹

Definitely, culture is a complex term, but its feelings are the same for all. Everyone belongs to their own religion and tradition, and they have strong feelings for their own culture. Culture is the identity of people and the community to which they belong. This is the definition of a way of life that is crucial to the survival of a specific group of people in a specific society. Culture is very proud of itself in the way we dress, our language, our behaviour, the type of music we listen to, the food system, and many more things. The word "culture" is called "Sanskrit" in the Indian national language, and "Sanskrut" in the Odia language. Sanskruti represents the means to transform, purify, and be perfect.

Sanskrit and Sanskruti are both derived from Sanskrit, which represents the ultimate meaning of culture, encompassing collective customs, traditions, beliefs, art and architecture, knowledge, and a society's way of life. They represent refinement, development, and civilisation.²

Heritage is defined as all that can be inherited from ancestors. That's why "heritage" carries everything in the context of human society. Heritage can broadly be classified into two categories: Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage

Natural Heritage represents the meaning of the various characteristics that nature has given to human beings. This kind of Heritage includes both the natural environment, like landscapes, mountains, hills, oceans, valleys, and rivers, as well as a variety of flora and fauna.³

Cultural Heritage represents the products of Man's creative power, his artistic abilities, imagination and innovation of different ideas. Again, cultural Heritage can be subdivided into two sections: e.g., Tangible Cultural Heritage and intangible Cultural Heritage. Tangible cultural Heritage represents the entire range of archaeological Heritage. This can be considered the authentic source of history. The term Tangible Heritage makes clear that these items can be seen, touched, and stored. Tangible cultural Heritage is presented by physical presence. It includes early texts, historical tools, historical sites, art and architectural elements, traditional costumes, monuments, buildings, and other structures of historical value. Tangible Heritage is an indicator of the past lives of any civilization, society, or nation. These items are crucial to the fields of architecture, archaeology, and the science and technology of any particular culture.⁴

Studying tangible cultural Heritage is crucial for a person in the field of history because abstract concepts of the past life are validated by providing a physical basis as a primary source of authentication. Tangible heritage can be classified into two subdivisions, namely movable and immovable heritage.

Movable heritage comprises ancient books and texts such as the Vedas and Kautilya's Arthashastra, as well as documents, artworks, traditional clothing, and machines. All of these have their own historical value; for example, the Lord Jagannath temple is immovable heritage, while the Garuda or Aruna Stambha is movable heritage. Both have their own historical values and pride, and both need to be preserved.

Odisha, an eastern Indian state, has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. The lifestyle of the Odia people is reflected in the range of elegant monuments and cultural practices. Odisha has over 4,000 monuments and archaeological sites, which carry their own history and present to prove their glory. Odisha monuments include remains from prehistoric times, Buddhist monasteries such as stupas and chaityas, several Jain caves, temples, Hindu sculptures, significant epigraphs, many old fortifications, royal palaces, and many examples of colonial architecture.⁵

When it comes to historical majesty and cultural heritage, Odisha offers a treasure trove of experiences that thrill any explorer. All kinds of attractions in Odisha are on one side, and the royal palaces are on the other side. The royal palaces of ancient Odisha, locally known as Rajabati, stand as a testament to the region's rich past and royal legacy.⁶

Odisha's history is a mirror of its royal past and gives us our true identity. Rather, it has been found that regional history is a neglected aspect in historical writing. We have to remember that national history cannot be completed without excavating and preserving regional history. Regional history always seeks to document the history of common people and the state's rich culture. To make our future generations aware of their state's rich history and culture, the study of regional history is essential.⁷

Boudhgarh is a very crucial part of western Odisha. This region is popular for its culture and heritage. The name of Boudhgarh is associated with the Buddhist influence. According to some sources, the region of Boudhgarh was ruled by the Bhanja and Somavamsi dynasties; later, it came under the rule of the Gangas. A chieftain was appointed under the Gangas, and later he adopted a son from near Keonjhar district, who was a descendant of Bhanja, around the 14th century.⁸

After Ananga Bhimadeo, Jogendra Prasad Deo was declared the king of Boudhgarh. He was a very benevolent king. He constructed the huge and attractive Jogendra Villa Prasad. He was not only the constructor of the royal palace of Boudhgarh, but also constructed an English medium school. After Jogendra Prasad Deo, Narayan Prasad Deo ascended the throne of Boudhgarh, and after the unification of Odisha in 1874, it was declared a separate district.

