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Architecture on Temples

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Introduction

Vastu Śāstra literally translated means the 'Science of Buildings' since 'Śāstra' means a 'Science' and 'Vastu' means 'all places of dwelling' and 'Vāstu' means 'the actual physical manifestation of the dwelling'. Both terms 'Vastu' and 'Vāstu' are from the root "Vas" which means 'to dwell, live, stay, abide' (cognate with the English past tense was). So 'Vāstu Śāstra' basically means Architecture (Art & Science of buildings). There are four categories of Vāstu.

Bhūmi – The earth/site, the principal dwelling place on which everything else rests.

Prasāda – Structures on the earth.

Yāna – Movable objects like vehicle.

Sayana – Furniture.

As these categories suggest, the principles of Vāstu Śāstra extend from the macro level to the micro level – site selection, site planning and orientation, zoning and disposition of rooms, proportional relationships between the various parts of character of the interior buildings, the buildings and arrangement of furniture.

Vastu Śāstra is an ancient Indian Vedic Building Science which lays down guidelines on the construction of buildings, so that they are in harmony with the natural environment by managing the flow of cosmic energy (prāṇa) through around them, which in turn promotes the well-being, peace and prosperity of the inhabitants.

According to Vastu Śāstra, when the buildings and forms are in tune with the underlying cosmic principles, they become a part of the basic structure of the universe and vibrate in harmony with it. These positive vibrations are believed to have a positive effect on the inhabitants.

Important Features of Indian Temple

The Indian temples are symmetry-driven structure, with many variations, on a square grid of pāda-s, depicting perfect geometric shapes such as circles and squares. In this article, we are giving the list of important features of Indian Temple, which is very useful for the competitive examinations like UPSC- prelims, SSC, State Services, NDA, CDS and Railways etc.

The Indian temples are symmetry-driven structure with many variations on a square grid of pāda-s, depicting perfect geometric¹ shapes such as circles and squares. Susan Lewandowski states that the architectural principle of Indian temple is moving around the belief that all things are one, everything is connected. Decoration is one of the major parts of Indian temples. It is reflected in the multitude details of figured sculpture as well as in the architectural elements. The Indian temples were decorated in the multitude details of figured sculpture as well as in the architectural elements which are discussed below.

➤ Garbhagr̥ha: It is referring to the sanctum sanctorum, the innermost sanctum of a temple where resides the Murti (idol or icon) of the primary deity of the temple. It literally means 'womb-house' and is a cave like sanctum. Garbhagr̥ha is made to house the main icon or deity.

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- **Mandapa:** It is a porch-like structure which is designed as a pillared outdoor hall or pavilion for public rituals. It is used for religious dancing and music and is part of the basic temple compound. The temples which has more than one mandapa called by different names such as Artha Mandapam or Ardh Mandapam, Asthana Mandapam, Kalyana Mandapam, Maha Mandapam, Nandi Mandapam (or Nandi Mandir), Ranga Mandapa, Meghanath Mandapa, Namaskara Mandapa and Open Mandapa.
- **Shikhara:** It is derived from Sanskrit word 'Shikhar' which means mountain peak. It is a curving shape which is mountain like spire of a free standing temple. It is mainly found in North India temples.
- **Vimāna:** It is pyramidal like structure refers to the rising tower in the temple architecture of North India. It is prevalent in South India.
- **Amalaka:** It is the term used for a stone disc like structure at the top of the temple shikhara.
- **Kalasha:** It is the topmost point of the temple above Amalaka.
- **Antarala (Vestibule):** It is a place between the Garbhagrha and the temple's main hall (mandapa).
- **Jagati:** It is the term used for the platform where people sit for praying.
- **Vāhana:** This term is used for the vehicle of the temple's main deity along with a standard pillar or Dhvaj.

The distinct architectural style of temple construction in different parts of India was a result of geographical, climatic, ethnic, racial, historical and linguistic diversities. The type of raw materials available in different regions had a significant impact on construction techniques, carving possibilities and the overall temple appearance.

The Philosophy of Temple Construction

Temples are built to establish the contact between man and God. The rituals and ceremonies performed in the temples have primarily influenced the forms of temple architecture. The identification of divinity with the fabric of the temple and the reflection of the form of the Universe with that of the form of the temple is of supreme importance. Hence, importance is given right from the selection of the site of the temple, to formation of the ground plan and also to its vertical elevation. The symbolic representation of the cosmic ideas is formalized by creation of sacred mathematical treaties, with precise measurement systems. The plans of the temples are based on sacred geometric diagrams (madala) – symbolized as a miniscule image of the universe with its coordinated organized structure (as in Vāstu Puruṣa² Mandala).

