Temple Architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE

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10.10: Temple architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE

Significant stage in temple architecture

The temple is the most visible site of Hindu worship. The earliest Hindu temples in the Indian subcontinent appear in the late centuries B.C. and are known from the remains of their foundations. Some of these include the 3rd century B.C. Vishnu temple at Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh), Shiva and Vishnu temples at Dangwada (Maharashtra) and 2nd century B.C. Shiva temple at Gudimallam (Andhra Pradesh). The period between 300 and 600 A.D. (coinciding with the Gupta dynasty) is a significant stage in the architecture of Hindu temples since the surviving shrines are relatively complete, with several of them having been identified in central and north India. To begin with, the temple was a relatively simple structure. It comprised a square *garbhagriha* for the deity and a *mandapa* for sheltering the devotee. The plans of temples built in the post-Gupta period (circa 600–750 A.D.) became extremely elaborate. This phase inaugurated three distinct temple building styles: *Nagara*, *Dravida* and *Vesara*. The variations in temple styles evolved in the context of geography and chronology, not on the basis of religious affiliations. The temple walls too came to be richly ornamented with reliefs depicting deities and mythological scenes.

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<td><strong>Of the north, the south and a fusion</strong></td>
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<td>Ancient texts on architecture describe three major styles of temple architecture-- <em>Nagara</em>, <em>Dravida</em> and <em>Vesara</em>. <em>Nagara</em>, which literally means “pertaining to the city”, is associated with temple styles found throughout northern India, that is the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas. The <em>Nagara</em> temple is square in plan, 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 curvilinear <em>shikhara</em>. The <em>shikhara</em> is made up of several layers of motifs such as the <em>gavaksha</em>, usually crowned by an <em>amlaka</em>. The extant temple remains indicate that although individual elements of the <em>Nagara</em> style are visible from the 6th century A.D., the style fully evolved by the 8th century.</td>
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<td><em>Dravida</em>, as the name implies, refers to the southern or Dravidian style. It is particularly associated with the land between the Krishna and Kaveri rivers. The <em>Dravida vimana</em> has a pyramidal tower, made up of progressively smaller stories, culminating in a slender pinnacle, which is finally surmounted by a small dome-like <em>stupika/shikhara</em>. The <em>garbhagriha</em> is square and set within a covered <em>mandapa</em>. Large <em>gopuras</em> provide access to the <em>Dravida</em> temple complex.</td>
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<td><em>Vesara</em> literally means mule and by implication a hybrid style, which combines elements from the <em>Nagara</em> and <em>Dravida</em> styles. The style is associated with the area between the Vindhyas and the Krishna river. Unlike those of <em>Nagara</em> and <em>Dravida</em>, <em>Vesara</em> temples are found on the eastern frontier of the Indian subcontinent.</td>
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In the period under review, the arduous rock-cut technique of creating sacred spaces was slowly being replaced by building structural temples. Therefore, Buddhist and Jaina worship, which had hitherto been exclusively centred in rock-cut caves (see chapter), was extended to structural temples. Similar to developments in Puranic Hinduism, the concept of bhakti or personal devotion to a god led to the construction of temples or shrines dedicated to the Buddha and the Jaina tirthankaras. The earliest extant Buddhist and Jaina structural temples belong to the period between 400 and 650 A.D. but compared to Hindu temples, their number is far limited. The transition from the rock-cut medium to structural shrines is best reflected in two Hindu temple complexes—the Kailashha temple at Ellora and the rathas at Mamallapuram)—which are rock-cut imitations of structural temples.

Factors facilitating the growth of temples

The spurt in temple-building activities came about because of the philosophical and religious climate during 300–600 A.D. It was the development of Puranic Hinduism, which enjoined the installation and worship of deities in temples. The proliferation of Hindu temples is particularly connected to the consolidation of the theistic cults of Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti. The establishment of Jaina and Buddhist structural temples was a response to the increasing emphasis on the worship of the tirthankaras in Jainism and a pantheon of countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Buddhism respectively.

