

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURAL STYLE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

In the present paper we will discuss about the temple architectural style in India with special reference to the temple architectural style found in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh, which is also referred to as Devboomi “Land of the Gods”. First of all, we will study about the types of Temple architectural style prevailing in India i.e. Nagara, Dravida and Vesara style. India is an abode of numerous God and Goddesses, which are prevailing in every part of the nation. India’s diversity is well reflected in the temple architectural style, as temples in the different parts of the country have their own distinct features based on the geographical, climatic, ethnic, racial, historical and linguistic diversities.

Keywords: Nagara, Dravida, Vesara, Architecture, Diversity.

Temples are an indispensable part of Indian culture. They are not only a place of worship but also a source of ancient and medieval art and architecture. They are an importance source to know about our religious beliefs and practices. India is an abode of numerous God and Goddesses, which are prevailing in every part of the nation. India’s diversity is well reflected in the temple architectural style, as temples in the different parts of the country have their own distinct features based on the geographical, climatic, ethnic, racial, historical and linguistic diversities. Here in our current write up, we are mainly focusing on the Hindu temples. The basic form of the Hindu temple comprises, sanctum (garbhagriha literally ‘womb-house’) which was a small cubicle with a single entrance, mandapa (the entrance to the temple which may be a portico or colonnaded hall that incorporates space for a large number of worshippers), shikhar (in North India)/vimana (in South India), the vahan i.e., the mount or vehicle of the temple’s main deity along with a standard pillar or dhavaj is placed axially before the sanctum. Temples are broadly classified in three types- Nagara in the North, Dravida in the South and Vesara style of temples, created through the selective mixing of the Nagara and Dravida orders. We will discuss in detail all the three styles in the following paragraphs.

NAGARA OR NORTH INDIAN TEMPLE STYLE

This style is prevalent in the north India. Some specific features make this style different from the other two styles. Here it is important and common that entire temple is built on a stone platform with steps leading up to it. Further, it does not usually have elaborate boundary walls or gateways. Earliest of this kind had only one shikhara, but later temples had several shikharas. The garbhagriha is always located directly under the tallest tower or shikhara.

This style is further divided into several subdivisions depending on the shape of the shikhara.

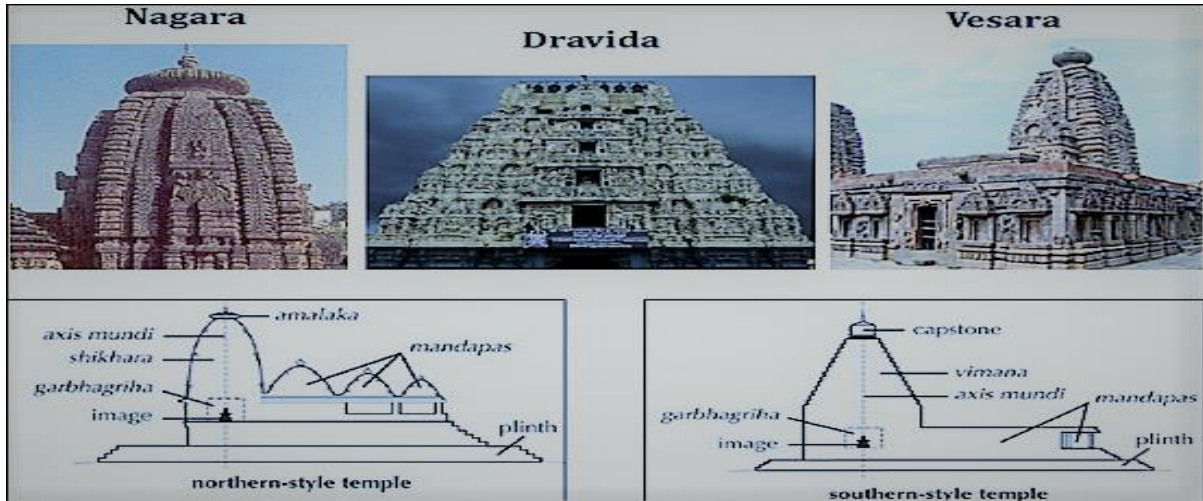
- Latina: Simple shikhara which is square at the base and whose walls curve or slope inward to a point on top. This kind of Nagara style temple is also called as rekha-prasada type of shikhara.
- Phamsana: This kind of nagara style temple tends to be broader and shorter than latina order. Their roofs are composed of several slabs that gently rise to a single point over the centre of the building.
- Valabhi: The third main subdivision of Nagara style of temple. These are rectangular buildings with a roof that rises into a vaulted chamber.

