Preface

The early medieval sculptures of Khiching (in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha) constitute a homogenous, self-sufficient school that requires definition. The iconography is varied and it is equally important to trace the sources that have moulded its style in progressive stages as well as the socio-religious information that can be gleaned from them. The aim of this PhD dissertation is to explore the iconographic variety of the site and determine the Khiching sculptures as a distinct school of art or sub-style within the broader stylistic development of Odishan art.

The dissertation is a humble attempt to place my findings from the intensive fieldwork carried out in the modern village of Khiching (91 miles from Baripada, the headquarters of Mayurbhanj district in north Odisha) and surrounding village shrines within a radius of ten kms, including Benusagar (Jharkhand). Hitherto un-documented sculptures in the village shrines have been taken into account, widening the iconographic profile of the site. Also a critical, re-appraisal of the sculptures in the site museum has been attempted, leading to few fresh identifications according to their pratimalakshana (iconographic traits).

The methodology incorporate the iconographic and stylistic study of the images, contextualizing in the perspective of historical, socio-religious data gathered from both primary and secondary sources on Odishan history and art. Ethno-archaeological methods and oral history (interview of village elders, people connected with the reconstruction of temple) findings have also been incorporated to make this study as rooted as possible.

Chapter one or Introduction reviews the previous works in the field of art and archaeology of Khiching and Mayurbhanj and states the need and necessity of undertaking this research. It also introduces the site in terms of location and antiquity. Chapter two sets the historical background, giving an account of the origin and genealogy of Khijjinga or adi- Bhanja kings under whose patronage this remarkable provincial centre of art flourished. Chapter three as is evident from its title, explores the religious and social conditions as indicated by the cult images and the inscriptive evidence, pointing to the multiplicity and co-existence of faiths, religious affiliation of the patron kings and major tantric influence in the region. In Chapter
Sculptural art and allied objects different cult images and ornamental details on the images and architecture have been studied. It also discusses secular sculptures like the women figures (*alsakanya*). Chapter five - A study in style, offers the stylistic study, including the comparative study and final observations have been drawn in Conclusion.

Histories of pre-modern art and archaeology have a strong interrelationship. They are almost inextricably linked. The present researcher came across fascinating facets of the history of archaeology in Mayurbhanj- how art objects were retrieved from excavations, establishment of the site museum, endowing of art historical importance through preservation at the museum, etc. This aspect of knowledge production has been dealt with in the Appendices. While Appendix I deal with the institutional history of archaeology of erstwhile Mayurbhanj State, Appendix II has tried to throw light on an individual Sailendra Prasad Bose, an ‘unsung hero’, a key figure in the aforementioned process, who has been precluded from the official history but remembered vividly and revered in popular memory. There is enough evidence in terms of documents to show how he was an integral part of the process.