

## Unveiling the Legacy: The Impact of Colonial Architecture in Odisha

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### Article Info.

E-ISSN: **2583-6528**

Impact Factor (SJIF): **6.876**

Peer Reviewed Journal

Available online:

[www.alladvancejournal.com](http://www.alladvancejournal.com)

Received: 17/ May/2025

Accepted: 25/June/2025

### Abstract

This article explores the enduring influence of colonial architecture in Odisha, India, shedding light on its historical significance, architectural evolution, and contemporary relevance. Through a comprehensive analysis of colonial-era structures, such as government buildings, churches, and residences, the article examines the intricate interplay between colonial power dynamics and architectural expression. It delves into how colonial architecture has shaped the cultural landscape of Odisha, contributing to its identity and heritage. Moreover, the article discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with preserving and repurposing colonial structures in the context of modern urban development. By unveiling the legacy of colonial architecture in Odisha, this study aims to foster a deeper understanding of the region's historical narratives and architectural heritage, while also informing future conservation efforts and urban planning initiatives.

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**Keywords:** Colonial, Odisha, colonial power.

### Introduction

Colonial architecture in Odisha stands as a testament to the region's rich historical narrative, showcasing the amalgamation of indigenous traditions with foreign influences. From the towering structures of British colonial rule to the subtle yet profound impact of Portuguese and Dutch settlements, the architectural landscape of Odisha reflects centuries of cultural exchange, power struggles, and socio-economic transformations. This article aims to delve deep into the multifaceted impact of colonial architecture in Odisha, exploring its historical significance, cultural implications, and contemporary relevance.

### Historical Context

Pre-colonial architectural traditions in Odisha: Temples, forts, and palaces. Pre-colonial architectural traditions in Odisha lay the foundation for the region's rich architectural heritage, reflecting the indigenous craftsmanship, religious fervor, and cultural diversity of the land. These traditions encompassed a wide range of structures, including temples, forts, palaces, and civic buildings, each bearing distinct characteristics influenced by historical, geographical, and socio-cultural factors.

### 1. Temple Architecture

Odisha is renowned for its ancient temple architecture, particularly the Kalinga style, which flourished between the 7th and 13th centuries. The Lingaraja Temple in Bhubaneswar stands as a masterpiece of Odishan architecture, showcasing intricate carvings, towering spires, and elaborate rituals. Other notable examples include the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Konark Sun Temple, and Mukteshwar Temple in Bhubaneswar, each reflecting the architectural brilliance and religious significance of the era.

### 2. Forts and Palaces

Pre-colonial Odisha was dotted with fortified settlements and palatial complexes, serving as centers of political power and defense. The Sisupalgarh archaeological site near Bhubaneswar provides insights into the urban planning and defensive architecture of ancient Odisha, dating back to the 3rd century BCE. Palaces such as the Barabati Fort in Cuttack and the Khurda Fort exemplify the architectural grandeur and strategic importance of these structures in pre-colonial Odisha.

### 3. Civic Architecture

Civic architecture in pre-colonial Odisha encompassed a variety of structures, including tanks, stepwells, and public buildings, designed to serve the needs of the community. Examples include the Bindusagar Tank in Bhubaneswar, which served as a sacred water body for ritual bathing, and the Ananta Vasudeva Temple, originally built as a Vishnu temple and later converted into a Jagannath temple.

### 4. Regional Diversity

Pre-colonial Odisha exhibited regional variations in architectural styles and techniques, influenced by local traditions, materials, and environmental conditions. The tribal communities of Odisha, such as the Dongria Kondh and the Kutia Kondh, built unique structures using locally available materials like bamboo, wood, and thatch, reflecting their symbiotic relationship with nature.

### 5. Art and Sculpture

Sculpture played a pivotal role in pre-colonial Odisha's architectural expression, with artisans showcasing exquisite craftsmanship in stone, metal, and wood. Intricately carved doorways, pillars, and friezes adorned temples and palaces, depicting mythological narratives, celestial beings, and everyday life.