The best-known temples of this style are the Khajuraho group of Temples, Kandariya Mahadev temple in Madhya Pradesh, Sun temple at Konarak, Sun temple at Modhera, Gujarat and Ossian temple, Gujarat.

DRAVIDA OR SOUTH INDIAN TEMPLE STYLE

This style was pioneered by the Pallavas who ruled in the parts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and northern Tamil-Nadu until ninth century. These temples are enclosed within a compound wall. Here walls are a significant part of the temples. The front wall has an entrance gateway in its centre, which is known as a gopuram. The main temple tower is known as vimana in Tamil Nadu, is like a stepped pyramid that rises up geometrically rather than the curving shikhara of North India. In the South Indian temple, word 'shikhara' is used only for the crowning element at the top of the temple which is usually shaped like a small stupika. Fierce Dvarapalas or the door-keepers guarding the temple adorn the entrance to garbhagriha. Another feature of this style is to find a large water reservoir, or a temple tank, enclosed within the complex. Subsidiary shrines are either incorporated within the main temple tower, or located as distinct, separate small shrines beside the main temple. Kailashnath temple at Ellora is a famous example of a temple built in complete Dravidian style. Other well-known examples of this style are the temples of Tanjore, Madurai, Mahabalipuram, Badami, Pattadakal and Kanchipuram. Based on the shapes these are divided into five subdivisions, which are as follows:

- Kuta: square shaped.
- Caturasra: rectangular or shala or ayatasra shaped.
- Gaja-Prishta: elephant-backed also called as vritayata.
- Nasi: this is derived from wagon-vaulted shapes of apsidal chaityas with a horse-shoe shape entrance faced.
- Ashtasra: Octagonalshaped.



Both the styles differ in one way or another. In North Indian temples, the Sikhara remained the most prominent component while in the South Indian temple's enclosures around the temples and the Gopurams (huge gateways) remained the prominent feature. On the other hand, there are many common features in both styles of temple like the ground plan, positioning of stone-carved deities on the outside walls and the interior, and the range of decorative elements.

VESARA STYLE TEMPLE

The term vesara is derived from Sanskrit word vishra meaning an area to take a long walk. Vesara is a fusion of Nagara and Dravida style of temple architecture styles. This style originated in the historic architecture schools of the Dharwad region. Most of the historians are of the view, that the Vesara style originated in what is today, Karnataka. According to Indian texts, this style was popular in the central parts of India such as between the Vindhyas and the river Krishna. This trend was started by the Chalukyas of Badami (500-753AD), further refined by the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta (750-983AD) in Ellora, Chalukyas of Kalyani (983-1195AD) in Lakkundi, Dambal, Gadag etc. and epitomized by the Hoysalas (1000-1330AD).

The distinctive features of this style of architecture are the ornamentation of temple walls and pillars, Chalukyan temples shows indigenous quality. Others includes the transformation of the Dravida towers by minimizing the height of each storey and arranging them in descending order of height from base to top further, modifications is seen in the vertical shape of the tower instead of inclined storey as

in Nagara tower. Notable temples built with this style are Kallesvara temple, Kukkanur; Ramalingesvara temple, Gudur; Kasivisvesvara; Lakkundi and Mallikarjuna temple, Sudi.