Value addition: delving deeper

The mode of worship in temples

As many of the early temples are either in ruins or are no longer used for daily worship, it is difficult to imagine the modes of ancient worship. In order to reconstruct some of these practices, one can turn to donative inscriptions of the Gupta period which refer to donors making monetary provisions for items required for daily worship of enshrined deities. These included the supply of incense, flowers, lamps and sandalwood. The archaeological evidence of ancient mode of Hindu worship has come from the temple areas of Bhitari, in Uttar Pradesh (c.450–550 A.D.) in the form of large terracotta bowls which were probably used to offer food either to the deity or for the ritual feeding of large groups of worshippers or pilgrims. In addition,
sprinklers which priests probably used for sprinkling water while performing worship have also been found.

Interestingly, as in Hindu shrines, at Buddhist and Jaina viharas, donations were made for identical paraphernalia of worship. The 5th and 6th century inscriptions from Bengal for example bear this out.


Yet another factor responsible for the proliferation of temples was their appropriation by kings as symbols of temporal power.

**Value addition: common misconceptions**

**Only kings and queens built temples**

While the bulk of patronage did come from royalty in the period between 300-750 A.D., inscriptions indicate that individual merchants as well as professional guilds were involved in financing temples. The Mandasor inscription from Malwa records that in the early 5th century, a guild of silk weavers who had migrated from Lata in Gujarat to the town of Dashapura in central India, sponsored the building of a temple dedicated to Surya. Around the same time, in north Bengal, a city merchant donated land to construct two temples and two storerooms for gods Shvetavarahasvamin and Kokamukhasvamin, possibly two forms of Vishnu.

That such patrons were concerned about the maintenance of the temples they built is very clear. This could either take the form of making monetary provisions for future repairs to the structure or by directly financing a restoration project. When the Surya temple at Dashapura was damaged after being struck by lightning, a little less than forty years after its establishment, the guild of silk weavers funded its repair. On the other hand, the mid 5th century Baigram copperplate inscription from north Bengal records that two *kutumbin* (agriculturalist householders) brothers who donated land to the temple of Govindasvamin (Vishnu) founded by their father, made provisions for occasional repairs. In ancient and early medieval India, the repair of temples was considered a meritorious act.

Dynastic labels

Since kings had a proactive role in building temples, there is some justification in using dynastic labels (such as Gupta temples, Pallava temples) to refer to sacred monuments made during the reign of a major ruling family. Such dynastic labels can also be applied because non-royal patrons inscribed time of construction by the regnal year of the current monarch. However, one must exercise caution in using dynastic reference. This is because one, styles of art and architecture did not neatly coincide with dynastic periods. Two, the absence of powerful royal patronage did not spell an artistic void.

Nevertheless, a dynasty did promote a broad stylistic unity over a wide area. This is particularly true of temple architecture that developed within the domain of the Gupta dynasty. The broad unity of style extended even beyond the Gupta realm, for example to the Deccan Plateau, where the Vakataka dynasty ruled as contemporaries of the Guptas. The immediate post-Gupta period marked the establishment of regional dynasties in different parts of the country. This generated the beginning of regional architectural styles. The geographical focus of temples now shifted from the erstwhile Gupta heartland to Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Saurashtra. This is clearly evident in south India and Deccan where the first stone monuments were built under the Pallava and Chalukya dynasties.

Temples in the Gupta realm

At its peak in the 5th century, the Gupta empire extended from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in the east, from the Himalayan foothills in the north to the Deccan Plateau in the south. Within this vast area, encompassing many cultural zones, there developed a broadly unified genre of temples, which is conveniently labeled the “Gupta style”. To what extent was the style a product of direct Gupta patronage is difficult to say, since an overwhelming majority of surviving structural temples cannot be connected to any king of the dynasty. What is notable however is the gradual evolution of this genre, both over time and across geographical space.

Most of the extant temples of the Gupta period are damaged and located in the hilly areas of Madhya Pradesh. Gupta temples are made of brick or stone, with brick having taken a lead by the end of the Gupta period. Stone temples are extensively decorated with relief sculptures. All brick temples in the northern belt of Gupta influence are elaborately decorated with carved bricks and terracotta plaques. Originally these surfaces were plastered over and painted in bright colours. In eastern India temples were initially decorated with stucco, which was later replaced by terracotta.

| Value addition: delving deeper |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| **Tales in terracotta**     | Before the Gupta period, the medium of terracotta or fired clay was largely used for making small sacred images and toys. In the Gupta period, terracotta was reinvented as decorative and narrative plaques for the |
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Temple terracottas were made in a folk style, with highly simplified treatment of forms. While Buddhist centres such as Sanchi and Bharhut were already skilled in engraving stories in stone (from the life of the Buddha and Jataka tales), Hindu temples in northern and eastern India now began to use terracotta to portray narratives from Hindu mythology. Vishnu temples were adorned with episodes from the lives of Rama and Krishna, two avatars of Vishnu. In Ahichchhatra, series of large plaques, have been found, representing a variety of scenes from Shaiva mythology.

