



Different Architectural Styles and Temple History

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Abstract

Temple architecture of very high standards were developed in almost all regions during ancient India. The distinct architectural style of temple construction in different regions of India was a result of geographical, climatic, ethnic, racial, historical and linguistic diversities. Ancient Indian temples are classified in three broad types based on different architectural styles, employed in the construction of the temples. Three main style of temple architecture were the Nagara or the Northern style, the Dravida or the Southern style and the Vesara or Mixed style, eventhough there are also some regional styles of Bengal, Kerala and the Himalayan areas. This paper dwells on the salient features of each style of temple architecture and general description of a temple

Keywords: Temple, Nagara, Dravida ,Southern style, Vesara

1.0 Introduction

An important aspect of ancient Indian temples was their decoration. It was reflected in the multitude details of figured sculpture as well as in the architectural elements. Second important aspect of Indian temples was the garbha-griha (sanctum sanctorum), which housed the deity of the temple. The garbha-griha was provided with a circumambulation passage around. There were many subsidiary shrines within temple complexes which are more common in the South Indian temple.

In the initial stages of its evolution, the temples of North and South India were distinguished on the basis of some specific features like *Sikhara* and gateways. In the north Indian temples, the *Sikhara* remained the most prominent component while the gateway was generally unassuming. The most prominent features of South Indian temples were enclosures around the temples and the Gopurams (huge gateways). The Gopurams led the devotees into the sacred courtyard. There were many common features in the Northern and the Southern styles. These included the ground plan, positioning of stone-carved deities on the outside walls and the interior, and the range of decorative elements.

2.0 Design

The very essence of a Hindu temple is believed to have been developed from the ideology that all things are one and everything is associated. The four essential and significant principles which are also aims of human life according to Indian philosophy are the quests for artha, kama, dharma and moksha.. The intricate artworks, decorated and carved pillars and statues of Hindu temples illustrate and revere such philosophies. A hollow space without any embellishments situated at the centre of the temple, usually below the deity, or at the side or above the deity symbolises the complex concept of Purusha meaning the cosmic man or self without any form. The Hindu temples encourage purification of mind and prompt the process of self-realisation in devotees.

3.0 Site

The areas of Hindu temple sites are usually vast with many of them were built near water bodies, in the lap of nature. This is probably because according to ancient texts, the most suitable site for a Hindu temple referred as 'Mandir' is at close proximity to water bodies and gardens where flowers blossom, chirping of birds and sounds of ducks and swans can be heard and animals can rest without any fear. These places exhibiting peace and tranquility were recommended by the texts for building Hindu

temples elucidating that Gods reside in such places. Although, leading Hindu temples were suggested near natural water bodies like confluence of rivers, river banks, seashores and lakes, according to the 'Puranas' and 'Bharat Samhita', they can even be constructed in sites devoid of natural water bodies. In the absence of both natural and man-made water bodies, water remains typically present during consecration of the deity or the Mandir. Hindu text *Vishnudharmottara Purana* also recommends building of temples within caves and chiselled out stones, atop hills amidst spectacular and serene views, within hermitages and forests, beside gardens and at the upper end of a street of a town.

4.0 Layout

Layout of a Hindu temple follows a geometrical design known as *Vastu-Purusha-Mandala*, the name of which is derived from the three vital components of the design namely *Vaastu* meaning Vaas or a place of dwelling, *Purusha*, meaning the Universal principle and *Mandala* meaning circle. *Vastupurushamandala* is a mystical diagram referred in Sanskrit as a Yantra. The symmetrical and self-repeating model of a Hindu temple demonstrated in the design is derived from the primary convictions, traditions, myths, fundamentality and mathematical standards.

According to *Vastupurushamandala*, the most sacred and typical template for a Hindu temple is the 8x8 grid Manduka Hindu Temple Floor Plan also referred as Bhekapada and Ajira. The layout displays a vivid saffron centre with intersecting diagonals which according to Hindu philosophy symbolises the Purusha. The axis of the temple is created with the aid of the four fundamentally significant directions and thus, a perfect square is created around the axis within the available space. This square which is circumscribed by the *Mandala* circle and divided into perfect square grids is held sacred. On the other hand, the circle is regarded as human and worldly that can be perceived or noticed in daily life such as the Sun, Moon, rainbow, horizon or water drops. Both the square and the circle support each other. The model is usually seen in

large temples while an 81 sub-square grid is observed in ceremonial temple superstructures.

