

MEDIEVAL INDIAN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE- - SYNTHESIS AND DIGRESSION.

CHOODAMANI NANDAGOPAL

Professor and Head of Chitrakala Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore University, Art Historian.

SUMMARY

This paper deals with special reference to the ideology, design, and structural elements of medieval Indian temple architecture. The period comprises from tenth to fourteenth century. It is an analytical study on the aspects such as the distinct identity, cultural synthesis and stylistic digression that pervade the sporadic growth of temples. The paper also throws light on the technical problems that caused the destruction of these temples and the steps taken to conserve them.

Indian architectural heritage has a great significance in the 2000 years and more in the history of architecture and structure. It unravels the existence and co-existence of several religious and metaphysical speculations. In the ancient period the ideological nomenclature of Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism and Vaishnavism strove to grow independently with distinct entities in terms of architectural design and the execution of structure. A detailed analysis of the existing monuments testify the three stages in the development of medieval temple architecture, namely, – a. the distinct identity b. the cultural synthesis and c. the stylistic digression.

The compilation of techniques from oral tradition to written form for the need to document for the posterity gave a special place for Indian temple architecture in the development of Hindu civilisation. Several Vastu (manuals for architecture) and *Silpa* (manual for sculpture) texts were formulated from 4th century AD giving astounding details on *pramana* (measurement) techniques, materials and other structural details. The textual sources and their correlation with the existing

architectural edifices have created an enduring source material for Historiography of Temple Architecture in India, more precisely of the medieval temple architecture.

1. THE DISTINCT IDENTITY:

The religious orders as we all know, the Buddhist, the *Jaina* and the *saiva* and the *Vaishnava* (Brahmanical), evolved through two and half millennia, some times overlapping or complementing one another. This is reflected in the structures erected for the functional aspect of these religious systems. Each of these orders is characterised by their own deities, monastic orders, leaders and propagators, rituals, festivals and fairs. While accommodating these requirements each order evolved into an expressive manifestation. These manifested structures converted the centres of activities influencing in a great way the ethos of the habitat. In course of time they did not just remain as means of approach but they sufficed the functional form for a specific aesthetic appeal. This led to the patronisation of religious structures by the royal houses, merchant guilds and even the commoners to disenchant with the mundane pleasures of worldly existence and to seek the spiritual solace.

Ordained with this temperament, the three religious orders without any exception charmed the wealthy patrons who in turn bestowed with their strong commitment of erecting the structures. The Buddhist identity is closely connected with the *stupa* (the mound-like structure for the relics of Buddha, a commemorative structure), the *chaitya* (the apsidal prayer halls) and the *vihara* (chambers for the monks to reside). The *stupas* containing the relics of Buddha were constructed in the urban set up and the *viharas* around the *stupa* at a distance. This can be seen in Polunaruva, Anuradhapura in Srilanka and Saranath in India. The *chaityas* were carved by executing the whole plan on the mountain ranges and the *chaityas* of Karle, Ajanta were part of the cliff. The viharas for the monks were also carved near the *chaityas*. Architecturally in terms of design, technique and function the Buddhist architects satisfying the theological perceptions of Buddhism originated the tradition of religious architecture in Indian sub-continent.

Jainism, which claims antiquity along with Buddhism, does not equate itself with the Buddhist architectural development. The early *Jaina* structures are in the form of rock-cut architecture as seen in Ellora. Later with the influence of Hindu temple structures with slight modifications for the specific requirements [like having double-storied structures for preserving the *jina* images made of precious stones] the *Jaina* architectural style opted broad simplicity in erecting their structure.

The *Saiva* and the *Vaishnava* (Brahmanical) structures initiated from the Gupta period evolved a style of directly comprehending with the sculpturally oriented rock-cut architecture under the Chalukyas and the Pallavas. The Hindu architects exploited the function of the architecture to house several gods and goddesses by creating unmistakable expressions. The form of the temple in the rock-cut architecture style was potentially used with the available material. The Hindu rock-cut architecture superseded the Buddhist architecture in form, function, constructional techniques and the size of operation. Kailasa Temple at Ellora is the grand edifice of the sublimate into the usage of the internal and external space and makes one marvel about the precision of carving a mountain into an emblem of divinity.

In the rock-cut architectural stage, the three architectural styles have noticeable differences. A distinct identity is experienced whenever each of these structures is considered from the point of view of study. But when the state of structural temples is observed the distinct features of these orders existed marginally. The process of synthesis marks this stage in the religious scenario, the development of new dimensions in the medieval temple architecture.

