

A STUDY ON THE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Before the Centuries Gupta period the chief architectural remains other than stupas and their surrounding gateways and railings are artificial caves, excavated for religious purposes. Early specimen show a slavish imitation of carpentry which proves conclusively that those buildings in stone were in infancy stage. Later Cave temples and monasteries are available in many parts of India but in the Western Deccan under the Satavahana kings most famous artificial caves were excavated. The most impressive cave temples are found at Ellora near Aurangabad thirty miles away from Ajanta constructed between 5th to 8th centuries A.D. most of them Hindu but some Buddhist and Jain. The crowning achievement of Ellora is the great Kailasanath Temple excavated on the instructions of the Rastrakuta emperor Karsana I. The entire rock face was cut away and a splendid temple carved like a statue for from hill side, complete with shrine room, hall gateway, votive pillars, lesser shrines, and cloisters, the whole adorned with divine figures. The ground floor of this Kailashnath is about the same size of Parthenon temple. The latest cave temples of importance are those of Elephanta, a beautiful island off Mumbai. These caves projected in the same style of Ellora are famous for their sculpture especially for the great Trimurti figure of Lord Siva.

Keywords: - Architecture, Style, Technique, Shrine

EARLY TEMPLE STYLE IN INDIA: -

The earliest free standing religious building of which traces remain is a small round hall, probably originally containing a Buddhist Stupa at Bairat near Jaipur built in 3rd century B.C. The next landmark in temple architecture is the temple generally known from the modern name Jandial excavated from one of the mounds which covered the city of Takshasila. The Jandial temple was probably Zoroastrian. The influence of Western architecture is clearly to be seen in Kashmir where columns of Hellenic type were used throughout the medieval period. Distinctive pyramidal roofs and arches surmounted by pointed gables in the Kashmir temples testify the Gothic appearance. Most famous of Kashmir's early temples is the Temple of the sun at Martand dating from the 8th century. There are no remains of free standing Hindu temples erected before the Gupta period though by this time they must long have been built in wood, clay and brick. From the Gupta period however several examples survived chiefly in Western India all showing the same general pattern. Pillars are usually ornate with heavy bell shaped capitals surmounted by animal motifs and the entrances were often carved with mythological scenes and figures. All the Gupta temples were small and most had flat roofs.

Their masonry was held together without mortar and was far larger and thicker than was necessary for the comparatively small buildings. The finest Gupta temple of Deogarh near Jhansi of the 6th century marks a great advance. Iron dowels were used to hold the masonry together and a small tower rose above the sanctum. The portal veranda was continued all-round the building making a covered walk. The standard type of Hindu temple which has

persisted from the 6th century to the present day was not fundamentally different from that of the ancient Greeks.

The heart of the temple was a small dark shrine room known as garbhagriha containing the chief icon. This opened on a hall for worshippers known as mantapa, originally a separate building but was joined to the shrine room by a vestibule or antarala. The hall was approached by a porch or ardhramantapa. The shrine room was generally surmounted by a tower while lesser towers were connected from other parts of the building. The whole structure was made in a rectangular courtyard often placed on elevated platform.

The Medieval Period of India: - The Medieval Period of India was an age of faith. With better technique of stone construction new temples came up everywhere to replace wooden buildings. Strict canons of design in both architecture and sculpture were laid down in text-books (Silpasastra) some of which survive. Though arches occur dome or vault, seems to have been ignored although corbelling, the building up an arch or dome by overlapping courses of brick or masonry was widely practiced and produced work of great beauty. Mortar was known but rarely used. The temple was ornately decorated often even to the dark shrine rooms lighted only by flickering oil lamps. Heavy cornices, strong pillars wide in proportion to their height and the broad base of the Sikhar or tower give to Indian temple architecture a feeling of strength and solidity. The surface of the temple walls were designed and decorated with many figures.

Considering the size of the land, Indian temple architecture is remarkably uniform but authorities distinguish two chief styles and numerous schools. The Northern or Indo-Aryan style prefers a tower with rounded top and curvilinear outline while the tower of the Southern or Dravidian style is usually in a shape of a rectangular truncated Pyramid. The stages of stylistic development are clearer in the South than in the North. Temple building underwent great change during the time of Pallavas due to their patronization of Art and culture. Important early temples of Pallava dynasty are found at Mamallapuram and Kanchi. Chalukyas left temples remains at their capital Badami and nearby site of Aihole in modern Andhra Pradesh. The temples constructed by these dynasties show the gradual emancipation of the architect from the techniques of carpentry and cave architecture.

Pallava style of architecture is found in the Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanath temple of Kanchi built in early 8th century. The Kailasanath temple has a pyramidal tower formed of two courses of small barrel vaults surmounted by a Solid Cupola suggesting a Buddhist Stupa. The style of the Pallavas was developed further under the Chola dynasty, the finest products of which are the great temple of Siva at Tanjore built by Rajaraja the great and the temple built by his successor Rajendra-I at his new capital of Gangaikondacolapuram near Kumbakonam. The Pallava style was replaced by a great Pyramid rising from a tall upright base and crowned with some variation down to the present day.

In the next phase of the Dravidian architecture the emphasis shifted from the tower above the chief shrine to the entrance gateway of the surrounding wall. From 12th century onwards it became usual to fortify the temple often with three square concentric walls with gates on four sides. The gates were surmounted by watch towers or gate houses further developed into soaring towers or Gopuram generally much taller than the modest Sikhara over the central shrine.

The entrance tower was usually in the form of an oblong pyramid with its broadest side parallel to the wall. This new style is often called Pandyan style. This style introduced more elaborate ornamentation and the use of animal forms in pilasters and columns including the

rampant horses and leographs that further give a distinctive character of Dravidian architecture. Other style developed in the Deccan under the Chalukyas, Rastrakutas, and Hayasalas during 8th century. They have developed individual features including the wide over-hanging caves like the medieval temples of Central Deccan. The later Chalukyas and Hayasalas developed a more elaborate style.