The construction of Jogendra Villa Prasad began by Raja Jogendra Deo in 1912, and this construction work was completed by the queen Saudamini Debi.⁹ The palace is named 'Jogendra Villa Prasad' in honour of Raja Jogendra Deo. Jogendra Villa Prasad is a handsome building that commands a fine view of the river Mahanadi. Strategically, it was built on the banks of the Mahanadi River, both to maintain its beauty and ensure security.

The beautiful royal palace of Boudhgarh, popularly known as Jogendra Villa Prasad or the Boudh Rajabati, is located in this area near the Mahanadi River valley. King Jogendra Prasad Deo constructed this beautiful architectural marvel. This royal palace has a two-story structure. This palace also has a huge entrance, which is now in almost ruinous condition. It consists of a huge iron-made gate, but now we can see only its remnants. The gate is located in the northwest direction of the palace. Nowadays, the royal palace of Boudhgarh has become the home of many rental families.

The main palace faces northwest. This beautiful palace was built of concrete and burnt bricks.¹⁰ The Varanda supporting the pillars was set back 58 inches. As it is a two-storied structure, on the top of the second stair, there are three small storied. In one section of the palace, the roof-edge wall featured three centred arches. The entire structure was divided into two sections, with a small passageway between them. The roof layers can also be seen from the side wall. The palace seen on the right side was much older than the main royal palace. It could have been constructed much earlier than the main palace. According to the people of Boudh, when the entire palace was active, the older section was used by royal helpers or the servants, who are locally called Dasa and Dasi or sebakas. The king and his family members used the new palace.

The architectural design is quite simple, with some picture-pattern windows and a radius pattern. The roof of this two-story structure is plain. It was stated that it has stairs that are directly connected to the Mahanadi River valley. A part of this royal palace was converted into the cinema hall of Boudh. But now it is closed, and the building will be a vestige. Besides the New and Old palaces of Jogendra Villa Prasad, there was another two-story palace, called “Panchabakhri” by local people.

To this day, some members of the royal family or the Deo-parivar live here. We can also see a nameplate there, inscribed with the name of the palace, “Panchabakhri,” as well as the names of some rulers who lived there. Such engraved names are Rai Shiv Kumar Deo, Rai OmmPrakashdeo, Rai KirtibasDeo, Rai Swastik Kumar Deo, Rai Sanjeev Kumar Deo, Rai Subrat Kumar Deo, and Rai Kashyap Kumar Deo (who are currently staying there). In the early period, a Sudanga and a Gada-khai were also made for the protection of the royal palace and the king, but both have now lost their identity and value. Near Jogendra Villa Prasad, there are two temples. The first is the Radha-Krishna temple, locally known as the Madan-Mohan temple. The speciality of this temple is that there are no doors or windows. In front of the palace’s main gate is a park known locally as Mahanadi Vihar Park. It is located facing the North-East direction. It has a speciality: here we can find an early stone-carved Buddha statue in Dhyani Mudra.¹¹ The very interesting thing is that, till today, the Hindu people of Boudhgarh have never begun any kind of sacred ceremony like marriage customs or Brotoponayana, etc., without worshipping this statue of Lord Buddha. We, the people of Boudhgarh, always love and respect our culture and heritage. Our cultural heritage is our pride.

CONCLUSION

The royal palace of Boudhgarh is a significant repository of the region’s historical, cultural, and architectural heritage. It reflects dynastic power, artistic patronage, and socio-political developments over time. Despite its current condition, this palace remains a vital symbol of cultural identity. Its preservation through systematic documentation and conservation is essential for safeguarding Boudhgarh’s rich royal legacy and transmitting it to future generations.

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