In Hinduism, the attachment of spiritual perfection is through progression of various stages of consciousness. Thus, the temple is a place of transit, a ford or passage (Tirtha). The symbolism of passage through the doorways is represented by the idea of changeover from temporal to the perpetual. The sacred deities are placed in a small sanctuary within the temple known as Garbhagrha. The interior spaces of the temples are arranged to promote the

movement of the devotee from outside through a series of enclosures which becomes increasingly sacred and dark as the enclosure is approached. At a general level, the nomenclatures of the spaces, as one pass from outside to inside of the temple, designates the various functions that are supposed to be performed in those spaces. For example, as one enters from outside, the first space is the Bhoga Mandir, which generally means the 'offering space', where the offerings, particularly, the food offerings are made to the deity. Then one comes to the Nat Mandir, which is the 'dancing hall', used for performance of dancing and singing to the God. Dancing, in Hindu philosophy, is a "prototype of cosmic dance... (that) brings into play every portion of the body in movement which symbolizes precise spiritual state... (emulating) the return to the Sole Being from whom all things emanate and to whom all things return to the ceaseless ebb and flow of the life force".

Temple Culture in Ancient India

'The temple was not merely a place of worship; it filled a large place in the cultural and economic life of the people. Its construction and maintenance offered employment to number of architects and craftsman, who vied with one another in bold planning and skill full execution. The making of icons in stone and metal gave scope to the talents of the best sculptors of the country. The daily routine, especially of the larger temples gave constant employment to number of priests, choristers³, musicians, dancing girls, florists, cooks and many other classes of servants. The periodical festivals were occasions marked by fairs, contests of learning, wrestling matches and every other form of popular entertainment. Schools and hospitals were often located in the temple precincts⁴ and it also served often as the town hall, where people assembled to consider local affairs or to hear the exposition of the sacred literature. The large endowments in land and cash bestowed on each temple are successive generations of pious donors tended to make it at once a generous landlord and a banker, whose aid was always available to those that needed it. The practice of decorating images particularly those used during processions with numerous jewels set with precious stones encouraged the jeweler's art to a considerable extent. And it is no exaggeration to say that the temple gathered around itself all that was best in the arts of civilized existence and regularized them with the humaneness⁵ born of the spirit of Dharma. As an agency of social well-being, the medieval temple has few parallels.

As a cultural centre, the temple witnessed the evolution of different schools of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance in different parts of the country, which brought out a variety of systems in plastic and performing arts, although all of them stemmed from the same spiritual stock. Cultural activities ranging from music and Bhajans to theatre and dramas have taken place in the temple precincts. The temple had also provided inspiration to a number of poets, composers and artists who have richly contributed to the Bhakti Literature, music and dance. The 'Ranga-Sala' in the central part of the mandapa, as its name would imply, has provided venue of dancing.

The temple established as a significant centre of religious and cultural activities. Religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion. In order to express itself religion has to make use of cultural forms and every religious act is formed by the particular culture of a country. In this way, the temple as a religious centre, represents the culture of the particular region.

The temple was originated and developed as a religious centre. It continued to be the main centre of public worship among the Hindus. All sections of society visits and offers their prayers and worship to the deities ritually. The construction of a temple and a tank was considered as an act of religious merit. Naturally worship in temples was elaborate and ostentatious. It was roughly of two kinds namely 'Anga-Bhoga' and 'Ranga-bhoga' where Anga-Bhoga was probably related to daily routine of worship associated with other functions. Various kinds of endowments were received by temple for the worship, Anga-bhoga and Ranga-bhoga of the deities.

Temple was well-known for philanthropy. They maintained Dharmasala-s for deeding the pilgrims and others. The flower gardens were endowed in Venulavada Agrahara with religious devotion for the offerings and worship of the God Arikesvaradeva and for the Achari who worshipped that God.

The 'Rang-mandapa' was another significant limb of temple complex where 'Ranga-Bhoga' is to be conducted. It was customary in the village or town to celebrate religio-social functions like marriage in the premises of the temple. The temple would in this event not only make available to the parties a hall (Mandapa) or courtyard but also other services necessary for the solemnization of the marriage, at minimal expense. This was indeed a great help for the poor folk.