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURAL STYLE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

Himachal Pradesh came into existence on 15th April 1948, with the merger of 26 Shimla Hill states and 4 Punjab Hill States into a centrally administered Chief Commissioner Province. Sh. N.C. Mehta was appointed as the first Chief-Commissioner (1948-50). After a long struggle for attaining the status of a fully-fledged State it was on 25th Jan 1971, India's first women Prime-Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in Shimla's Girja Maidan inaugurated Himachal Pradesh as the 18th State of the Union of India. Himachal Pradesh is also known as 'Devbhoomi' which is due to the fact that this hill state is abode to numerous Devi and Devas. Having two thousand or more temples all over the state. Amongst these most of the temples have legends dating back to centuries, some as old as mankind itself. Almost every temple has some kind of fair and festival connected to it. The distinctive feature of the Himalayan temples is that they have been modified according to the climatic conditions, which make them unique and different from the original style. Here are various types of temple architectural styles.

1. DOMED SHAPED TEMPLE

Word Dome is derived from Latin word domus. Domes were built in ancient Mesopotamia. This style is found in Persian, Roman, Hellenistic and Chinese architecture. In India, this style is the direct outcome of the Mughal and the Sikh rule. A dome resembles the hollow upper half of a sphere. They have been constructed using mud, snow, stone, metal, wood, brick, concrete, glass and even plastic over the centuries. Some of the important shrines belonging to this category are Jawalamukhi and Brajeshwari Temple (Kangra), Chintpurni (Una), Kameshwar Temple (Mandi) and Tarna Temple (Mandi), Naina Devi (Bilaspur).



**Jawalamukhi Temple
(Kangra)**



**Bajreshwari Temple
(Kangra)**



**Chintpurni Temple
(Una)**

2. SHIKHAR / NAGARA STYLE TEMPLES

In Sanskrit, shikhara means “mountain peak”. In Latin shikhara is composed of a series of horizontal roof slabs gradually receding towards the top and provided with projections that extend from the base and wall of the temple. The Nagara temples in Himachal Pradesh broadly follow the overall form and design of the typical Indo-Aryan stone temples. In this some minor changes were made in the form of these temples in comparison to the temples of the same kind found in plains, in order to adapt them to the climatic conditions of the hill areas. There is a tower like conical formation built of stone and decorated with carvings. The top of shikhar has amalaka, the circular sun-disc. It has got all the essential elements of a Hindu temple. It has got mandap (porch), garbh-griha (sanctum sanctorum) and shikhar (tower). Vidyanath’s temple at Baijnath (Kangra district), Laxmi Narayan temple (Chamba district), Bajaura temple (Kullu district) and Thakurwada at Masroor (Kangra district) fall under this category.



MASRUR Temple: in Kangra District also known as **Ellora of Himachal prades**. It is a Monolithic temple (i.e.; carved out of one rock). Built in **Nagara/Shikhar** style by **Kashmir Raja Lalitaditya**. It is a group of **15 shrines** and main shrine is known as Thakurdwara. **H.L. Shuttleworth** discovered the temples at Masrur in **1913**.



**Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple
(Chamba)**



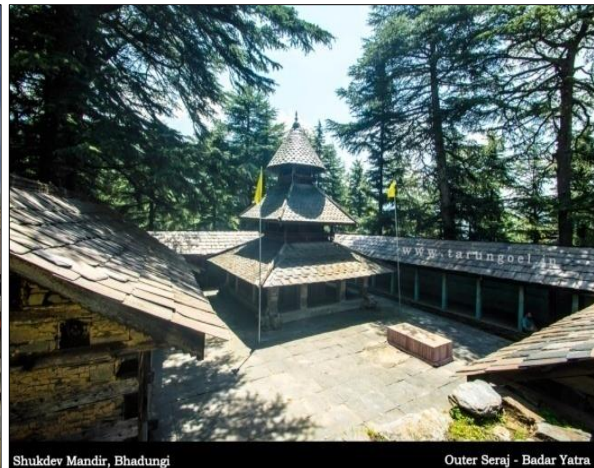
**Vidyanath's temple at Baijnath
(Kangra)**