The most intriguing fact about these terracotta panels is that their layout had been planned meticulously by artisans who developed a code for themselves. The code took the form of inscribing a series of numbers along the lower border of tiles. For example, the two sets of terracotta plaques from the brick platform at Shravasti, narrating stories of Rama and Krishna were sequentially numbered. Similarly, at the Buddhist brick temple of Harwan, in Kashmir, each tile was inscribed with numerals in Kharoshti.


Blossoming of the Gupta style

The earliest Gupta temples are modest in size. The basic plan consists of a square garbhagriha (about 10 feet x 10 feet) preceded by a flat-roofed, small portico. Temple walls are generally plain but the doorways are intricately carved with auspicious symbols such as conch and lotus. In addition, there are sensitively modeled figures of river-goddesses on makaras. Temples of the late 5th and early 6th centuries which continue to follow the basic plan, have two new features: a raised plinth and a shikhara. The pillars have capitals in the form of purna-kalashas.

Early 5th century stone temples include Temple 17 at Sanchi and Kankali Devi temple at Tigowa. The small and unpretentious Temple 17 at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh rests on a low plinth. The structure consists of two units: a mandapa with a set of four pillars and a small, cubical garbhagriha. Several features of the structure reveal that this was a product of the earliest stage of temple building in stone. It totally lacks foundations (which resulted in the buckling of the walls and partial collapse of the roof), the walls are not very solid since they are made of rubble and stone and, what is most conspicuous is that the mandapa and garbhagriha do not blend seamlessly. Sculptural ornamentation is confined to the doorway and pillars.
The second phase of the Gupta temple, assignable to the second half of the 5th century is characterized by a *jagati* and an elaboration of the superstructure, particularly a roofed *pradakshina* around the *garbhagriha*. Sculptures or friezes were added on the facades. Two specimens of this phase are the so-called Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara and the Shiva temple at Bhumara. The Parvati temple in Madhya Pradesh is the earliest surviving example of a *sandhara* temple. It is a double-storied structure resting on a plinth. The door of the shrine, which is oriented to the west, is among the finest examples of Gupta embellishment.
The third stage of Gupta temple architecture is distinguished by the presence of a towering *shikhara* over the *garbhagriha*. Temples of this phase are very large, with superstructures sometimes rising as high as 50 feet. This is seen for example in the mid 5th century brick temple at Bhitargaon and the late 5th century stone temple at Deogarh. The Bhitargaon temple in Uttar Pradesh is special on a number of counts. It contains the earliest version of the true arch in India. Its *shikhara*, of a *triratha* plan, is one of the earliest examples of the *Nagara* style. In a *triratha* plan, the *shikhara* is divided into three vertical sections with the central section jutting forward, flanked by two receding sections. The temple also marks the culmination of the practice of embellishing temple walls with terracotta plaques.

The Vishnu temple at Deogarh, in Madhya Pradesh, which is commonly called the Dashavatara temple, is one of the earliest *panchayatana* temples. The 40 feet high, curvilinear *shikhara* of the extant central shrine anticipates the development of the typical *Nagara shikhara*. The central shrine has an elaborately carved doorway on the west and projections on the other three sides.

**Temples in the realm of the Vakatakas**

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Remains of temples built in the realm of the Vakataka dynasty have been found at Mandhal, Ramtek, Paunar and Nagra in Maharashtra. Temple remains at Mandhal, which have been dated on the basis of stratigraphical evidence to 300–600 A.D., represent the earliest examples of Vakataka architecture. These shrines mark the transitional period from the use of brick to stone. Hence, brick surfaces are offset by partial use of stone for pillars and walls. The walls are often decorated with pilasters and shallow niches. While the common feature of all Mandhal temples is that they rest on a platform with simple mouldings, there are two distinct kinds of superstructures. One type consists of a garbhagriha and a mandapa, sometimes preceded by a flight of steps. Another type consists of a shrine on an oblong platform, approached by flights of steps from lateral sides. This was often accompanied by an ablation tank.