The temple continued to be an educational centre. 'The recitation of the Puranas which spread Hindu doctrine and culture among both literates and illiterates continued to be a special feature of temple activities. Adult education was provided throughout the country by endowments in temples for the recitation and exposition of the epics and Puranas. The singing of devotional hymns in temples by choirs regularly maintained for that purposed and the training of young men for the same purpose in schools generally attached to mathas is another side of education that deserves notice. Many of the temples were well-known centre of learning, some of them universities (Maha-ghatika-sthana), imparting education in the traditional lore.

The Matha, which conducted to temples, were also a centre of learning where pupils were taught the arts and sciences. Gifts of land and money were made to them frequently for the purpose of imparting education. Monasteries in fact played an important role in the promotion of education. The Saiva Mathas attached to the temple were also educational institutions. They maintained teachers who taught Vedas, Śāstras, Agamas, Puranas, Kavyas and the various arts. The institutions mainly concerned with the development of education in ancient and medieval period besides the Hindu temples are the Ghatika, Matha, Agrahara, Guhai, Salai and Buddhist and

Jaina monasteries. While the temple was a symbolic expression of the religious feelings of the people, the educational institutions mentioned above stood for the propagation of the religious ideals and philosophy. The temple played a prominent role in the promotion of educational activities. There were more higher educational centers attached to temple in medieval India than there are in modern India.

Music and dance were also encouraged by temples specially. It was a common venue, where musicians, actors, dancers, jesters, humorists, speakers, entertainers, gestures, debaters, orators, pipers and drummers were exhibited properly. 'Musical recitals and presentation of dance-items were included in the daily and occasional worship ritual, after the main sequence was completed. On occasions of festival, these become more important than ever, and attracted large crowds to the temple. While the 'Devadasi' system and the institution of professional dancers and musicians in the service of the temple were not universal or wide spread, it was customary to hire them occasionally, however, the temple had on its pay-roll-pipers and drummers as their services were required in several sequences even of daily worship.

Music in the temple was of two types, vocal and instrumental. Vocal music was provided by both male and female singers and reciters appointed in the temple service. The instrumental music was provided by different kinds of instrumentalists serving in the temple. They included lute player, flute players,, tabor beaters, gong beaters, hand bell ringers,, conch-blower, horn-blowers drummers, etc. There are many epigraphical records which show to grants for the theatrical entertainment of the Gods.

The temples and the deities were the source of spiritual and devotional inspiration for the poets, scholars and writers to produce the works of high standard in Sanskrit and other languages which helped to strengthen the religious, moral, spiritual and ethical valued among the monarchs and the masses.

In medieval India, temple developed as a museum. The huge and lofty temple had various types of sculptures and icons in stone and metal which gave scope to the talents of the best sculptures. Another, temple was consisted as a town-hall where people assembled to consider local affairs or to hear the exposition of sacred literature. It is also meeting places for students and others. The kings and royals were also used to meet the citizens in temple complexes.

The temple organized festivals occasionally where all section of society was involved. The rich and the poor alike had the benefit of these entertainments. During the festivities, pilgrims were given free food and lodging in the rest houses attached to the temples. During the annual Rath- festival of a temple, which continues for more than nine days, the whole village or town assumes a festive aspect. It is usual for vendors from neighbouring areas to gather here and ply their trades. It is an occasion for brisk business, for there will be a large concourse of people drawn from different places, known as 'yatra' (pilgrimage), this is a social and economic arrangement for trade and

commerce, centering round a temple, and is a source of revenue for the temple as well as the local administration. There are two aspects of a temple-religious and administration. The temple, as a religious institution, is the place where worship is conducted for the benefit and well-being of the entire community. Another is the aspect of administration of temple that required huge income to play its all-pervasive role in the society.

Generally, temples were richly endowed by royal patrons, wealthy devotees and others such as village grants, land grants, various dues and taxes, money grants, and miscellaneous grants including with the grants of animals, oil mills and others. The king and others used to make grants to a temple on the day of his coronation, at the time of leading an expedition, on the occasion of victory in a battle, on the birth of a son for the prosperity of his son at the request of others at the time of setting up of divinities after founding Agraharas or Brahmadeyas, at the time of visiting the temples for obtaining all manners of prosperity and at the time of performing the puja etc.

Nagara or North Indian Temple Style

- In North India it is common for an entire temple to be built on a stone platform with steps leading up to it.
- Further, unlike in South India it does not usually have elaborate boundary walls or gateways.
- While the earliest temples had just one tower, or shikhara, later temples had several.
- The Garbhagrha is always located directly under the tallest tower.
- There are many subdivisions of nagara temples depending on the shape of the shikhara.
- There are different names for the various parts of the temple in different parts of India; however, the most common name for the simple shikhara which is square at the base and whose walls curve or slope inward to a point on top is called the 'latina' or the rekha-prasāda type of shikhara.
- The second major type of architectural form in the nagara order is the phamsana, which tends to be broader and shorter than latina ones.