### 6. Influence on Subsequent Architectural Movements

Pre-colonial architectural traditions in Odisha laid the groundwork for subsequent architectural movements, including the Odisha school of temple architecture and the regional vernacular styles that emerged during colonial and post-colonial periods.

These pre-colonial architectural traditions in Odisha not only reflect the ingenuity and artistic prowess of ancient craftsmen but also serve as a source of inspiration and reverence for contemporary architects, historians, and cultural enthusiasts, underscoring the enduring legacy of Odisha's architectural heritage.

### Arrival of European Powers: Portuguese, Dutch, and British

Colonial conquests left a lasting architectural imprint on Odisha, reshaping the region's urban landscape, infrastructure, and cultural identity. From the arrival of European powers in the 16th century to the consolidation of British colonial rule in the 19th century, Odisha witnessed the construction of forts, administrative buildings, churches, and other structures that reflected the changing political, economic, and social dynamics of the time.

#### 1. Portuguese Influence

The Portuguese were among the earliest European powers to establish settlements along the coast of Odisha, primarily for trade purposes. A Portuguese resort, located near the mouth of the Mahanadi River, served as a strategic outpost for the Portuguese in their trade ventures. Portuguese influence is evident in the architecture of coastal towns such as Puri and Chilika, where remnants of Portuguese forts and churches can still be found.

#### 2. Dutch Settlements

The Dutch East India Company established trading posts and settlements in Odisha during the 17th century, vying for control over lucrative trade routes and resources. Gopalpur Fort, originally built by the Dutch in the 18th century, bears

witness to their presence in the region. The fort, although in ruins, reflects Dutch architectural elements blended with local styles.

### 3. British Colonial Rule

The British East India Company's conquest of Odisha in the 18th century marked the beginning of a new era of colonial dominance in the region. Forts were constructed in strategic locations to consolidate British control and defend against potential threats. Examples include Balasore Fort and Barabati Fort in Cuttack. Administrative buildings, such as the Collectorate in Cuttack and other district headquarters, were erected as centers of colonial governance and bureaucracy. Churches and cathedrals built by British missionaries served as symbols of colonial authority and facilitated the spread of Christianity. Notable examples include St. Andrew's Church in Cuttack and the Holy Rosary Church in Balasore.

### Influence on Urban Planning

Colonial powers played a significant role in shaping the urban fabric of Odisha, establishing administrative centers, commercial hubs, and residential quarters. Cuttack emerged as a major colonial administrative center, with planned layouts, wide roads, and public buildings reflecting British architectural sensibilities. The development of port cities such as Cuttack and Balasore facilitated trade and commerce, further reinforcing their importance in the colonial hierarchy.

### Legacy and Preservation

Despite the passage of time and the challenges of urbanization, many colonial-era structures in Odisha have survived and are recognized as important heritage sites. Efforts are underway to preserve and restore these architectural landmarks, not only for their historical significance but also for their potential to promote tourism and cultural exchange.

### Colonial Conquests and their Architectural Imprint on Odisha

The arrival of European powers to Odisha marked a pivotal moment in the region's history, ushering in a new era of trade, conquest, and cultural exchange. Among the European powers that set foot on Odishan shores, the Portuguese, Dutch, and British played significant roles in shaping the region's destiny. However, it was during the British colonial era that Odisha's architectural landscape underwent significant transformation. The British, seeking to consolidate their rule, introduced Western architectural styles while also adapting local techniques to suit their needs.

One of the most notable legacies of British architecture in Odisha is evident in the administrative buildings and churches. The capital city of Bhubaneswar, for instance, boasts colonial-era structures like the Odisha State Legislative Assembly, which reflects the neoclassical architectural style favored by the British. Similarly, the Raj Bhavan, formerly known as the Government House, showcases colonial architectural elements, including colonnades and symmetrical facades. Churches erected during the British period also contribute to Odisha's architectural heritage. The St. Andrew's Church in Cuttack, constructed in the 19th century, is a prime example of colonial church architecture, featuring Gothic Revival elements such as pointed arches and ornate spires. Furthermore, the British influence extended to infrastructure development, including railways and bridges.

