

# Hindu Temple Architecture

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## Abstract

Hinduism is one of the world's most ancient living religious traditions, with its origins deeply rooted in the Indian subcontinent. Its enduring legacy is reflected not only in its rituals, spiritual practices, and sacred texts, but also in its monumental architectural achievements, particularly temple construction. Hindu temples are significant embodiments of religious belief, serving as sacred spaces dedicated to various deities and as centres of devotional worship. Temples in ancient times, though, represented far more than ancient Hindu temples; they embodied complex symbolic meanings and reflected the intellectual, aesthetic, and technological advancement of their time. Broadly, Hindu temple architecture evolved into three principal styles based on geographical distribution: the Nagara style in North India, the Dravida style in South India, and the Vesara style, which developed primarily in the Deccan and parts of Central India. Each style further diversified into several sub-styles, producing a rich variety of structural forms, decorative programs, and symbolic layouts. This paper undertakes a systematic examination of these stylistic traditions, analysing their regional distribution, formal characteristics, and representative monuments, in order to situate Hindu temple architecture within the broader discourse of India's cultural and architectural heritage.

**Keywords:** Hinduism; Temple Architecture; Nagara; Dravida; Vesara; Regional Architectural Traditions

## Introduction

India was the land of art, and its art was based on its religion. We find its artefacts mainly religion institution like temples, monasteries, mosques, etc. In ancient India, there were three religion which were dominating – Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain, and they had their own architectural features. In this paper, we try to discuss the Hindu architecture of temples. Here, we try to find out the differences between the regional characteristics of temple architecture. We take some temples as examples to differentiate the designs of the regional features of architecture. Those regional features are based on some factors like regional geography, politics, economy, belief, faith and religion. There were mainly three types of Hindu temple architecture – NAGARA, DRAVIDA, and VESARA, which were respectively found in North India, South India and Central India. They have different types of architectural features and designs.

## NAGARA STYLE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

In Nagara-style temple architecture, we found mainly rock-cut caves. We found this type of temple architecture in the northern part of India. We found details about this architecture in an ancient Indian book, the “SHILPA SASTRA”. There are mainly two divisions of this architecture based on their chronology – Classical period (7th-8th CE) and Medieval period (12th-13th CE). Now let's discuss about the basic elements of this design:

### 1.1 BASIC FEATURES:

There are many significant parts of this type of architecture–

1. Garbhagriha: The main part of the temple where the deity is kept.

2. Mandapa: Entrance of the temple.
3. Shikhara or Vimana: Top of the temple. Shikaras are usually shown at Southern part. On the other side, Vimana are usually shown in the Northern part.

Difference between Shikara and Vimana

#### **Difference between Shikara and Vimana:**

1. Shikara looks like a curve in shape.
2. Vimana looks like a pyramidal tower.

#### **Types of Shikara:**

1. Latina or Rekha type
2. Valabhi type
3. Phamsana type
4. Amalaka: The top stone of the temple.
5. Kalasha: A mandir kalasha is a metal or stone spire used to top the domes of a Hindu temple. It had been used for this purpose since ancient times.
6. Antarala: Intermediate space is a small antechamber or foyer between the garbhagriha (shrine) and the mandapa, more typical of North Indian temples. It is commonly seen in the architecture of the Chalukya. Here, the 'Vimana' and the 'Mandapa' are connected through the 'Antarala'.
7. Jagathy: In Hindu temple architecture, the Jagathy is the raised surface of the platform or terrace upon which some Buddhist and Hindu temples are built. The Jagathy lies on a platform or base called 'Adhisthana' (among other terms of various languages), which adds to its height.
8. Vahana: The mount or vehicle of a deity serves the function of binding a God's or Goddess's power. The Vahana also represents the devotee's mind, which the deity guides.

#### **Geographical Distribution**

##### **Central India**

Khajuraho Temple: A Jain temple at Chhatarpur city in Madhya Pradesh.

The temple is made of sandstone. There are three parts of the temple:

1. Garbhagriha
2. Mandapa
3. Ardhamandapa

The temple was made in the 10<sup>th</sup> CE by the Chandela Dynasty, which reached its apogee between 950 and 1050 CE. Only about 20 temples remain; they fall into three different groups and belong to two different religions – Hinduism and Jainism. Panchayatana style is used here. This type of temple has a central temple at the centre and four other temples on its four sides. [7]

Some temples of Khajuraho are:

1. Kandariya Mahadeva temple is the biggest one.
2. Lakshmana temple
3. Chausath Yogini temple.

#### **Western India (Solanki School)**

Those temple follows 'Maru-Gurjar' style. Maru Gujar architecture, Chalukya style, or Solanki style is a style of North Indian temple architecture that originated in Gujarat and Rajasthan from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> CE under the Chalukya dynasty or Solanki dynasty. The external walls of the have been structured by increasing numbers of projection and recesses, accommodating sharply carved statues in niches. These are normally positioned in a superimposed register above the lower band of mouldings. The latter displays

continuous lines of horse riders, elephants and kirtimukhas. Hardly any segment of the surface is left unadorned.