2. THE CULTURAL SYNTHESIS:

In the historiography of Indian temple architecture the medieval period is like a process of reinforcement of the power of the temple conceptually and structurally into the life of common man. Unless we understand the cultural complexity of the medieval India, we fail to reason the upsurge in the movement of temple building. The reasons are accounted as follows:

a. Trounce of Islamic invasion in 9th century had posed a threat to the very concept of temple architecture as the invaders were the iconoclasts in temperament and the history tells the damage caused. The alien influences affected the earlier traditions. The rulers and the ruled by and large could not retort against the Islamic power. The hegemony of Islamic rule indirectly brought the people of India closer and during this process probably conscious efforts were made to bring unity among the dispersed population religiously and ideologically.

India had already experienced this kind of cultural synthesis in the form of bringing people together in times of Ashoka as early as 3rd century B.C. His royal edicts pronounce 'you follow your religion sincerely but respect the other religions.' The Islamic stability in India sliced the differences between the various sects. But the sporadic growth of *Bhakti* (devotional) movement in tenth century triggered the devotional currents among common people upholding the homogeneous attitude against the religious digression of early times as they struggled to retain their distinct identity.

The departure of Buddhism from the central and southern India and the growth of Saivism in the post-Shankara period gave strong impetus to the development of structures for the purpose of conducting religious activities. At the social level a kind of marginal difference existed between the ancient religious orders namely, Buddhist, *Jaina*, *saiva* and *vaishnava*. The religious tolerance was shown even towards the alien religion like Islam. The inscriptions record the rulers of this phase as *chatussamaya* - the tolerant towards the four faiths namely, Jainism, saivism, Vaishnavism Shaktism or Surya cult. [Discussion with Dr.A.Sundara, eminent scholar in History and Archaeology] This could be seen in the execution of the structures and resulted in the synthesis of structural elements.

b. The evolving of this kind of new awareness functionally altered the needs of the temple. Elaborate rituals, modes of worship, ceremonies and celebrations became the part of the temple activities. Daily procession of deities and the chariot festivals brought the temple closer to the people. All these found their place in the conceptualisation of temple but were directly connected with the execution of the structure.

c. After the 9th century the monolithic temple architecture lost its place, as it could not adopt the ritual needs of the medieval concept. This period also experienced the shift of the temple from micro to macrosom in order to depict the worldliness. One single reason that could be cited for

the departure of cave architecture is the non-availability of the exterior for the depiction of the various forms of gods and goddesses. A devotee while taking a circumambulatory path could visually experience the different dimensions of the celestial world. This was the development necessarily of the medieval temple architecture, irrespective of the faith and the style they belonged to.

Plan

d. While referring to the Hoysala records, [S.Settar, Hoysala] Prof Settar makes the observation of seven groups of patrons, namely, the king and his entourage; the high nobility; the merchant nobility, the middle level-bureaucracy, religious men; community groups and the individuals in the capacity of devotees. This gives us an idea that the temple building and the maintenance of the structures were regarded as the sacred duty of an affordable person. This could be one of the strong reasons for the execution of temple buildings in such a large scale in the medieval times.

e. With the establishment of the Imperial power by the Mughals the temple architects had to go in search of their lively hood. The Mughal architects have employed many Hindu masons and artisans for the purpose of constructing great structures. But the *sthapatis*, the master architects moved down to the central and Deccan regions. They were respected and deployed for the purpose of growing need of socio-religious structures in the form of large temples. The temple life and ritual had direct bearing of the general characteristics of geography, political, administrative and social structure, religion and ways of thought. This lead to the development of intimate relationship between man and God.

The architects of medieval India were driven to attain the cultural synthesis because of the underlying current of *Bhakti* movement. They were exposed to a large number of *shilpa* texts, such as *Manasara*, *Mayamata*, *Kamikagama*, *Kasyapa shilpa*, *Karnagama*, *Ajitagama*, *Padmasamhita* and other medieval architectural manuals. Their creative dynamism ignited in establishing the intense relationship with the form and function and this motivated them to come out with architectural composition irrespective of the sectarian differences like *Jaina*, *saiva*, *vaishnava* or *shakta*. The *panchayatana* system, [K V Soundaryarajan, Invitation to Indian Architecture, 34P] is the thrust of such a consummation of placing the shrine of the main deity in the Centre, whether of Vishnu or Siva, and organising the subsidiary but cognate subshrines in smaller scale on the four corners of a raised common plinth terrace for all and for Ganesha, Durga, Surya – with Siva added, in the case of the central Vishnu Shrine; and with Vishnu added, in the case of the central Siva shrine. The *Parivara* system with the shrines running around the main temple for the *saptamatrukas* (seven mothers), different forms of the main deity, the consorts and several gods and votaries. Such architectural compositions based on the unified pantheistic outlook have perpetuated the need for enlarged temple complex. The medieval Indian temple architecture achieved the cultural synthesis functionally, religiously and architecturally.

