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Hindu Temples: Manifestation of Architectural Art

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A Temple is a structure usually built for the purpose of dedicated to religious or spiritual activities including prayer, meditation, sacrifice and worship.

Hindu temples in many styles are situated in diverse locations, deploy different construction methods and are adapted to different deities and regional beliefs. Like all things symbolic in Hinduism, temples also have a great purpose. Explaining the purpose of temples, Vedanta Masters like H.H. Swami Chinmayananda say that “A temple is a sacred place of reverence where the love of the mind and respect of the intellect come together. Temples are places where you practice what you have studied in the scriptural textbooks. They are gymnasiums for the mind. You have to go there and apply your mind to the ideal; remember, it is a mental gymnasium, not a physical one. Surrender the mind in devotion unto the Lord. He will purify it and return it back to you in better shape.”

Hindu art reflects this plurality of beliefs and Hindu temples in which architecture and sculpture are inextricably connected are usually devoted to different deities. Deities commonly worship include Shiva the Destroyer; Vishnu in his incarnations as Rama and Krishna; Ganesha, the elephant God of prosperity and different forms of the Goddess Shakti (literally meaning “power”), the primordial feminine creative principle. These deities are often portrayed with multiple limbs and heads, demonstrating the extent of the god’s power and ability. Hindu art is also characterized by a number of recurring holy symbols, including the *Om*, an invocation of the divine consciousness of God; the swastika, a symbol of auspiciousness and the lotus flower, a symbol of purity, beauty, fertility, and transcendence.

India has many magnificent temples that have found a place in World Heritage list. These include Sun Temple at Konark in Orissa, Khajuraho Temples in Madhya Pradesh, Ajanta Cave temples & Kailashnath Temple in Ellora, Maharashtra, Brihadeswara Temple in Tajavuur and Sanchi Stupas in Bhopal. It is said that Temple construction in India started nearly 2000 years ago. A Hindu temple is meant to encourage reflection, facilitate purification of one’s mind and trigger the process of inner realization within the devotee.

In the Vedic period, there were no temples. The main object of worship was the fire that stood for God. This holy fire was lit on a platform in the open air under the sky, and oblations were offered to the fire. It is not certain when exactly the Indo-Aryans first started building temples for worship. The scheme of building temples was perhaps a concomitant of the idea of idol worship.

Here, the paper is extended in the depiction of the temples through which the artistic acumen of the artists has been manifested.



Sun Temple-Konark

Sun Temple (Konark) located on the shore of Bay of Bengal, Sun Temple-Konark is the main attraction of Konark. It is situated in the Puri district of Orissa. The temple was constructed under the patronage of King Narasimhadeva I of Eastern Ganga Dynasty. It is dedicated to Sun God of Hindu mythology and resembles the shape of gigantic chariot fitted with giant wheels. Every nook and corner of the temple is carved with various stone sculpture

depicting different identities and activities.

The Sun God "Surya" riding on a chariot with 24 wheels, having magnificent architecture and design led by a team of seven horses attracts millions of people to the temple of Konark in Orissa. This temple is not only famous for its architectural work but also renowned for its intricacy and profusion of sculptural work. This temple was built by Narasimha Deva of Ganga Dynasty towards the end of 12th century. Since the complete temple is built of black stone, it is also known as Black Pagoda. This temple is around 35 kms from Puri.



Lingaraj Temple

Lingaraj Temple is biggest of all temples in the city of Bhubaneswar, it is devoted to the Hindu God Harihara located within a spacious compound wall of lattice work measuring 520 ft by 465 ft.. In addition to being surmounted by a plain slant coping, the wall of the temple is 7 ft 6 inches thick. A terrace probably meant to protect the compound wall against outside aggression, runs alongside the inner face of the boundary wall.

Representing the quintessence of the Kalinga type of architecture, the temple rises to a height of about 180 ft. Linga' or 'Lingam', being the symbol of Lord Shiva it is worshipped by the devotees visiting the temple. Lord Shiva, whose consort is called Bhuvaneshvari, is worshipped at the temple as Tribhuvaneshwara. Dating back to the last decade of the 11th century, the temple is more than 1,000 years old. Believed to be built by the Somavanshi King Jajati Keshari, in 11th century AD, the temple has 150 smaller shrines in its spacious courtyard and is surrounded by massive walls decorated with beautiful sculptures. Main temple, the Yajna Shala, the Bhoga Mandap and the Natya Shala are the four main parts of the site.



Meenakshi Sundaeswar Temple

Meenakshi Sundaeswar Temple is dedicated to Sundaeswar (form of Lord Shiva) and Meenakshi (form of Goddess Parvati). The term "Sundaeswar" suggests "the beautiful lord" and "Meenakshi" means "the fish-eyed goddess". As per the Hindu folklore, Madurai is the same city where Lord Sundaeswar (Shiva) appeared to marry Goddess Meenakshi (Parvati). Meenakshi Temple is regarded as one of the most

sacred places of Parvati, other being Kamakshi at Kanchipuram, Akilandeswari at Thiruvanaikaval and Vishalakshi at Varanasi. At the center of the sanctum sanctorum, the shrine of Shiva embraces the site. It is a famous image of Nataraja (Dancing form of Lord Shiva) on a massive silver altar. The shrine is also known as Velli Ambalam (Silver abode). In the proximity, there is a shrine dedicated to Lord Ganesha known as Mukuruny Vinayakar, the temple adores the idol that was found during the excavation made in Temple Lake. On the left side of Shiva, the shrine of Goddess Meenakshi appears enchanting with quite less ornamentation.