Their temples were no longer built on a rectangular plan but were polygonal raised on a tall solid platform of the same shape as the building. These temples give a strong feeling of flatness, platforms and walls are covered with narrow carved friezes of elephants, horsemen, gees, monsters and scenes of mythology and legend. The largest and most famous temples of this style are found at Dorasamudra and Belur. Under Vijayanagar Empire a new school began to flourish and reached its apogee in the 16th century resembling both Pandgan and Hayasala features. The florid carving of the Hayasalas was developed with even greater exuberance and new elements appeared in temple complex.

Every important temple in South India there was provisions of a building for amman the God's chief wife which was often nearly as large as the main shrine itself and a marriage hall or Kalyanamantapa wherein the icons of god and goddess were ceremonially united on festival days.

Another feature in the Vijayanagar style is the profusion of string yet delicate carving which adorns the pillared halls, the columns of which are so decorated that they become sculptures in their own right. Prancing horses, vigorous and energetic leap from the stone with leogryphs and other fantastic monsters. For brilliancy of decorative imagination the Vijayanagar style of architecture was never surpassed in Hindu India.

In the cities of Northern India almost all traces of the architecture of the Hindu period have vanished. Even in Banaras all the great temples are comparatively recent. One important exception however is the Buddhist temple at Gaya, the main tower of which is probably as early as the 6th century.

This is a large pyramid of brick work set on a high, plinth, it is adorned with parallel courses of Chaitya window' pattern and is surmounted by a lofty pinnacle which was originally a small stupa but have long since vanished. Medieval North Indian architecture is best illustrated by three schools those of Orissa, Bundelkhand and Gujarat and South Rajasthan.

The Orissan School flourished from the 10th to 13th centuries. The chief monuments lie in and around Bhubaneswar and Puri. The finest Orissan temple is the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar which shows the North Indian Sikhara in its final form-a tower which begins to curve inwards at about one third of its heights with rounded top crowned by a flat stone disc and final Kalasa.

The Lingaraj like most Orissan temples is built as a series of four halls-a hall of offerings, (bhogmandap), dancing hall (natmandir), a assembly hall (Jagmohana) and a sanctuary (Garvagriha or deul). The Orissan architects were lavish with their exterior decoration, and their sculptures produced works of great merit but the interiors are unadorned. In the larger temples the carbelled roofs of the halls rested on large pilasters but pillars were not generally used and roofs were often partly supported by iron girders. Among the most important temples of Orissa are the temple of Visnu-Jagannath at Puri still one of the most famous Shrines of India. The 'Black Pagoda' of Konark built in 13th century by Narasinghadeva the temple of Surya or Sun-god was formerly one of the largest and most splendid temples of India much larger than those of Bhubaneswar. The tower over 200 feet high has long since fallen but the great assembly hall remains. Unlike other temples of Orissa that of Konarak

had the two smaller outer halls completely separate from the main structure and the assembly-hall and tower were built on an imposing platform round which were carved twelve decorated wheels, 10 feet in diameter. The court of the temple was decorated with large free standing sculptures of great strength and beauty. The entrance is reached by a broad of flight of steps flanked on either side by prancing horses the whole representing the chariot in which the Sun-god rides across the heaven. The erotic Maithuna figures of couples closely embracing or actually in Coitu are common enough as decorative features of many Indian temples but those of Konark are exceptionally vivid. Many suggestions have been made as to the true significance of these figures. It has been suggested that they merely served the mundane purpose of advertising the charms of the devadasis or that they were intended to represent the world of the flesh in contrast to the bare and anstere interior that symbolized the things of the spirit.

Probably they were connected in the minds of their designers with the sexual mysticism which played so great a part in the medieval religious thought. Under the Chandela kings of Bundelkhand the chief work of which is a beautiful group of temples at Khajuraho about 160 km south of Jhansi. The standard type of Khajuraho temple contains a shrine room or sanctuary, an assembly hall and an entrance portico. This temple a Saivite temple known as Khandariya-Mahadeva was built about A.D 1000 and is not more than 100 feet high. The Khajuraho Shikhara like those of most Northern temples is curvilinear but differs from the types of Orissa. The halls and porticoes of the Khajuraho temple are also crowned with smaller towers which rise progressively to soad the eye up to the main tower and thus intensify the impression of a mountain range. Like all other schools of architecture that of Khajuraho made much of carving. In contrast to Orissa temples in Kajuraho the temples were adorned with sculpture both outside and inside and in the halls have beautifully carved domical ceilings.

In Rajasthan and Gujarat there are many medieval temples some of much architectural merit built under the patronage of Chalukya or Solanki kings of Gujarat and flourished from the 11th to 13th centuries. The most famous building of this school are the lovely Jain shrines of Mount Abu. The style of which is not very different fundamentally from that of Khajuraho.

The temples were built on high platforms and usually consisted of shrine and hall only. The Sikhara over the shrine was adorned with large number of miniature towers and the ceilings were in form of corbelled domes perhaps due to the influence of the Muslim architectural style. The strines of Mount Abu made of cool white marble, covered with most delicate and ornate carvings especially in the interiors. Several cities of Rajasthan and Gujarat have finely carved gateways from the medieval period.

CONCLUSION: -

During the Hindu period and medieval period in almost all temples in sculpture and painting all the gods were depicted on its walls, every aspect of human and divine existence symbolized. The temples were at once voluptuous and austere, rooted in earth but aspiring to heaven. These specimens' exhibits the architectural skills of Indian artisans unparalleled to the architectural production of any region of the universe.

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