Kirtimukha is the name of a fierce monster face with huge fangs and a gaping mouth, very common in the iconography of Hindu temple architecture in India and Southeast Asia, and often also found in Buddhist architecture.

Those types of temples are usually made of sandstone and black basalt.

Example

1. Jain temple in Mount Abu (Ratanpur in Rajasthan) made in 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> CE.
2. Modhera Sun Temple (made by the Solanki dynasty) is famous for its triangular pond.

Eastern India (Kalinga/Odisha temples)

1. Kamakhya temple (shakti pith), Assam, made in the 17<sup>th</sup> CE.
2. Odishan temple. In Odisha, shikaras are known as Rekhadelus.

EXAMPLE

1. Konark Sun Temple: The temple is also known as “Black Pagoda”. It was made in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE by Narsimha Deva of the eastern Ganga dynasty. It becomes UNESCO World Heritage site in 1984. The Konark is the third link of Odisha’s Golden Triangle. Three links of the Golden Triangle are: 1. Puri Jagannath temple, 2. Bhubaneswar Lingaraj Temple, 3. Konark Sun Temple. The Konark, known as Black Pagoda due to its black colour.
2. Puri Jagannath temple: Puri is one of the ‘Chardham’. It was made in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE by King Ananta Varman Chodagang Deva of eastern Ganga dynasty. [7]

Hilly Region

Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, etc., are under the hilly region. Taxila, Peshawar and the Northwest Frontier-Gandhara style. This type of temple has its own style of wooden buildings with pitched roofs.

Main part: Garbhagriha

Shikhara: Latina style

Mandapa: An older form of wooden architecture.

The temples are pagoda shaped temple. The Karkota period of Kashmir is very important for this type of temple architecture. [1]

EXAMPLE

1. Pandretan Temple
2. Lakshmana Devi Temple 3
3. Jageshwara Temple of Almorha
4. Champwat near Pithoragarh.

Some Temples as an Example

Konark Sun Temple: The word ‘Konark’ is made with two words, Kon’ and ‘Ark’. The word ‘Kon’ means angel, and ‘Ark’ means the sun. The temple is also known as the ‘Black Pagoda’. The temple follows the Kalinga type of architecture. The architect was Bishu Maharana. The kalasha of the temple was placed by Bishu Maharana’s twelve-year-old son Dharma.

Some important characteristics

1. The temple faces east; the first rays of the sun enter the sanctuary.
2. Impact of southern style, construction in dry masonry can be witnessed.
3. Courtyard complex is 856 ft.\* 540 ft., having 3 gateways in a ruined state.

4. Complex has other shrines also, together with the sun temple and some sculpture work of architectural importance.
5. Jagamohan is (Jagamohan is an assembly hall in the Hindu temple architecture, especially in Odisha) 100 feet square with an internal space of approximately 57 feet and a height of 100 feet. 6. Sculptures are carved on a monumental scale.
6. Nat mandir is detached by 30 feet and intricately carved.
7. Jagamohan is pyramidal in 3 tiers and is achieved by the corbelling technique (Corbel, in architecture, a bracket or weight-carrying member, built deeply into the wall so that the pressure on its embedded portion counteracts any tendency to overturn or fall outward). The pyramidal roof is approximately 54 feet high with an amalaka 39 feet in diameter and 24 feet high. Iron clamps or large sections were used to hold together stone pieces.
8. Temple is perceived as a chariot of the Sun God, having 7 horses and 12 pairs of gigantic wheels, attached to the base pedestal. Wheels give the structure the appearance of a vehicle. A flight of steps leads to the temple, guided by lions.
9. Now there is no roof on the sanctuary and the Nat mandir. All the 3 structures lie on the same axis. [2]

**2. Khajuraho Groups of Temples:** The temples were made between the 10th CE and the 11th CE. The temples are unique in character and represent a beautiful composition.

