CC-5: HISTORY OF INDIA (CE 750-1206)

V. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS:

(D). ART AND ARCHITECTURE: EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL STYLES

The early medieval period was marked by remarkable developments in the spheres of art and architecture. Distinct regional architectural and sculptural styles emerged in different areas, including Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Orissa. In peninsular India, major edifices were built through the patronage of the Rashtrakutas, early Western Chalukyas, Pallavas, Hoysalas, and Cholas. In contrast to previous centuries, when a great proportion of the major architectural remains were Buddhist, in this period, the remains are dominated by Hindu temples.

The two most significant aspects of architecture are the structural temples of this time (many of monumental size) and the gradual disappearance of the rock-cut architecture of the previous centuries. No less significant is the emergence and consolidation of distinct regional styles in temple architecture: the Nagara style of temples, the Dravida style of temples and the Vesara type of temples.

The Nagara style is associated with the land between the Himalayas and Vindhyas, the Dravida style with the land between the Krishna and Kaveri rivers, while the Vesara style is sometimes associated with the area between the Vindhyas and the Krishna river. A number of architectural texts known as the Shilpashastras were written in early medieval times. The north Indian Nagara temple styles had at least two major sub-regional trends, one in Orissa and the other in central India (especially Khajuraho).

The basic plan of the Nagara temple is square, with a number of projections in the middle of each side, giving it a cruciform shape. The temple’s elevation is

marked by a conical or convex shikhara or temple tower, consisting of several layers of carved courses, usually crowned by an amalaka (notched ring stone). These two features—the cruciform plan and curvilinear shikhara—are visible in northern temples from the 6th century CE (the 'late Gupta' period), for example in the Dashavatara temple at Deogarh and the brick temple at Bhitargaon (both in UP). The beginnings of the typical Nagara shikhara can be seen in the Mahadeva temple at Nachna Kuthara (7th century) and the brick Lakshmana temple at Sirpur (both in MP). The fully developed Nagara style is evident by the 8th century.

The evolution of the north Indian Nagara temples not only demonstrates elaborations and complexity in the design of the sanctum cella and the superstructure, but also witnessed the addition of a few ancilliary structures. These structures were non-existent in the simple but elegant square temples at Sanchi and Tigawa in the 4/5/6th centuries. These temples merely had a square sanctum cella in the front of which stood a pillared porch serving as the resting place for pilgrims and worshippers. In the developed and mature forms of the later Nagara temples, one comes across three separate structures.

These three structures, though separate, were placed in the same linear alignment with the sanctum cella. Following Orissan terminology of temple architecture, these structures are called the natamandapa (pillared pavilion for musical, theatrical performances in the temple precincts), bhogamandapa (pillared pavilion for distributing and partak the sacred prasada) and jagamohana (a massive hall as a vastly enlarged form or ne original pillared porch before the main shrine). A passageway connected the jagamohana with the main shrine. The natamandapa, bhogamandapa and the jagamohana had their exterior walls richly carved with sculptures, designs and moldings: the exterior walls on each side also had the usual projections to allow interplay of light and shade and accommodate sculptures. All these three structures had a

common type of roofing, which was distinctly different from that of sanctum cella. The superstructure here consisted of three or four tiers of massive horizontal platforms, each upper tier an exact replica of the immediately lower tier but on a smaller scale. The use of the three or four receding tiers gave a clear thrust on horizontality in sharp but pleasant contrast to the soaring tower of the sanctum cella with a stress on verticality. The tier in Orissan terminology is called pidha. Therefore, the three ancilliary structures, and especially the jagamohana is termed pidha deul; the main shrine with its curvilinear superstructure is known as rekha deul. Like the rekha deul, the pidha deul too has in the topmost part of the superstructure the usual neck-like section, the spheroid stone, the skull-like part and the pitcher with the finial. Each succeeding structure was higher than each preceding structure, while the pinnacle is the tall and tapering tower above the sanctum cella. The intention of the architect was to give a visual effect of a range of mountains leading up to its highest peak, which in this case was the sikhara above the sanctum cella.

The outstanding example of this kind of temple architecture in Orissa are the Rajarani temple and the Lingaraja temple at Bhuvaneswar, dated respectively to the tenth and eleventh century. The inherent structural harmony along the four components in both the temples underlines the superb mastery of the Orissan architects. The best specimen of the jagamohana is of course the famous structure at Konarak, built in the thirteenth century. Massive in size and composition, the jagamohana, in situ, is the only relic to impress the viewer of the monumentality of the main shrine, which is completely broken. The Konarak sun temple, designed as the wheeled chariot of the Sun-god, is an architectural marvel in terms of its stupendous size and its structural symmetry and harmony.

The most striking feature of the Dravida temple is its pyramidal shikhara, which consists of progressively smaller and smaller storeys, culminating in a slender

pinnacle surmounted by a small dome (stupika). In a later stage, South Indian temples came to be marked by huge gateways known as gopurams and by pillared halls and corridors. The earliest traces of such features go back to the Gupta period and are not restricted to the far south—e.g., they occur in northern and central India and the Deccan. They can be seen in the Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara and the Lad Khan, Kont Gudi, and Meguti temples at Aihole. In temples built in the Dravida style, the square inner sanctum is set within a large covered enclosure. The external walls are divided into niches by pilasters.

The earliest Dravida style architecture is visible in Mahabalipuram where during the Pallava period were constructed five different structures, popularly known as rathas named after the five Pandava brothers and Draupadi. The essential features of a Dravida temple are visible in the Dharmaraja ratha. The more famous and elegant Shore temple at Mahabalipuram was built during CE 700-728 period. It is so called because of its location to the proximity to the Bay of Bengal. Made of granite, it is the earliest of the important structural temples of Dravida style. The shrine has the usual square garbhagriha, over which the superstructure rises in five storeys represented by the five receding tiers. The topmost portions of the superstructure are occupied by the large round boulder and above it, a finial, giving the visual effect of a tall pyramidal structure with a conical appearance.