The construction of railway lines facilitated trade and transportation, while bridges like the Mahanadi Bridge in Cuttack exemplify British engineering prowess.

Despite these colonial imprints, Odisha's architectural landscape remains a vibrant tapestry of diverse influences. The region's rich heritage, encompassing indigenous, Islamic, and colonial styles, reflects its storied history and cultural synthesis. Today, these architectural marvels serve as reminders of Odisha's journey through time, embodying the resilience and adaptability of its people.

### **Portuguese Exploration and Settlements**

The Portuguese were among the first Europeans to arrive in Odisha, seeking to establish trade routes to Southeast Asia and the Spice Islands. In the early 16th century, Portuguese navigators, including Vasco da Gama and Alfonso de Albuquerque, ventured along the Indian coast, establishing contacts with local rulers and merchants. Portuguese traders set up settlements and fortified outposts along the Odishan coast, including at Chilika, Ganjam, and Puri, primarily for trade in spices, textiles, and other commodities. The most prominent Portuguese fortification in Odisha was Fortaleza de São João Baptista de Ajudá, near the mouth of the Mahanadi River, which served as a strategic outpost for Portuguese maritime activities in the region.

### **Dutch East India Company**

The Dutch East India Company emerged as a formidable maritime power in the 17th century, vying for control over lucrative trade routes in the Indian Ocean. Dutch traders established settlements and trading posts along the Odishan coast, competing with the Portuguese and indigenous merchants for supremacy in the spice trade. Gopalpur Fort, originally built by the Dutch in the 18th century, served as a key stronghold for Dutch commercial activities in Odisha, although it later fell into disrepair.

### **British East India Company**

The British East India Company, following the establishment of its trading post in Surat in 1612, gradually expanded its influence across the Indian subcontinent, including into Odisha. In the late 18th century, the British East India Company consolidated its control over Odisha, annexing territories and establishing administrative centers in key coastal cities such as Cuttack and Balasore. British colonial rule in Odisha brought about significant socio-economic changes, including the introduction of plantation agriculture, modern infrastructure, and educational institutions. The British presence in Odisha left a lasting imprint on the region's architectural landscape, with the construction of forts, administrative buildings, churches, and other structures reflecting colonial power and influence.

In summary, the arrival of European powers to Odisha heralded a period of profound transformation, characterized by commercial rivalries, political intrigues, and cultural interactions. The legacies of Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonialism endure in Odisha's architectural heritage, cultural traditions, and socio-economic institutions, shaping the identity of the region to this day.

**British Colonial Architecture:** British colonial architecture in Odisha left a lasting legacy, characterized by forts, administrative buildings, churches, and cathedrals that reflect the imperial power's influence on the region's urban planning and architectural landscape.

Forts and administrative buildings stand as enduring symbols of British authority in Odisha. The Balasore Fort, situated in the coastal town of Balasore, exemplifies British military architecture. Built in the 19th century, this fort served as a strategic stronghold for the British East India Company, guarding the region against potential threats. Its sturdy walls and bastions bear testament to the defensive prowess of British engineering.

In Cuttack, the colonial administrative center, several buildings showcase British architectural styles. The Cuttack Collectorate, constructed in the 19th century, stands as a prominent example of colonial administrative architecture. Its imposing facade, adorned with classical columns and intricate detailing, reflects the grandeur and authority of British rule.

Churches and cathedrals built during the British colonial period also contribute to Odisha's architectural heritage. St. Andrew's Church, located in Cuttack, is one such landmark. Built in the mid-19th century, this Gothic Revival-style church features pointed arches, towering spires, and ornate stained glass windows, characteristic of colonial church architecture. The Holy Rosary Church in Cuttack is another notable example, known for its elegant facade and serene interior.