Some important characteristics

1. The building components are in Northern style, i.e., the Nagara style, having components, namely the garbhagriha, mandapa, ardha mandapa, antarala and maha mandapa, each having its separate roof tapering upwards, towards the sky, pointing towards the divine power and residence of Gods.
2. The structure together stands on a raised platform.
3. The main shikara is the most attractive element in itself, produced by repetitive shikaras of miniature scale protruding from all directions, surrounding the main shikara at different levels. This makes its shikara distinct in style from earlier shikaras.
4. The base is on a firm, rigid platform, as was the practice and has horizontal bands that run across the whole perimeter, creating an amazing, attractive effect.
5. The shikaras are in typical northern style, with convexity in elevation.
6. The temple has an entrance from the eastern side, as usual. But unlike the Odishan group of temples, these have richly carved interiors with geometrical patterns.
7. The temple elevation is also enriched with window openings to bring light into the interiors. [2]

### Some Temple of Hilly Region

**Pandretan Temple:** Pandretan Temple, locally known as 'Panni Mandir', is about 5 km from Srinagar city. The temple is an ancient stone temple dedicated to lord Vishnu that lies within a square-shaped tank to the north of the Jhelum River at Srinagar. The ancient temple was built by Meru Vardhan, minister to King Partha, who ruled Kashmir from 921-931 AD. The temple is a great example of Kashmiri temple architecture.

Architecture

The Pandretan temple is a piece of excellence and a showcase of skilled labour that is involved in building this masterpiece. The roof of the temple was carved out of a single piece of rock and is known for its impressive designs and illustrations. The domed roof and arches of the temple are the best example of classic Kashmiri architecture. The temple houses several deities. Most of the images present in the temple

premises belong to lord Shiva. Some images are three-headed, out of which two symbolise male and the third represents female. The two structures are separated by a colossal Buddhist image. A pillar with figures on four sides is also present in the temple complex. The images of the female deities include Ganga, Chamunda, Vaishnavi, Varachi and Indrani. Most of these images are multi-armed and are presented in various forms and postures.

**Lakshmana Devi Temple:** The Lakshmana Devi temple in Bharmour is a post-Gupta era Hindu temple in Himachal Pradesh dedicated to Durga in her Mahishasura-mardini form. It is dated to the second half of the 7th century, and is in part one of the oldest surviving wooden temple in India.

#### Architecture

The temple shows the Gupta era architecture and artwork in wood. It faces north, and it currently has a rectangular plan with about 11.6 metres(38ft) external length and 8.73metres(28.6ft) width. The temple sits on a square wooden Jagathy, about 0.45metres (1ft 6 inches) above the ground. The earlier versions of the temple had a combination of weight-bearing wood and non-weight-bearing stone walls. The external wall of the temple was later plastered with mud, reaching a current thickness of about 0.85metres (2ft 9 inches). It is similar to the late Gupta style, with three parallel panels surrounding the doorway flanked by river Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. Above the Gupta era-style carved temple entrance doorway is a triangular pediment. It has an ardha-mandapa, a mukhya-mandapa, a circumambulation path and a rectangular sanctum, about 3.61metres (11.8ft). The roof projection to act as a canopy was added by the Archaeological Survey of India to protect the Gupta-era-style wood carvings. Its roof and walls have been repaired over the centuries, and it looks like a hut. [4]

**Jageshwar Temple:** Jageshwar temples, also referred to as Jageswar temples or Jageswar valley temples, are a group of 124 ancient Hindu temples dated between 7th and 14th CE near Almorha, in the Himalayan Indian state of Uttarakhand. The valley has several temple clusters, such as the Dandeshwar and Jageswar sites. Some locations have attracted the construction of new temples through the 20th CE. Together, these clusters over the valley consist of over 200 structural temples built from cut stone. Many are small, while a few are substantial. The predominantly illustrated North Indian Nagara style of architecture, with a few exceptions that show South and Central Indian style designs, many are dedicated to lord Shiva, while others in the immediate vicinity are dedicated to Vishnu, Shakti Goddesses and Surya traditions of Hinduism.

**Champwat Temple:** Champwat (Uttarakhand) is believed to be the place where the Kurmavatar (the turtle incarnation of lord Vishnu) took place. These days, there is a temple called Kranteshwar Mandir, which is dedicated to lord Shiva. It is also believed that the head of Ghatotkacha (son of the second Pandava Bhima and Rakshasi Hidimba) fell here after he died in the battle of Kurukshetra. The Ghatku mandir is the temple dedicated to Ghatotkacha. There is a famous temple called the Shani mandir (or Manokamna purn mandir Kaula) in the village of Maurari. The original name of Champwat is said to be Champavati, which was due to its location on the banks of the Champavati stream. Champavati was the capital of the nine kings of the Puri Naga dynasty. There are seven ancient temples in the valley of the Champavati stream: Baleshwar, Kranteshwar, Tadkeshwar, Rishneswar, Diketshwar, Mallareshwar and Maneshwar, of which the Baleshwar temple is considered to be the most important.