3. THE STYLISTIC DIGRESSION:

The medieval period in India witnessed a cultural synthesis in the outer periphery in holding the *Hindu* and *Jaina* against the alien religion to a considerable merit, no doubt. But we have to admit that it could not resist the stylistic digression within the inner circles as the movement of temple

architecture had encompassed the vast geographical area characterised by the regional cultural differences.

a. The multi-dynastic system was the order of the times and each dynasty promoted the temples of their cult. The dynasties that ruled the central, Deccan and south India were the Solankis, Paramaras, Chandellas, Pratiharas, Kalachuris, Palas, Senas, Gajapatis, Chalukyans, Seunas, Kakatiyas, Hoysalas, Nolambas, Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras, Gangas, Alupas, Nayakas and Vijayanagar Rayas. The religious structures built in their reign out-numbered the entire development of the Buddhist, Jaina, Saiva and Vaishnava structures of early period. The structural elements are brought under the dynastic styles to designate individual characteristic. An in depth study of the structures erected under these dynastic rules throw light on the natural differences between one another in terms of the execution of the structure, treatment of the walls, pillars, the towers and the door lintels.

Photograph

b. The stylistic digression is due to the adherence to *shilpa* texts, which convincingly brought out different styles of super structures and the *adhishthanas*-basements. The Holalu and Kuppatur (small towns in Shiomoga district, Karnataka) inscriptions are the rare records documenting the digressed styles of temple architecture prevalent in medieval India such as Nagara, *Kalinga*, *Dravida*, *Vesara* and *Bhumija*. [M.A.Dhaky, Temple forms, Abhinav Publications, P 3] Apart from these fundamental differences in the prime structures, features of local affiliation in the treatment of sculptures, dressing of the walls etc, also contribute to the factor of stylistic digression.

Photograph

c. The shift in the material also accounts for the digression. The medieval architects used, to a large extent in the *hemadpanti* style, Pala, Sena, Kalyana Chalukyan, Kakatiya, the stone known as Deccan trap, in the central India and Orissa the local red variety stone, the Hoysalas the chloride shiest, and the Cholas, Pandyas down south the granite. The architects were able to cross over the limitations of earlier times by adopting the locally available material. This caused the grave differences among the structures from the very appearance. Depending on the variety of the stone the crisp mouldings were chiselled which posed challenge to the artistic merits of the artisans. The aesthetic needs of the patrons are also to be taken into consideration while looking into the aspect of differences we experience between one structure to the other.

The medieval temple architecture as a field of study proposes interesting challenges due to these stylistic digressions against the probability of monotonous structures if not due to the elements discussed above. The treatment of the *shikhara*, the super structure, the *jagati*, the basement, the stallite plan, the pillar decorations and mouldings, the associated sub structures of the main temple, the door frame and the entrance porticos are stylised according to the tradition followed in the region.

Photograph Ittagi and Halebidu and plan of Somanathpur

4. TECHNICAL PROBLEMS AND EFFORTS OF CONSERVATION:

The zealous efforts of the patrons and architects of medieval India have exhibited two things, one the outburst in the number of structures and the other the lacuna in the execution of the structures.

This has created architectural flaws in the technical direction. One such grand example is the Sun temple, Koran that was abandoned by the architects. The *hemadpanti* style of central India accredited for having nearly three hundred temples is characterised by heaviness inclining to clumsiness. The Kalyana Chalukyan, Kakatiya, Hoysala temples with out exception is shaky and in a more or less dilapidated state. This is chiefly due to the material used in their construction – the amygdaloidal trap of the country, quarried as a rule on the spot. Though a hard tough stone, it is full of flaws and minute cracks, which render it very unsuitable for such parts of the beams. They are in strict proportion to one another following that the maximum size of a temple was thus limited by the length of the pillar shaft. [Henry cousins, Medieval Temples of Dakhan p 5]

One of the most the common obstacles of the medieval temples that the visitor encounters is the poor lighting. The architect has designed beautifully carved ceilings, ornate pillars, intricate doorjambs according to his creative impulses, much of them are hardly seen due to the defective lighting. The philosophic explanation of the sanctum as the womb and the light before the deity is the opening to the spiritual world etc., fail to satisfy the urge of a connoisseur of enjoying the artwork in such defective lighting. The architects would have overcome this problem. The structure is crowded with ornamental detail, though look aesthetic each of this part would only contributed for the lack of stability to the whole structure. The open pillared halls were functional as they served as the platform for performing art in the form of worship but the pillars could not hold the heavy roof. The *shikharas* are in broken state. The defective structural plans are also responsible for the dilapidated structures as found in many places.