Specimens of structural stone temples have been discovered only at Ramtek and reveal a variety of forms. The characteristic feature of these temples is the use of two types of stone. While the plinth and walls are made of a local variety of sandstone, the main load-bearing pillars supporting the roof are made of basalt. The pillars are often adorned with full or half lotus-medallions. Another noteworthy architectural feature is the tentative demarcation between the garbhagriha and mandapa, marked by a pair of pillars and pilasters. A few examples of Ramtek temples include the zoomorphic Varaha housed in an open pavilion; two Narasimhas enshrined in temples consisting of a closed, mandapa and a garbhagriha; and a trivikrama shrine with an open mandapa.

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In the period between 600 and 750 A.D.

In the period between the end of the Gupta dynasty and efflorescence of the Pallavas as builders of large structural temples, temple building programme was actively taken up by regional dynasties such as the Maitrakas in Gujarat, Panduvamshis in Chattisgarh and Rashtrakutas in the Deccan.

Buddhist temples of eastern India

Compared to Hindu temples, extant Buddhist structural temples from the 600 to 750 A.D. period are few. The Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, Bihar had been built to enshrine the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment. From a modest bodhighara, the temple was modified several times. A major restoration occurred sometime during the 6th/7th century when the old sandstone railing enclosing the temple precinct was enlarged, adding upright granite railings. These posts were carved with medallions depicting floral motifs and faces. The original polished sandstone surface of the platform was provided with a new brick base, decorated with stucco images of pot-bellied dwarfs and lions.

The Buddhist site in eastern India which superseded building activity at Bodh Gaya in this period was Nalanda, also in Bihar. The cumulative evidence of the accounts of two Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuan Zang along with excavated seals and sealings point to the sustained patronage by the late Gupta kings and thereafter Harshavardhana of the Vardhana dynasty. Although its history is older, the Nalanda mahavihara reached its high

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point in the 7th century when two of its most notable monuments were built. One was the jagati (known as Patthar Ghatti) of the temple at Site 12. It served as the foundation for a large stone temple whose sanctum measured about 52 feet square. Around the perimeter of the plinth are 220 panels, depicting decorative motifs, brahmanical deities Kubera and Gajalakshmi and scenes from the Ramayana. The absence of any Buddhist deity on the panels has complicated the identification of the sectarian affiliation of the shrine as Buddhist.

Old temple at Gop

The oldest surviving structural temple in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat is the so-called Old Temple at Gop. This was built in the late 6th or early 7th century, during the reign of the Maitraka dynasty. The architecture of this rather stark temple is an unusual variation on the Nagara style. The temple is classified as a “Gandharic” type since it preserves a number of elements from the northwestern tradition of the Kushana period. The most obvious of these is the so-called ‘penthouse-type’ roof. Like the Gupta prototypes, the Gop temple stands on a high, square jagati which has a projection on the east. In comparison to Gupta temples, the plinth is much higher. The use of large, heavy blocks of stone in the construction is not merely a Gupta legacy but a characteristic regional form. The temple was originally sandhara.

Lakshmana temple at Sirpur

The Panduvamshis or Somavamshis, ruling during the 6th-7th centuries, had their capital in Sirpur, in present day Chattisagarh. The best preserved Panduvamshi temple is the Vishnu temple at Sirpur, now known as the Lakshmana temple, which was built by the mother of the last king. This brick temple stands on a large stone platform, accessible by steps at both ends of the eastern side. The temple plan consists of a shrine and a now-ruined mandapa with stone pillars arranged in rows. The sanctum of the temple is entered through a large stone doorway, decorated with panels of mithunas, and vrikshadevatas. Across the centre of the lintel is a representation of Vishnu reclining on the snake Sesha. The shikhara of the Lakshmana temple is specially noteworthy because of its curvilinear and almost cylindrical form. The shape of the shikhara and its clear division into bhumis or horizontal stories became typical of the early Orissan temple style, which is discussed below. The exterior of the shikhara and shrine is extensively decorated with chandrashalas and different types of mouldings.