3. PAGODA/ PAGORA STYLE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Similar to the pent-roofed temples in plan and style this style is believed to be originated in Kathmandu, Nepal. The only difference lies in the superstructure. The Pagoda Style temples comprised of rectangular stone and wood structures with successive roofs, placed one over the other making them in some cases look like multi-storey edifices. Each superimposed storey is slightly smaller than the one below forming a slanting linear structure at a sharp angle surmounted by a metal purnakalasa at the top. Each slanting roof consists of rows of slates, much like the roofs on the pent-roofed temples, designed to shed water and ice in winters. These temples are believed to have Chinese or Tibetan influence in their architecture. Besides Himachal Pradesh, this style is found in Kashmir, Nepal, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other parts of Asia. Famous among this category in Himachal Pradesh includes Hidimba Devi or Doongari (Manali), Tripura Sundari (Naggar, Kullu), Adi Brahma (at Khokan, Kullu), Sungara Maheshwara (Kinnaur).



**Prashar Rishi Temple
(Mandi)**



**Sukhdev Rishi Temple
(Mandi)**

4. PENT ROOF STYLE TEMPLE

The pent-roofed temples are indigenously styled circular or rectangular structures with slanting roofs made of rows and rows of slates, designed, in keeping with the climatic conditions of the region, to keep heavy rainfall and snowfall from covering these structures for more than short intervals. The roof extends over the covered 'veranda' which serves the purpose of 'Pradakshina' round the shrine. Most interesting feature of this style is the peculiar arrangement of wood and stone in building the walls of the temple. Wooden beams are laid at right angles of the walls, and intervening spaces are filled up with stone which holds itself quite

beautifully protecting the inmates from harsh climatic conditions. Most remarkable among these temples are Lakshana Devi temple (Brahmaur), Shakti Devi (Chhatrari in Chamba), Kali Devi also known as Mirkula Devi (Lahaul) and Bijli Mahadev (Kullu).



**Mrikula Devi or Kali Devi Temple
Lahaul-Spiti**



**Shakti Devi Temple
Chhatrari (Chamba)**

5. SATLUJ VALLEY STYLE TEMPLE

A beautiful blend of pent roof and pagoda style. Styled as mandap with one or more pagoda roofs above the garbhgriha that corresponds to shikhar of a classical temple, usually at one end of the building but sometimes in the center. As this fusion is generally found in the upper Sutlej valley, hence known as Sutlej valley style temples. Bhimakali Temple (Sarahan, Shimla), Bahna Mahadev and Dhaneshwari Devi (Nethar) in Outer Seraj are noted ones.



**Bhimakali Temple
Sarahan, Shimla**



**Mata Dhaneshwari Temple
Nethar, Outer Seraj**

6. PYRAMIDICAL STYLE TEMPLE

This style of roof temples is built on square plinths. In which, all the four lower eaves of the temple roof are of equal length and the roof goes on narrowing towards center forming pyramid like roof in the center. Hateshwari Devi and Shiva temples at Hathkoti and Mahasu and Shiva temples at Deora in Jubbal (Shimla) are examples of Pyramidical architecture in this hill state.



**Hiteshwari Temple
Hathkoti (Shimla)**



**Mahasu Temple
Deora in Jubbal (Shimla)**

7. FLAT-ROOFED TEMPLE

This category has ordinary walls in mud and lime plaster and the remarkable paintings executed in the traditional pahari style around the Ramayana and Mahabharata which makes them executive.

Famous among this category includes Narbadeshwar Temple (Sujanpur-Tira, Hamirpur), Ramgopal Temple (Damtal, Kangra).



Narbadeshwar Temple (Sujanpur -Tira)

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