An amazing specimen of Dravida temple architecture is the Kailasa temple at Ellora. It was built in the eighth century under the patronage of the Rash raku a ruler Krishna I. The most outstanding feature of this stupendous temple is that unlike the two other Dravida temples mentioned before, it is not a structural temple, but a rock-cut shrine, hewn out, as it was of live rock. Dug out of a basal cliff, it is the pinnacle of rock-cut architecture of India. It is a monolithic temple, since it was carved out of a single rock. The temple is adorned with superb sculptures and obelisk like free-standing, independent pillars.

However, the most celebrated example of Dravida temple style is the Brihadiswara temple at Tanjore, built by the formidable Chola king Rajaraja. It is also called Rajarajeswara temple after its royal patron. It is a complete granite temple located at the centre of the town of Thanjavur. Built to underline the glory and majesty of its patron, the temple is noted for its grandeur, axial and symmetrical geometry. The entrance is through the customary gopuram, which is five-storey high.

The Vesara style is a hybrid style (vesara literally means ‘mule’) that borrowed from the northern and southern styles. It is difficult to define, as the mixture of northern and southern elements may vary. Temples built in the Deccan under the later Chalukyas of Kalyani and Hoysalas are considered examples of this style. However, looking at the temple architecture of the Deccan simply as a combination of northern and southern elements means missing out on its distinctiveness and variations.

The caves at Ellora (7th–8th centuries) represent the last phase of Buddhist cave architecture in western India. Their architecture and sculpture shows some continuities with earlier centuries (e.g., with Ajanta, Bagh, and Kanheri), but there are also some changes. These include an increase in the size of the side shrines and a double row of stone benches (in Cave 5). The sculptural programme of the Buddhist caves at Ellora includes arrays of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. A group of eight bodhisattvas are sometimes arranged together in a mandala formation.

In the Deccan, major examples of early medieval rock-cut shrines and structural shrines are found at several places in Karnataka. The early architectural phase (6th–early 8th centuries) is represented at Badami and Aihole. This was followed by the later and grander 8th century temples located at Pattadakal. Badami represents the site of Vatapi, capital of the early Western Chalukyas.

The temple architecture of the Deccan shows an amalgam of northern and southern features, but attained a distinctive identity of its own during these centuries. The structural temples of the period were for the most part built out of large blocks of stone, without the use of mortar. The inner walls and ceilings have sculptural ornamentation.

The history of stone architecture in South India begins in the 7th century and can be connected with the increasing popularity of the bhakti cults. The Pallava kings, especially Mahendravarman I (600–625 CE), Narasimhavarman I (625–670 CE), and Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha (700–728 CE), were great patrons of the arts. The remains of the architecture of the Pallava period are mostly found at Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram. They comprise cave temples, monolithic temples, and structural temples.

as a decoration of the temple wall, whether in the Nagara or the Dravida temples. The exterior walls of the sanctum cella and other ancilliary structures, with several projections, were ideally suitable for setting up sculptures. The richly carved exterior walls of the temple stood in sharp contrast to the bare interior of the temple. Another notable stylistic feature of the sculptures of this period is that majority of the images were relief sculptures. On many occasions these were executed in very high relief, giving an impression of the representation of the figure almost in the round. A very large number of sculptures, being inseparable parts of temples, were created by strictly following iconographic prescriptions laid down in technical treatises. The image of the sun-god wearing a pair of boots, riding on a chariot drawn by seven horses and flanked by goddesses Usha and Pratyusha , is a typical instance. There is little doubt that many Brahmanical images drew heavily upon myths and legends in the Puranas. The images of Siva and Parvati, of the Ardhanarisvara (half male, half female) form of Siva, of Durga as the slayer of the buffalo demon (Mahish suramardini) and of Vishnu in his eternal sleep (anantasayin) clearly illustrate

this. The profusion of erotic images, adorning temple walls (e.g., in Khajuraho temples and at Konarak), is another characteristic of early medieval sculptures.

The celebrated and gigantic stone sculpture at Mahabalipuram depicts a fascinating world of flora and fauna, along with the figures of ascetics and the scene of a cascading stream. The scene is identified either with the legend of Bhagiratha's bringing the Ganga down from the matted locks of Siva (Gangavatarana) or Arjuna's penance, which is described in the Mahabharata and also the theme of the drama, Kiratarjuniyam. The robustness of composition, the predilection for larger-than-life forms and the love for action are all throbbing with life in sculptures at Kailasa temple (Ellora). An excellent example of this shows Ravana shaking the mount Kailasa, the abode of Siva and Parvati.

In eastern India, especially in the Pala-Sena realms, emerged a distinctive sculptural Style combining the classical sculptural style with a regional idiom. Profuse number of ages are known, some with inscribed labels, which help us arrive at a workable Chronology of the stylistic evolution of this school of sculpture. Buddhist monasteries, especially Nalanda, Vikramasila, Somapura and Mainamati, were lively centres of sculptural art and had in them ateliors. Many images, whether of the Buddha or Vishnu, are shown in a straight and erect posture without any flexion, portrayed in high relief with a staela forming its background.

The visual art of the early medieval times can be complete without referring to the bronze sculptures in south India, belonging largely to the Chola times (ninth to thirteen century). Royal figures, images of Parvati were curved out in bronze. The Chola bronze par excellence is the figure of Nataraja,

During the Early Medieval period c. 600–1200 CE, there was an efflorescence and refinement in temple architecture and sculpture, and distinct regional styles became apparent.

REFERENCE

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