Jagannath Temple in Puri

The land of Lord Jagannath, meaning 'Lord of Universe' is one of the most sacred pilgrimage spots in India. One of the four divine abodes lying on four directions of the compass. The Jagannath temple in Puri was built approximately 12th Century AD by King Chodaganga of the Eastern Ganga dynasty. The completion was later brought about by his descendant, Anangabhima Deva, during the 12th century. One of the most revered of all temples of Lord Vishnu in eastern India, the Jagannath Temple was built in the classical temple building phase. Protected by two

surrounding walls, the conical tower of the temple is 58 mts high on which the flag and the wheel of Lord Vishnu can be seen. Dedicated to Krishna, Balabhadra and Subhadra, the temple has these three as principal deities. Similar to the Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar, this temple is also close for Non-Hindus who contend themselves by just viewing it from outside its precincts.



Brihadeeswarar Temple

Dedicated to worshipping Lord Shiva, the Brihadeeswarar Temple, which is known by the locals of the state of Tamil Nadu in India where it is located as "Big Temple". This temple is also called with the name Peruvudayar and RajaRajeswara Temple RajaRajeswaram. Situated in the city of Thanjavur this is one of the most ancient and largest temples of India. It showcases the architecture of Dravidians who existed during the Chola period. Having been built in

1010 CE during the reign of Raja Raja Chola I, the temple had already completed almost 1000 years. Brihadeeswara temple is also one among the three entries of the "Great Living Chola temples" of the UNESCO world heritage site.



Birla Temple

Birla Temple is a popular architectural wonder of Jaipur. Located below the Moti Dungri Hill, Birla Mandir is easily accessible from the city of Jaipur. One can take local buses, rickshaws or can hire taxis to reach the Birla Temple. In 1988, the striking temple was built by Birla Group of Industries, a well-known name in the corporate sector of India. Made in pure white marble, Birla Mandir appears startling, when it gets lightened up in the night. Birla

Temple of Jaipur is renowned for its fine carvings and delicate work.

The original name of the shrine is Laxmi Narayan Temple, yet it is more popular as Birla Temple being made by the Birlas. As the name suggests, Laxmi Narayan Temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu (Narayan), the preserver and his wife Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. Erected with a modern approach, Laxminarayan Mandir sprawls in the wide area of Jaipur. Standing on a raised platform, Birla Temple is made out with the premium quality of white marble.



Somnath Temple

According to the ancient beliefs the Somnath Temple was believed to be built by Somraj, the moon God, out of gold. Then during the rule of Ravana it was rebuilt by Ravana in silver. Again Lord Krishna, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu on earth built the Somnath Temple in wood. In 10th century King Bhimdev Solanki rebuilt the Temple in stone. The splendid architecture, beautiful stone carvings and breath-taking sculptures in the Somnath Temple,

reflect the great artistic skill of the Gujarat's master masons. Home to the 12 most sacred Jyotirlingas, the Somnath Temple is an ideal example of the ancient Indian temple architecture. You can see the glorious Jyotirlingas within the Temple adorned in gold, silver, and flowers. The sounds of holy chants, bells, and drums during aarti (prayer) time will transport you to a new spiritual world.



Tirupati Temple

In Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, Tirupati Temple is one of the most sacred pilgrimage centers in the world. The presiding deity that is worshipped in this temple is the Vishnu in the form of Venkateswara or Srinivasa or Balaji. People worship the deity with great devotion and people from all over the world come to this temple to pay their homage. Constructed in the typical South India style of

architecture, the temple is an amazing piece of structure.

You can site the Tirupati Temple at the seventh peak, the Venkatachala of the Tirupati Hill in the Eastern Ghats. It is located at the southern banks of Sri Swami Pushkarin. The

greatness of the shrine is till date sung by the religious saints. Also known as the Sri Venkateswara Temple, it is one of the richest temples in the world. The divine deity inside the shrine is bejeweled with gold and diamonds. The doors and the walls of the temples also are engraved with precious and semi precious stones.



Jagadamba Temple - Khajuraho - Madhya Pradesh

The Nagara style which developed for the fifth century is characterized by a beehive shaped tower (called a shikhara, in northern terminology) made up of layer upon layer of architectural elements such as Kapotas and Gavaksas, all topped by a large round cushion-like element called an amalaka. The plan is based on a square but the walls are sometimes so broken up that the tower often gives the impression of being circular. Moreover, in later developments such as in the Chandella temples, the central shaft was surrounded by many smaller reproductions of itself, creating a spectacular visual effect resembling a fountain.

In a nutshell, Hindu Temple architecture reliefs a synthesis of arts, the ideals of dharma, beliefs, values. The style of Hindu Temple architecture is not only the result of the theology, spiritual ideal and the early Hindu texts but also a result of innovation driven by region availability of raw materials and the local climate. But this is not end of architectural artistic manifestation there stand a lot of Indian temples that outstand for their architectural style.

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