Kailasha temple at Ellora

The colossal and richly carved Kailasha temple complex at Ellora was constructed during the reign of Krishna I (757–83 CE) of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. This is the largest rock-cut monument in India and marks the culmination of rock architecture in South Asia. The temple is unique in that it is a rock-cut imitation of the structural temple. In plan, the complex has three separate units—a cruciform Dravida temple, a gatehouse and a pavilion. Two rock-cut bridges connect the three components but each can also be accessed independently.

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The main temple contains a flat-roofed **mandapa** leading to a shrine containing a **linga**. The shrine has a pyramidal **shikhara** which rises 29 metres above the courtyard floor. Around the temple, there are five miniature shrines surrounding the temple; free-standing, life-sized rock-cut elephants and two monumental rock-cut columns. Inside the pavilion is a sculpture of the **Nandi**. The Kailasha temple stands out among other rock-cut shrines, particularly because of the magnificent carvings on its exterior walls. Pilasters have divided the exterior surface into niches, which contain individual sculptures of deities and vibrant mythological scenes depicting the legend of Shiva. Originally both exterior and interior were painted over a thin layer of plaster.

**Pallava temple**

The Pallava dynasty held sway over Andhra Pradesh and northern Tamil Nadu between the 6th and 9th centuries A.D. At Mamallapuram, a pre-eminent Pallava cultural centre in Tamil Nadu, there are granite monuments of four distinct types, of which two are relevant to our discussion. First, rock-cut monolithic shrines created out of single boulders of granite and second, structural temples built by piling stone upon stone.

**Rathas at Mamallapuram**
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A group of five rock-cut shrines are located at the southern end of Mamallapuram. They are now known as rathas and four of them are named after the five Pandava heroes of the Mahabharata. Four of the five represent differing architectural styles. The Arjuna ratha is the earliest example of a large Dravida temple. Its shikhara is crowned by a rounded unit known as stūpi or stūpika. Miniature versions of stūpis are repeated at the corners of its lower level. It is believed to be a Shaiva shrine because there is a large, rock-cut bull located close behind it. The Dharmaraja ratha is a taller and more impressive version of the Dravida temple than the Arjuna ratha. The Bhima ratha is a barrel-vaulted structure incomplete in its lower level. The Nakula Sahadeva ratha is apsidal and has an elephant carved besides it. The shrine may have been dedicated to either Indra or Aiyanar, both of whom ride an elephant. The Draupadi ratha is modelled after a wooden hut with a thatched roof. It was originally dedicated to goddess Durga since her image is carved on the rear wall and her female attendants flank the entrance. Her lion mount is carved in front of the shrine.

Who built these rathas and were these originally intended for worship? The title ‘Mamalla’ prominently engraved on the Dharmaraja ratha indicates that these rathas were commissioned by the Pallava king, Narasimha Mamalla, after whom the city of Mamallapuram is named. Vidya Dehejia argues that the rathas are more in the nature of a workshop rather than shrines since the lion, bull and elephant sculptures associated
with the Durga, Arjuna and Nakula-Sahadeva rathas respectively are not placed in their correct ritual positions (Dehejia 1997:193).

**Shore Temple at Mamallapuram and Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram**

Two of the most impressive structural temples attributed to the Pallavas was built by the last great ruler of this dynasty, Narasimhavarman II. These are the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram and Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram, 72 kilometres from Mamallapuram. The Shore Temple has an unusual plan. It consists of three separate worship areas, which do not appear to relate to a unified scheme. The main temple, dedicated to Shiva contains a linga and a relief of Somaskanda in the central shrine. There is a circumambulatory passage around the shrine. There is a small square Shiva shrine on the western side of the central temple. A third shrine, dedicated to Vishnu as Anantashayana, spans the two Shiva temples forming a connecting link. Yet another peculiar feature is that while the main entrance to the complex faces west, there is another, in the sanctum, facing east.
The most impressive building of Narasimhavarman II’s reign is the Shiva temple known as Kailashanatha, built in his capital Kanchipuram. Enclosed within a rectangular courtyard wall, the complex consists of the main temple and a series of miniature shrines. The main sandstone shrine with a detached hall and a pyramidal shikhara is a full-fledged Dravida temple. The shrine contains a 2.5 metres high Shiva linga. A Somaskanda relief is carved against its back wall. Seven sub-shrines are attached to the exterior of the main shrine contain huge images of Shiva dancing, receiving the Ganga and in the form of a mendicant. At quite a distance from the shrine is a pavilion with a seated Nandi, facing Shiva. Within the courtyard of this Shaivite shrine, Vishnu appears in a range of forms that include Narasimha and Trivikrama.