Each square within the main square referred as '*Pada*' symbolises a specific element that can be in the form of a deity, an apsara or a spirit. The primary or the innermost square of the 64 grid model called *Brahma Padas* is dedicated to Brahman. The *Garbhagriha* or centre of the house situated in the Brahma Padas houses the main deity. The outer concentric layer to Brahma Padas is the *Devika Padas* signifying facets of Devas or Gods which is again surrounded by the next layer, the *Manusha Padas*, with the ambulatory. The devotees circumambulate clockwise to perform Parikrama in the Manusha Padas with Devika Padas in the inner side and the *Paishachika Padas*, symbolising facets of Asuras and evils, on the outer side forming the last concentric square. The three outer Padas in larger temples generally adorn inspirational paintings, carvings and images with the wall reliefs and images of different temples depicting legends from different Hindu Epics and Vedic stories. Illustrations of artha, kama, dharma and moksha can be found in the embellished carvings and images adorning the walls, ceiling and pillars of the temples.

Pillared outdoor halls or pavilions called *Mandapa* meant for public rituals with the ones in the east serving as waiting room for devotees adorns the large temples. The Mandir's spire, usually a tapering conical or pyramidal superstructure with a dome designed adhering principles of concentric squares and circles and referred in North India as *Shikhara* and *Vimana* in South India is symmetrically aligned exactly above the Brahma Pada or the central core of the Mandir/temple. Compounds of many larger temples house smaller temples and shrines that also follow fundamental aspects of grids, symmetry and mathematical perfection. Repetition and mirroring of fractal-like design structure forms a significant principle of Hindu temple designs.

The manuals comprising of Hindu temple layouts elucidates plans with squares in the count of 1, 4, 9, 16, 25 and thus, reaching up to 1024. Each plan of different Padas has individual significance, for instance in *1 pada plan*, the pada is regarded as the seat for

a devotee or hermit to perform yoga, meditation or offer Vedic fire, a *4 Padas plan*, a meditative design represents a core at the center and a *9 Padas* layout that generally forms model of smallest temples has a divine surrounded centre. Although the perfect square grid principle is primarily found in different temples of India, some others hold exception such as the Teli-ka-mandir and the Naresar temple in Madhya Pradesh and the Nakti-Mata temple in Rajasthan, indicating that Hinduism welcomed flexibility, creativity and aesthetic independence of artists.

5.0 Nagara Style

The Nagara style that is palpable in different parts of India with varied elaborations in different localities has two particular features. The first being presence of several graduated *projections or rathakas* in the centre of all sides of the square temple, thus bearing a cross-shape with several re-entrant angles on all sides. The second feature includes design of the *spire or Shikhara* that follows principles of concentric squares and circles and gradually taper in a convex curve while stretching upwards. The Kandariya Mahadeva Temple in Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh is a fine example of this style.

6.0 Dravidian Style

Dravidian temple architecture evolved in South India predominantly comprise of temples built of sandstone or granite. The square-shaped temple called *Vimana* has one or more storied pyramidal roof while its cell houses the image or emblem of the God. The *Mandapas/Mandapams* are built in such a way that these precede and cover the door that leads to the cell. The *Gopurams/Gopuras* or elaborate gateway-towers or gate-pyramids encloses the temples. The pillared halls employed for different purposes forms one of the principal and constant features of this style. Temple tanks, wells, abodes of priests and other important buildings form part of this temple style. The famous Thanjavur temple of Tamil Nadu typifies this style.