Photograph umapura

Apart from these technical flaws which came in the way of endurance, there are other specific reasons for the sorry state of affairs of the medieval temples. The vandalism by the Islamic army and their attacks on the Hindu rulers and their township has created havoc and the localites could not protect their temples. The vandalism by the superior cult, which prevailed at that point of time, did not allow the exchequer to spend on maintenance of the temples of other cults. Most of the *Jaina* temples were altered into Saiva temples and, in the process the structures were damaged beyond recovery. The literary sources describe the occurrence of the tremors and mild earthquakes, which caused the dismantling and crumpling of the structures in certain cases. Due to the tectonic movements in the earth vertical cracks have been developed. The Hindu order does not treat a temple worthy of worship if it is prone to Islamic vandalism or destroyed in the natural process. Such temples despite their artistic importance were abandoned.

Most of such structures were enshrouded by thick foliage or converted as mounds. The British archaeologists rediscovered them and created awareness in conserving and protecting them. Archaeological Survey of India has continued the efforts of restoring the ancient structures. The process of conservation is based on the naturalistic way. They identify the weak parts of the structure and provide support by using the same material. Carvings may not be replaced for if the minor details are remade or replica is kept in place of the original it misleads people and they can not distinguish. The whole purpose of the conservation and restoration as stated by the archaeologists [Discussion with Jitendra Das, Superintending Archaeologist, South Central Circle, Bangalore] is to conserve whatever is remaining and to keep them intact and to preserve them as they are in the state of affairs.

There are hundreds of monuments, which are neither protected by the Central Archaeological Survey or the Dept of State Archaeology, which are in pathetic condition. Since they are not in worship the local people pay least attention to preserve them. International Centre for Indian Arts and Cultural Studies, a Bangalore based research institute is documenting unprotected monuments and drawing the attention of the concerned authorities and the local people towards the cultural importance of the monuments. The Dharmothana Trust patronised by Dr.Veerendra Heggade, under the able guidance of S.R.Rao; the Marine Archaeologist has taken up several temples in chaotic condition and restructured them. It is a Herculean task and the Trust is successful in retracing the glory of these ruins otherwise they would easily slip into oblivion.

To conclude, one is struck with wonder while observing the process of transformation of the basic form into the overpowered structures in the form of temple architecture. The role played by them in the life style of the inhabitants of the region is sustained on account of the inner dynamism. The temple architecture of medieval India as a science and art has a significant place in the world architecture since 2000years and is open to the interactive dialogue between the geo-cultural entities.

Photographs;

1. Ramalingesvara Temple, Gadag, 1100 AD, Kalyana Chalukyan shikhara
2. Palampet(Andhra Pradesh) Ramappa temple, Kakatiyas,1135 AD, doorway, Basalt
3. Mahadeva Temple, Ittagi Opened Pillared hall.
4. Hoysalesvara Temple, Halabidu, 1121 AD, adhisthana portion,
5. Dialapidated Super structures, Umapaura(Karnataka) 1100 AD, Later Chaukyan

Plans

Keshava Temple, Somanathpur, Hoysala, 1268 AD, Stellate plan, three shrines temple complex.

To,
PROF. ING GIORGIO CROCI
Chairman of Scientific Committee
UNESCO Conference Bethlehem
ORDINARIO FACOLTA DELLE COSTRUZIONI
NELLA FACOLTA DI INGEGNERIA DI ROMA
ST. VIA FONTE DI FAUNO 2A ROMA

Respected Sir,

I have received your fax dated February 23 2000. I thank you for considering my paper for presentation. Due to my academic pre-occupations such as Examination and result (Post-graduate and research courses) I could not respond to you earlier. Kindly excuse me.

I am enclosing here with my paper as per the guidelines specified. While presenting I would use more number of slides and transparencies. One of my life ambitions was to visit Bethlehem and the conference is to be held there in the month of October. It would be a very useful seminar I suppose. The deliberations would be interactive.

I am a UNESCO scholar, received Hirayama Fellowship for Art history and worked on the Himalayan culture. I look forward for attending this promising event.

P.S: I have already posted the paper with speed-post. I am sending another copy by an ordinary mail to the above address. The first copy I had sent has two minor mistakes. For printing purpose, the second copy which I am sending tomorrow, may be considered or please download the attachment with this letter. Kindly correspond with my e-mail and my residence Address.
e-mail: choodamani21@yahoo.com

With warm regards

Yours sincerely

Dr.Choodamani Nandagopal