



KONARK

Chariot of Sun God

Massive. Awesome. Magnificent. Ancient India's gift to world heritage The Sun Temple of Konark is about 800 years of history and 100 years of conservation. The erotic sculptures on its walls intrigue every visitor to discover their deeper meaning.

Wealth is not enough; you must also have power. This is the message of a lion overpowering an elephant on both sides of the entrance of the massive complex of Konark Temple near Bhubaneswar, Orissa. After noting this message, you climb up to the main entrance flanked by seven powerful horses pulling a chariot with 24 wheels. At the entrance of the main temple, now filled up, is the huge black marble Lord Shiva positioned precisely to bathe in the first rays of the rising sun every morning.

As you walk along the sides of the chariot, the huge wheels awe you. The Konark wheels are a famous symbol not only for Orissa but also for India. Their spokes and hub have elaborate and different carvings as have the walls. Gazing at some of them, you marvel at their beauty and candour.

This 800-year-old temple to worship the sun displays a great understanding of astronomy. Drawn by seven horses for each day of the week, the mammoth chariot of the Sun God has 24 wheels for the hours in a day and eight spokes in a wheel for each 'pahar' of three hours each in a day. The Oriya King Narisma Dev-1 built it to celebrate his victory over the Muslim invaders and employed 1,200 workers to build it over 12 years. It fell into ruins in the early 17th century after

it was pillaged by one of Jehangir's Generals and until 1900 it was simply a huge, interesting mound.

In December 1900, destiny brought the British Lt. Governor Sir John Woodburn to this site who vowed to restore it to its original epic grandeur. By April 1901, the archaeological Surveyor T. Bloch unearthed the mammoth structure and the sheer size and splendour of its structure and intricate carvings once again shone in sunlight. The immense structure of a huge tower, a prayer hall, a dancing hall and an offering hall is decorated with carvings, sculptures and bas-reliefs. As it stands on a sandy foundation the main temple has been filled in to prevent it from collapsing.

Among the priceless treasures unearthed was a black granite slab about 30 feet long, six feet high and weighing 27.5 tones carved with exquisite sculptures of the seven planets and two demons. The Imperial rulers thought that this should be best displayed in the British Museum along with all the other heirlooms from India and many other countries; and so they constructed a short railway line to transport it to the seashore to ship it away. But they miscalculated the fury of the locals who revolted until the rulers abandoned this plan! Safely enshrined in a separate building near the main temple, this precious Indian heritage draws devotees and visitors to pray and admire it to this day. The deities of Lord Jagannath have been moved to the nearby town of Puri equally famous for its 'Rath Yatra'.

Originally the chariot-temple was near the seashore and it's black pagoda visible for miles by incoming ships but the sea has receded and so it is about two miles

inland today. In the last half a century, a great deal of restoration work has been going on at this site. The three deities of Lord Shiva in black stone have been restored and placed in their original position. Now UNESCO has declared it as a World Heritage Monument.

After listening to this interesting background from our guide, one asks, "How interesting! But what are these erotic sculptures doing on the walls of this temple?"

A pertinent question at which most Indians become embarrassed and/or shy away from answering and our guide's explanations were not quite satisfactory by saying that similar sculptures are also found in Khajuraho.

The renowned photographer of *Life* magazine, Eliot Elisofon relates a similar incident during the 1950s. "I had just finished photographing several long views of Konark Temple and was setting up my camera for a close-up of sexual union between two figures beautifully carved when my assistant, a young educated Indian from new Delhi, placed himself between the sculpture and my camera. He pleaded with me not to take the photograph. When I asked why, he answered, "What will Americans think of us when they see this picture?" He was not alone in this opinion. Many Indians were and some still are ashamed of the erotic subject material which adorns the temple."

Even today, one sees many visitors looking in stunned silence at these carvings pretending they are just not there; others start giggling and sniggering and some starting joking and discussing them in hushed voices. These are not for giggling, sniggering and snapping erotic photos but to be understood for their deeper meaning. They are not about sex but about yoga union and specifically Tantric Yoga of man and woman and of angels and gods and from thereon of the human being and God atman (soul) and paramatman (super soul).



Inside is the image of God, and outside are engravings, images of sex, passion, and copulation.

Khajuraho couples is that they are standing or sitting but not 'going to bed' or 'sleeping' with each other. Moreover, they are not solemn but seem to be joyous indeed ecstatic. Alan Watts, a leading Western scholar of Eastern mysticism, writes about these expressions, "If this is not tender, cherishing love, and if the sculptor had no appreciation of the human form, one's eyes are not to be believed. How can they argue,

verbally, as to whether or not spirituality is compatible with sexuality? The question can be answered by only going beyond words."

Osho explains these sculptures with this insight, "These temples have, on the outer side, beautiful women, beautiful men, and all in love postures. Inside there are no love postures. Inside you will find the temple empty, not even a statue of God. The idea is that unless you pass through your sexuality with full awareness, in all its phases, in all its dimensions -- unless you come to a point when sex has no meaning for you... only then you enter the temple. Otherwise you are outside the temple, your interest is there."

"The images look naked and obscene. If, after seeing them, a man simply runs away, then he will not be able to reach the deity of the temple inside. Inside is the image of God, and outside are engravings, images of sex, passion, and copulation. They must have been a wonderful people who built the temples of Konark. They depicted a profound fact of life: they have conveyed that sex is there, on the outside wall, and if you are to run away from there, then you will never be able to attain brahmacharya celibacy -- because brahmacharya is inside. If you are ever able to get beyond these walls, then you will also attain brahmacharya. Samsara, the mortal world, is displayed on the walls, and running away from it will never bring you to God, because the one who is sitting inside the walls of samsara is God himself," says Osho.

- Swami Kul Bhushan