The British colonial presence significantly influenced urban planning in Odisha, particularly in cities like Cuttack and Puri, which served as colonial administrative centers. Cuttack, with its strategic location on the banks of the Mahanadi River, emerged as a key hub for trade and administration under British rule. The layout of the city, with its wide avenues and orderly streets, reflects British urban planning principles aimed at facilitating governance and commerce.

Puri, renowned for its religious significance as the abode of Lord Jagannath, also underwent transformation during the colonial period. While the sacred precincts remained largely untouched, the surrounding areas witnessed the establishment of colonial administrative offices and residential quarters. The integration of British architectural styles with traditional Odia elements gave rise to a unique urban fabric that endures to this day.

### **Cultural Implications**

Identity and representation: Colonial architecture as a symbol of power and authority.

### **Socio-economic Impact**

The period from 1860 to 1960 witnessed profound socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas in Odisha, exacerbated by colonial policies and the architecture they engendered. Colonial architecture played a significant role in shaping and perpetuating these disparities, reflecting the unequal distribution of resources, power, and opportunities.

Urban areas in Odisha, particularly those designated as colonial administrative centers, experienced substantial infrastructural development and architectural transformation. Cities like Cuttack and Puri emerged as hubs of colonial governance, commerce, and culture, characterized by grand administrative buildings, churches, and civic amenities. The architecture of these urban centers often mirrored European styles, symbolizing colonial authority and modernity.

Colonial urban planning initiatives, influenced by British models, prioritized the needs of the colonial administration and European settlers, often at the expense of indigenous communities. Urban development projects focused on improving sanitation, transportation, and public utilities primarily benefited the colonial elite and affluent urban

residents, further widening the gap between the urban elite and rural masses.

In contrast, rural areas in Odisha languished under the weight of colonial exploitation, agrarian impoverishment, and neglect. The architecture of rural settlements remained largely vernacular, characterized by traditional mud-brick huts and thatched-roof cottages. Colonial policies, such as the Permanent Settlement System, entrenched landlordism and exacerbated socio-economic inequalities in rural society, leading to widespread poverty and landlessness among peasants.

Furthermore, the colonial administration's focus on extractive industries and cash crops like indigo, tea, and cotton further marginalized rural communities, displacing them from their ancestral lands and disrupting traditional livelihoods. The architectural landscape of rural Odisha thus reflected the stark socio-economic disparities between the urban centers of colonial power and the agrarian hinterlands.

Moreover, the colonial legacy of infrastructure development, including railways and roads, primarily served to facilitate the extraction of resources from rural areas to urban centers and ports for export, rather than fostering balanced regional development. This lopsided development model perpetuated the dominance of urban interests and reinforced the marginalization of rural communities, deepening socio-economic disparities across the region.

### **Legacy of Colonial Infrastructure: Railways, Roads, and Bridges**

The legacy of colonial infrastructure, particularly railways, roads, and bridges, in Odisha remains a testament to the transformative impact of British colonial rule on the region's transportation network and socio-economic development.

Railways played a pivotal role in connecting Odisha to the rest of British India, facilitating the movement of goods, people, and ideas across vast distances. The construction of railway lines in Odisha began in the late 19th century and accelerated during the colonial period. The East Coast Railway, connecting Kolkata to Chennai via Odisha's coastal belt, was one of the significant railway projects undertaken by the British. Railways not only spurred industrialization and commercial agriculture but also facilitated administrative control and military mobilization.

The legacy of colonial railways in Odisha is evident in the architectural design of railway stations, bridges, and viaducts, characterized by sturdy construction and utilitarian functionality. Landmark railway structures such as the Mahanadi Bridge in Cuttack, spanning the Mahanadi River, stand as enduring symbols of British engineering prowess and colonial modernity. These infrastructural marvels not only facilitated transportation but also transformed the socio-economic landscape of Odisha, enabling the expansion of trade, industry, and urbanization.

