

Representation of femininity through the Śākta texts (*Śilpa Prakāśa* and *Śilparatnakośa*) of Early Medieval Odisha

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Śilpa or art is an important marker of the world view of any culture. If we consider the art traditions in different parts of India as mirroring notions of femininity and masculinity prevalent in society, the sculptures in various regional contexts provide us with ample examples of such representations of gender. This paper endeavours to study the normative understanding of women and femininity as depicted in sculptures on the temple walls of early medieval Odisha. My research focuses primarily on temple iconography to understand representations of the feminine.

There are a large number of prescriptive works that throw light on art and architecture in early medieval India, but many of these refer to specific regional traditions.

Śilpa Prakāśa and *Śilparatnakośa* are the two main sources to interpret the iconography and sculptures on the temples of early medieval Odisha. This paper focuses on the idea of representation of femininity through the sculptures on temples and how the doctrines of the *Śāstras* moulded the idea of womanhood in early medieval Odisha. More or less these *Śāstras* uphold the details of various parts of the temple, detailing the underlying meaning of iconography and symbolism, by drawing on Tāntric and other ideas.

The erotic motifs were not only carved out on the Śākta temples, but Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples, were also decorated with these motifs. This paper tries to understand and analyze the influence of emerging Śākta cult on the sculptures, in general and specifically on erotic sculptures in the early medieval Odishan temples, on the basis of the Śākta texts.

Key Words: Early medieval Odisha, Temple sculptures, Śilpa Śāstra, Iconography, Śākta cult, Femininity.

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