Central India Temples

- Ancient temples of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan share many traits. The most visible is that they are made of sandstone.
- Some of the oldest surviving structural temples from the Gupta Period are in Madhya Pradesh.
- The crowning elements- amalak and kalash are to be found on all nagara temples of this period.
- These are relatively modest-looking shrines each having four pillars that support a small mandapa which looks like a simple square porch-like extension before an equally small room that served as the Garbhagrha.
- Udaigiri, which is on the outskirts of Vidisha is part of a larger Hindu complex of cave shrines, while the other one is at Sanchi, near the stupa.
- Deogarh (in Lalitpur District, Uttar Pradesh) was built in the early sixth century CE, is a classic example of a late Gupta Period type of temple.

- This temple is in the panchayatana style of architecture where the main shrine is built on a rectangular plinth with four smaller subsidiary shrines at the four corners (making it a total number of five shrines, hence the name, panchayatana).
- The presence of this curving latina or rekha-prasāda type of shikhara also makes it clear that this is an early example of a classic nagara style of temple.
- The temple depicts Vishnu in various forms, due to which it was assumed that the four subsidiary shrines must also have housed Vishnu's avatars and the temple was mistaken for a Daśāvātāra temple.
- Predating the tenth century, Chausath Yogini temple is a temple of small, square shrines of roughly-hewn granite blocks, each dedicated to goddesses associated with the rise of Tantric worship after the seventh century. Built between 7th and 10th centuries, several such temples were dedicated to the cult of the yoginis across Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and even as far south as Tamil Nadu.
- There are many temples at Khajuraho, most of them devoted to Hindu gods. There are some Jain temples as well.
- The Lakshmana temple of Khajuraho, dedicated to Vishnu, was built in 954 by the Chandela King, Dhanga. It is a nagara temple placed on a high platform accessed by stairs.

Eastern Indian Temples

- Eastern Indian temples include those found in the North East, Bengal and Odisha.
- It appears that terracotta was the main medium of construction, and also for moulding plaques which depicted Buddhist and Hindu deities in Bengal until the 7th century.
- Assam: An old sixth-century sculpted door frame from Dah Parvatia near Tezpur and another few stray sculptures from Rangagora Tea Estate near Tinsukia in Assam bear witness to the import of the Gupta idiom in that region.
- By the 12th -14th centuries, a distinct regional style developed in Assam.
- The style that came with the migration of the Tais from Upper Burma mixed with the dominant Pala style of Bengal and led to the creation of what was later known as the Ahom style in and around Guwahati.
- Kamakhya temple, a Shakti Peeth, is dedicated to Goddess Kamakhya and was built in the 17th century in Assam.
- Bengal: The style of the sculptures during the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries in Bengal (including Bangladesh) and Bihar is known as the Pala style, named after the ruling dynasty at the time.
- While the style of those of the mid-eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries is named after the Sena Kings.
- While the Palas are celebrated as patrons of many Buddhist monastic sites, the temples from that region are known to express the local Vanga style.

- The 9th century Siddheshvara Mahadeva Temple in Barakar in Burdwan District, for example, shows a tall curving shikhara crowned by a large amalaka and is an example of the early Pala style. The black to grey basalt and chlorite stone pillars and arched niches of Purlia temples heavily influenced the earliest Bengal sultanate buildings at Gaur and Pandua.
- In the Mughal period and later, scores of terracotta brick temples were built across Bengal and Bangladesh in a unique style that had elements of local building techniques seen in bamboo huts.
- Odisha: The main architectural features of Odisha temples are classified into three orders, i.e., Reshaped, Pidhadeul and Khakra.
- Most of the main temple sites are located in ancient Kalinga-modern Puri District, including Bhubaneswar or ancient Tribhuvaneshvara, Puri and Konark.

Dravida or South Indian Temple Style

- Unlike the Nagara temple, the Dravida temple is enclosed within a compound wall.
- The front wall has an entrance gateway in its centre, which is known as a 'Gopuram'.
- The shape of the main temple tower known as 'Vimana' in Tamil Nadu, is like a stepped pyramid that rises up geometrically rather than the curving shikhara of North India.
- It is common to find a large water reservoir, or a temple tank, enclosed within the complex.
- Subsidiary shrines are either incorporated within the main temple tower, or located as distinct, separate small shrines beside the main temple.
- Kanchipuram, Thanjavur or Tanjore, Madurai and Kumbakonam are the most famous temple towns of Tamil Nadu, where, during the 8th -12th centuries, the role of the temple was not limited to religious matters alone.
- Temples became rich administrative centres, controlling vast areas of land. Just as there are many subdivisions of the main types of Nagara temples, there are subdivisions also of Dravida temples.