Roads were another crucial component of colonial infrastructure in Odisha, connecting remote villages to urban centers and facilitating the movement of goods and people. The British undertook the construction of metaled roads, bridges, and causeways to improve communication and administrative control. Roads like the Grand Trunk Road, connecting Kolkata to Puri via Cuttack, played a vital role in facilitating trade and pilgrimage while also serving as conduits for colonial authority.

Bridges, in particular, emerged as iconic symbols of colonial infrastructure in Odisha, spanning rivers and estuaries to overcome geographical barriers. The construction of bridges

like the Kathajodi Bridge in Cuttack and the Birupa Bridge in Jajpur facilitated the integration of different regions and communities, enabling the flow of goods and services and fostering socio-economic exchange.

However, the legacy of colonial infrastructure in Odisha is not without its complexities. While railways, roads, and bridges contributed to economic development and connectivity, they also had social and environmental implications. The construction of railways and roads often involved displacement of indigenous communities and disruption of traditional livelihoods. Moreover, the ecological impact of infrastructure projects, including deforestation and river pollution, has had long-term consequences for Odisha's environment and biodiversity.

### **Economic Implications of Heritage Conservation and Tourism**

Heritage conservation efforts in colonial Odisha have the potential to stimulate economic growth by enhancing the region's attractiveness to tourists, both domestic and international. Colonial-era buildings, forts, churches, and bridges serve as tangible reminders of Odisha's colonial past, attracting heritage enthusiasts, history buffs, and architecture aficionados. Preservation and restoration projects aimed at maintaining these structures not only safeguard cultural heritage but also create employment opportunities in fields such as architecture, archaeology, and tourism management.

Furthermore, heritage tourism in colonial Odisha has the potential to generate revenue through visitor spending on accommodation, transportation, food, souvenirs, and guided tours. By promoting colonial heritage sites as tourist destinations, local communities can benefit from increased economic activity, job creation, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Additionally, heritage tourism can contribute to the diversification of the regional economy, reducing dependency on traditional sectors like agriculture and manufacturing.

Moreover, the promotion of colonial heritage tourism can also have ripple effects on related sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and handicrafts. Hotels, restaurants, and transportation services catering to tourists visiting colonial heritage sites stand to gain from increased patronage. Similarly, artisans and craftsmen producing traditional handicrafts and souvenirs can capitalize on the demand for authentic cultural products, thereby boosting local economies and preserving indigenous craftsmanship.

### **Contemporary Relevance**

Studying the impact of colonial architecture on Odisha's built environment is a fascinating area of architectural education and research, offering insights into the region's historical development, cultural exchange, and architectural evolution.

Research plays a pivotal role in uncovering the layers of history embedded within Odisha's colonial architecture. Scholars delve into primary sources, including archival documents, maps, and photographs, to reconstruct the narratives of colonial buildings and urban spaces. By tracing the trajectories of colonial planning initiatives, land policies, and socio-economic factors, researchers illuminate the broader socio-political context in which colonial architecture emerged.

Moreover, research on colonial architecture in Odisha often extends beyond the physical aspects of buildings to explore their cultural and symbolic significance. Scholars investigate how colonial structures served as instruments of power,

asserting dominance over the landscape and shaping colonial identities. They also examine the narratives of resistance and agency embedded within colonial architecture, highlighting the ways in which local communities appropriated, subverted, or contested colonial spaces.

Interdisciplinary approaches are integral to studying colonial architecture's impact on Odisha's built environment. Collaborations between architects, historians, anthropologists, and conservationists enrich research endeavors by offering diverse perspectives and methodologies. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines, researchers gain a holistic understanding of colonial architecture's multifaceted legacy and its implications for contemporary architectural practice and heritage conservation.

### Conclusion

Colonial architecture in Odisha serves as a tangible link to the region's complex history, embodying narratives of conquest, resistance, and cultural exchange. Its impact extends beyond aesthetics, shaping socio-economic dynamics and cultural identities. As Odisha navigates the challenges of modernization and globalization, the preservation and interpretation of colonial architecture remain essential for understanding and appreciating the state's diverse heritage.

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