Vattuvankovil temple at Kalugumalai

Strikingly similar to the Kailashanatha in form and the way it was built is the 8th century Vattuvankovil temple at Kalugumalai in Tamil Nadu. Although unfinished, it is the most impressive monument of the Early Pandyas. The east-facing Shiva temple consists of a mandapa and a garbhagriha. The garbhagriha is surmounted by a storied, elaborately decorated, southern style superstructure, topped by an octagonal shikhara.
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Temples of Western Chalukyas

There is great diversity among the structural temple forms of the Chalukyas. What is common to most of them is that they are created by piling large blocks of stone. The joints between different units of a structure are clearly visible. In proportion, most of the temples emphasize length rather than height. The interiors of mandapas are frequently carved with rich ceiling panels. Walls of larger temples are embellished with vyala motifs and sometimes other floral and figural motifs. The Chalukyan pillars are square and heavy, without a base. They are decorated with mithunas, yakshinis and river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. On the whole, sculptural decoration plays a much greater role in carrying out the programme of the temple than it did in the Gupta and immediately post-Gupta monuments. The chief temple centres were Aihole and Pattadakal in Karnataka. The Aihole-Pattadakal complex is interesting because it has temples in all three styles.

Meguti temple at Aihole

Meguti is a Jaina structural temple which was dedicated in circa 634 A.D. during the reign of king Pulakeshin II. In plan, the temple is of the sandhara type. The austerity of the temple’s exterior stands out among other Western Chalukyan examples which are lavishly carved. Panels of dwarves and animals are the only elements of decoration, located at the base of the structure. There are pilasters on the exterior wall but they do not house figurative sculptures. Perhaps the temple originally had a southern style superstructure.

Durga temple at Aihole

The apsidal Durga temple at Aihole is one of the most enigmatic temples of the Chalukyan style. It was built around 725–30 A.D. during the reign of the Chalukyan king Vijayaditya. It is one of the earliest examples of the Vesara style. In plan, it is a fusion between the Dravida mandapa and the Nagara shikhara. The temple has a distinctive pillared pradakshinapatha running all around the shrine. The variety of Hindu sculptures depicted in wall niches along the pradakshina patha makes it difficult to identify the cultic affiliations of the temple. Probably this was an Aditya temple since there is an image of this deity above the entrance. A gateway inscription also refers to it as temple of Aditya.
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Lad Khan temple at Aihole

Another unique Chalukyan monument is the Lad Khan temple, probably created in the late 7th or early 8th century. A pillared porch precedes the large, square mandapa. The small shrine at the rear seems to have been added as an afterthought. A small second storey shrine is placed above the centre of the mandapa. The exterior walls of the temple are striking for their plainness. They are relieved only by the impressive lattice windows and thick pilaster-like forms. Another notable feature is the use of large stone slabs on the roof that resemble wood planks and half timbers.

Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal

The most fully developed Dravida temple built by the Western Chalukyas is the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, which was dedicated to Shiva. It was constructed during the reign of Vikramaditya II, by his chief queen Loka Mahadevi. The temple complex is set within a rectangular walled enclosure in which a series of shrines were built. A large gopura on the east is balanced by a smaller one on the west. Between the eastern gopura and temple proper is a square shrine containing a sculpture of Nandi.

The main temple consists of a large pillared mandapa and a smaller vimana. The vimana in turn consists of an antechamber and shrine with an enclosed circumambulatory passage, the whole topped by a southern style superstructure. Porches project from the mandapa, to admit more light into the interior. On the exterior, deep niches created by pilasters contain dynamic depictions of various aspects of Shiva. The interior of the

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temple, specially the pillars, ceilings and lintels too are richly adorned. There are two small shrines, one on either side of the antechamber to the main shrine. The doorway to the main shrine (which houses a Shiva linga) is much more elaborate than Gupta temple doors. Outside the framework of the door, there are pilasters, a torana, architectural niches, multiple side figures and sizeable dvarapalas.

The early Orissan style: Parashurameshvara temple at Bhubneshvar

In the 7th century A.D., Orissa emerged as a major centre of art and architecture, giving rise to a distinct regional style. The style was inspired by the Early Western Chalukyan temple architecture and that of Sirpur, which we discussed above. The temple forms as known from existing monuments seem to closely follow the textual precepts. This is not always the case in other parts of the country.