These are basically of five different shapes:

- Square, usually called kuta and also caturasra.
- Rectangular or shala or ayatasra.
- Elliptical, called gaja-prishta or elephant backed, or also called vrittayata, deriving from wagon vaulted shapes of apsidal chaityas with a horse-shoe shaped entrance facade usually called a Nasi.
- Circular or vritta.
- Octagonal or ashtasra.
- The Pallavas were one of the ancient South Indian dynasties. They spread their empire to various parts of the subcontinent, at times reaching the borders of Odisha, and their links with South-East Asia were also strong.
- Although they were mostly Shaivite, several Vaishnava shrines also survived from their reign, and there is no

doubt that they were influenced by the long Buddhist history of the Deccan.

- Their early buildings, it is generally assumed, were rock cut, while the later ones were structural.
- The early buildings are generally attributed to the reign of Mahendravarman - I, a contemporary of the Chalukyan King. Pulakesin II of Karnataka.
- Narasimhavarman - I, also known as Mamalla, inaugurated most of the building works at Mahabalipuram which came to be known after him as Mamallapuram.
- The shore temple at Mahabalipuram was built later, probably in the reign of Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha who reigned from 700 to 728 CE.
- The temple houses three shrines, two to Shiva, one facing east and the other west, and a middle one to Vishnu.
- In the compound there is evidence of a water tank, an early example of a Gopuram, and several other images.
- Sculptures of the bull, Nandi, Shiva's mount, line the temple walls, and these, along with the carvings on the temple's lower walls have suffered severe disfiguration due to erosion by salt-water laden air over the centuries.

Conclusion

Temples are the symbolic reconstruction of the universe. The graceful blessings of God and the lives of human beings are linked together continuously in which time is conceived as a crystal system. Art is the reflection of the life of the people and also the store house of their noblest thoughts. The important contribution of temple is to promote creative art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, culture and religious activities. Hence temples are the background of all the social and religious activities of the human beings.

In this paper we included, important features of Indian temples, the philosophy of temple construction, temple culture in ancient India, then also includes Northern, Western, Central, Eastern, and South Indian temple styles.

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Examples



Rock Cut Temple



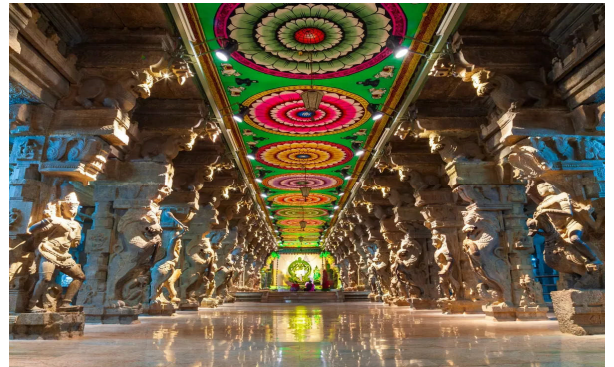
Peruvanam Temple



Madurai Meenakshi Temple



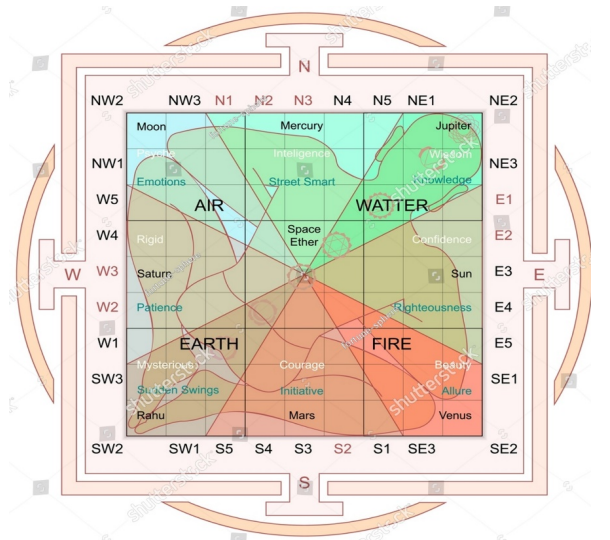
Lakshmana Temple



Interior of Madurai Meenakshi Temple



Sun Temple



Vāstu Puruṣa



Kamakhya Temple