Indian architecture saw an illustrious phase during the Badami Chalukyas rule. The foundation of cave temple architecture was laid by them on the banks of Malaprabha

River in Karnataka during 500 and 757 CE. The Badami Cave temples situated in the town of Badami in northern Karnataka dating back to the 6th century is one of the finest examples of this architecture that consist of decorative pillars, finely chiselled ceiling panels and sculptures. More than 150 temples in the historic temple complex situated in the village of Aihole called 'Cradle of Indian architecture'. Monuments of Pattadakal are marked by UNESCO as World Heritage site comprising of architectural edifices like the Virupaksha temple and the Mallikarjuna temple are also brilliant examples of this style

The Western Chalukya architecture or Gadag style of architecture is a specific style of decorative architecture that originated from the old dravida style and defines the Karnataka dravida tradition. Evolved during 11th century it prospered for around 150 years till 1200 CE during the reign of Western Chalukya Empire in the Tungabhadra region of Karnataka and saw construction of around 50 temples. A distinct feature of this style was articulation. Kasivisvesvara Temple at Lakkundi and Saraswati temple in the temple complex of Trikuteshwara at Gadag are some of the temples that illustrate this style.

7.0 Mixed Style

This style having three specific types of temples prospered in Odisha and Northern Andhra Pradesh. The three styles are Pidha Deula, Rekha Deula and Khakhara Deula with the first two linked with Shiva, Surya and Vishnu and the latter is predominantly associated with Goddesses Durga and Chamunda. Again the first type comprises of outer halls for offerings and dancing while the latter two comprise of the sanctum sanctorum. The word Deula means temple. The famous Jagannath Temple of Puri and Lingaraj Temple of Bhubaneswar portray Rekha Deula style while Vaital Deula of Bhubaneswar typifies Khakhara Deula and the Sun Temple at Konark remains a prominent example of Pidha Deula.

8.0 Inner Meaning of Elements within a Temple

A unique feature of fully evolved Hindu temples is the presence of motifs, of protection on the outside walls. Even before a devotee enters a temple, there is a *Dwaja Stambha*, the pillar of lights, which stands as a sentinel. Guarding the eight directions are *dighpalas*, protectors of directions, affording protection from the cardinal directions. *Lord Indra guards East, Agni the South East, Yama the South, Nirriti the Southwest, Varuna the West, Vayu the Northwest, Kubera the North and Ishana the Northeast.*

The guarding deity of the boundaries is the Lord Ganesha himself, having assumed his present form as he stood guard at his mother's side and faced the wrath of his father. Ganesha bestows auspiciousness and equally prepares a devotee towards a transition from a temporal and a limited world to limitless and infinite world inside the temple. River goddesses Ganga and Yamuna stand guard at the door to cleanse and thus prepare the devotees for the experience that awaits them.

Sculptures of intimate couples which adorns some prominent and notable temples are also featured which are considered auspicious for *mithuna*, understood both in its physical and aesthetic sense, is the source of creation and continuity of life, both of the body as well as the mind.

The lintel of entrance features the *Navagrahas*, which means invoking the entire cosmos for protection of the temple as nothing worthwhile can happen unless the planets are in concordance. The outer walls of the temples are dotted with *vyalas or shardulas*, which are mythic leonine animals who through their fierce and angry look ward off the evil eye.

There are also motifs of fullness and prosperity by way of *purna kumbha*, which is the metaphor of womb and also of creation. Sun symbols such as *swastika* remind the devotees that the centrality of sun as the source and sustainer of life and how our movement revolves around it

An ardent devotee may be committed to be inquisitive as to what is it that these motifs protect and the need for protection of the same. Physical calamities and unfavourable

material problems are the sources of destruction of a temple and there is need for protection of temple. The mind of a devotee is even more fragile. It is from the mind that a rich and radiant experience, religious or aesthetic is born and it is *Shraddha* in that very mind that this uplifted, chastened and enlightened mind is led to fruition to the state of *Anandha*.

The mind which is enlightened and experienced *Anandha* or serene bliss from the experience within the temple is fragile and liable to be broken and destabilized and hence needs to be preserved, protected, fostered, firmed, strengthened and established.

A precious treasure like mind can lose its lustre when it is beset by doubts or deprived of its brilliance when distracted by the dust and din of *samsara*, fragmented when it is stolen by mundane concerns or dethroned when it is beset by everyday preoccupations which are all common for any human being in this mortal world.

It is of paramount importance that the beautiful religious and aesthetic experience of the devotee be protected and preserved and the various motifs on the temple must be understood metamorphically for full aesthetic experience of any temple.

9.0 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the architecture of a temple makes a devotee experience supreme inner bliss, if undertaken in all sincerity and the credit for the same should go to the vision and foresight of rulers of various dynasties who have built the same through their meticulous planning.

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