The best preserved specimen of the temple building tradition inaugurated by the Shailodbhava dynasty is the 7th century Parashurameshvara temple at Bhubaneshvar. Inscriptional evidence shows that the temple was dedicated to an acharya of the Shaiva Pashupata sect. Enclosed within a rectangular compound wall, the Parashurameshvara temple consists of two parts: a triratha rekha deul and a jagamohana preceding it. In the vocabulary of Orissan temple architecture, the shikhara is commonly called a deul while the mandapa is called a jagamohana. The deul, which is characteristically curvilinear in Orissan temples is called the rekha deul. The shikhara is topped by a large amalaka. The basic profile of the Parashurameshvara deul became typical of the Orissan temple style.

Figure 10.10.8: Parashurameshvara temple, Bhubaneswar
Source: http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/bhubaneswar/pr01.html

The rectangular jagamohana with its double-storied roof, pillars and jalis recalls the Early Western Chalukya mandapas. Yet, the double roof also anticipates the pidhas found in more evolved Orissan temples. A peculiarity of the jagamohana is that it can be
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entered through doorways on both the west and the south. The interior of the jagamohana is starkly simple, which is a characteristic feature of Orissan temple architecture. In contrast to the interior, the exteriors of both the jagamohana and rekha deul are lavishly embellished with architectural and decorative designs, such as the chandrshala and the amalaka. However, in spite of all the surface elaboration, the large blocks of stone used in construction are clearly visible, specially on the jagamohana.

10.10 Summary

- With the strengthening of the Puranic Hinduism in the period between 300–750 A.D., distinctive iconographies of a number of deities evolved. This was manifested in the increasing number of temples within which they were enshrined. As the impact of bhakti filtered into Buddhism and Jainsim, it gave an impetus to the dedication of shrines to the images of the Buddha and the tirthankaras.

- The period witnessed the emergence of varying styles of temple structures. While the period between 300–600 A.D. was formative, it was in the 600–750 A.D. period that temple architecture crystallized into the Nagara style in the north and Dravida style in the south. A fusion between the Nagara and Dravida styles, which emerged in the Deccan, eventually matured into the Vesara style in the post 750 A.D. period.

- Temples used diverse material, such as brick, stone, terracotta and stucco, for structure and ornamentation. While in the earlier centuries, brick was widely used, it slowly gave way to stone. Problems of durability of brick may have been the trigger for the transition.

- A correlation between individual kings and temples has not been possible in the case of most Gupta period temples. In the period between 600–750 A.D., maximum number of temples was built by kings belonging to regional dynasties, such as the Pallavas and Chalukyas.

- The structural plan of the temple was modest to start with but became more complex and elaborate with the years. The profusion and sophistication of ornamentation became more pronounced as the styles matured. Versatile use of plaques and friezes portrayed the mythology of Vishnu, Shiva and Durga. The temple thus became the chief agency for popularization of religious cults.
10.10: Exercises

Essay questions

1) Why is the period between 300-750 A.D. a significant stage in the history of temple architecture?

2) To what extent can one use dynastic labels when discussing the evolution of temple architecture?

3) Write a short essay on the evolution of temple architecture in the period between 300-600 A.D.

4) Discuss the three major temple styles that emerged in the period under study.

5) In what ways are the rathas at Mamallapuram and the Kailasha temple at Ellora different from other structural temples discussed in this lesson?

Objective questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>LOD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>True or False</td>
<td>1</td>
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**Question**

In the vocabulary of Orissan temple architecture, the term *rekha deul* refers to the *mandapa* while the term *jagamohana* refers to the *vimaana*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct Answer / Option(s)</th>
<th>False</th>
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</table>

**Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer**

In Orissan temple architecture, *rekha deul* refers to the *vimana* while the *mandapa* is called *jagamohana*.

**Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer**

Reviewer’s Comment:
Temple Architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE

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<th>Question Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Match the following</td>
<td>2</td>
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**Question**

Match the following:

a) Temple 17, Sanchi  i) Sandhara  
b) Parvati temple, Nachna Kuthara  ii) Panchayatana  
c) Bhitargaon temple  iii) No foundations  
d) Deogarh  iv) True arch

**Correct Answer / Option(s)**

a) and iii), b) and i), c) and iv), d) and ii)

**Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer**

The left hand side column lists some of the prominent temples of the Gupta period. The column on the right describes some of their most distinctive characteristics. The temple 17 at Sanchi totally lacks foundations; the Bhitargaon temple consists of the earliest version of the true arch in India; the Deogarh temple is one of the oldest extant panchayatana temples and the Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara is one of the oldest extant sandhara temples.

**Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer**

Reviewer’s Comment:

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Match the following</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Question**

Match the following:

1) Nagara  i) vimana, gopura and mandapa  
2) Dravida   ii) hybrid style  
3) Vesara  iii) conical or curvilinear shikhara
Temple Architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE

Correct Answer / Option(s) 1) and iii), 2) and ii), 3) and i)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer
The left hand column lists the three main temple styles. The column on the right gives the characteristic features of each of these temple styles.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer’s Comment:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Multiple choice question</td>
<td>3</td>
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Question
Which of the following statement(s) is (are) false regarding the rathas of Mamallapuram?

a) They are called rathas because they resemble chariots
b) They are rock-cut imitations of structural temples
c) They are named after the five Pandava heroes of the Mahabharata
d) All of them have an identical architectural style

Correct Answer / Option(s) a) and d)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer
Four of the five rathas have different architectural styles. None of them resembles a chariot.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer’s Comment:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Multiple choice question</td>
<td>3</td>
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Question

Which of the following features is not applicable to the Early Western Chalukyan temples?

a) In proportion, the temples emphasize height rather than length  
b) The main temple centres are Sirpur, Mamallapuram and Gop  
c) Temples were built in all the three styles  
d) The Parashurameshvara temple at Bhubaneshvar has conceptual ties to the Early Western Chalukyan temples

Correct Answer / Option(s)  
a) and d)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

In proportion, the length of the Early Western Chalukyan temples is more than their height. Aihole and Pattadakal in Karnataka are the main centres of Early Western Chalukyan structural temples.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer’s Comment:

10.10 Glossary

Antarala: literally any intermediate space. In a temple, the vestibule connecting the garbhagriha with the mandapa

Anthropomorphic: pertaining to human form

Amalaka: a fruit - a flattened, fluted round form used as a crowning member of the superstructure of northern style Hindu temples

Bhumis: earth, floor, foundation, level. The levels or stories of a building or superstructure

Chandrashala: see gavaksha

Garbhagriha: inner sanctum

Garuda: Vishnu’s mount, represented as a composite half-man-half-bird

Gavaksha: great façade windows of the Buddhist chaitya halls. In Hindu temple architecture, miniature versions of the façade windows. Also known as gomukha or kuda

Gopura: a south Indian temple gateway
Temple Architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE

Jagati: platform of a temple  
Linga: the phallic form (of Shiva)  
Lintel: a horizontal beam or stone bridging an opening  
Makara: a mythological, crocodile-like creature. A symbol of auspiciousness  
Mandapa: an open or closed pillared hall  
Panchayatana: in architecture, a central shrine that is surrounded by four others at the corners  
‘Penthouse-type’ roof: a pyramidal roof rising from a square base  
Pidhas: horizontal, platform-like divisions or courses of the superstructure over the jagamohana of an Orissan temple  
Pradakshinapatha: a path or passage for going round a shrine from left to right.  
Purna-kalasha: literally pot of plenty. Pot and foliage used as capital in north Indian temples  
Ratha: chariot/temple.  
Rekha deul: pyramidal roof of the jagamohana of an Orissan temple  
Sandhara: temple with a circumambulatory passage  
Shikhara: in north Indian architecture, the spire or the tower over the shrine  
Stucco: plaster (usually lime)  
Tri-ratha: literally three-rathas. A side of a pedestal or building that is offset so that its length is divided into three sections  
Trivikrama: an epithet for Vamana, the dwarf, one of Vishnu’s ten major incarnations  
Vahana: vehicle - the mount or carrier of a god  
Vimana: in Dravida style of temple architecture, the shrine portion of a temple and its superstructure  
Vrikshadevatas: a tree goddess  
Vyalas: composite fantastic animals  
Zoomorphic: pertaining to animal form

10.10 Further readings

Temple Architecture, c. 300 - 750 CE