#### Important Characteristics

It was constructed in brick and terracotta panels. The temple stands on a high plinth. Entrance is from the east and is approached by steps. It is an earlier example of a mandapa. Garbhagriha is a square of 15 ft side. The shikara (now vanished practically) was perhaps of the pyramidal shape. An arch was attempted

to mark the entrance, perhaps for the first time in India, which now stands ruined. Remains of terracotta figures/relief work can be witnessed on the walls. No windows can be seen on the façade.

### **DRAVIDIAN STYLE (SOUTHERN STYLE) TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE**

Dravidian-style temple architecture emerged in South India and Sri Lanka between the 7th and 16th centuries CE.

Some Important Features:

1. Enclosed with a compound wall named 'Gopuram'.
2. Vimana looks like a stepped pyramid.
3. Sculpture: Fierce Dwarapalas or doorkeepers are commonly seen.
4. There is usually a water reservoir or temple tank.
5. Subsidiary shrines cooperated with the main temple.

During the 8th -12th CE, these temples were not only used for religious matter but also they are used as rich administrative centres of the country. The Tamil country was earlier known as Dravidadesh. Hence, the style that developed in those regions is popularly known as the Dravidian style of architecture.

Percy Brown, in his book 'Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu)', illustrates that the South Indian architecture is divided based on 5 kingdoms:

1. Pallavas – 600-900 AD
2. Cholas – 900-1150 AD
3. Pandyas – 1100-1350 AD
4. Vijayanagar – 1350-1565 AD
5. Madura – from 1600 AD

Pallava Dynasty (600-900 AD)

Architectural feature

1. The cella and the main portico are joined mainly by a wall with pilaster work. Niches thus created have relief work.
2. The capitals are broad, having curvilinear brackets.
3. Lintels and eaves are part of the roof.
4. The tower now is pyramidal in form with mostly straight lines, over the cella.
5. The word is employed only for the top storey of the pyramid.
6. The top resembled either the dome-like stupa or chaitya halls of the Buddhist style of architecture.
7. The tower has a different number of storeys with pavilions on a miniature scale. This adds visual thrust to the elevation.

Classification of Pallava-style temple architecture

1. Mahendravarman Group: Duration – 600-625 AD Example: Mahendravadi temple
2. Narasimha or Mammala Group: Duration – 625-674 AD Example: Panchyapandapa Rathas.
3. Rajashima Group: Duration – 674-800 AD (Narasimha 2 was known as Rajashima)

Example

1. Kailashnath temple
2. The Shore Temple of Mahabalipuram
3. Nandivarman Group: Duration – 800-900 AD

Example

1. Vaikuntaperumal temple

## 2. Mukteswara temple [3,6]

Chola Dynasty (900-1150 AD)

Architectural features

In its first part, small temples were built.

Example

1. Vijayalaya Cholisvara temple
2. Brahmapurisvara temple

After the 11th century CE, in its second part, large temples were built. [6,7]

Example

1. Brihadeswar temple Tanjore
2. Rajarajeswara temple. This temple was also known as Rajaraja Chola. Pandya Dynasty (1100-1350AD)

Architectural Features

Rock-cut and structural temples are a significant part of Pandyan art and architecture. The vimana and mandapa are some of the features of the early Pandyan temples. A group of small temples are seen in the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. The Shiva temples have a Nandi bull sculpture in front of the maha mandapa. In the later stages of the Pandyas rule, finely sculptured idols, gopurams on the vimanas were developed. Gopurams are the rectangular entrances and portals of the temples.

Example

1. Kalugunmalai temple complex (768- 800 CE)
2. Nellaippar temple
3. Meenakshi Amman temple
4. Sittanavasal cave
5. Srivilliputhur Andal temple
6. Nataraja temple, Chidambaram
7. Ranganatha Swamy Temple

Vijayanagar Dynasty (1350-1565 AD)

Architectural Features

Vijayanagar architecture of 1336-1565 CE was a notable building idiom that developed during the rule of the imperial Hindu Vijayanagar Empire. The empire ruled South India from its regal capital at Vijayanagar, on the banks of the Tungabhadra River in the modern Karnataka state of India. The empire-built temples, monuments, palaces and other structures across South India, with the largest concentration in its capital. The monuments in and around Hampi, in the Vijayanagar principality, are listed as a UNESCO WORLD Heritage Site. Vijayanagar temples are surrounded by strong enclosures and characterised by ornate pillared kalyanamandapa (marriage hall), tall rayagopurams (Carved monumental towers at the entrance of the temple) built of wood, brick and stucco in the Chola style, and adorned with life-sized figures of Gods and Goddesses. The Dravida style became popular during the reign of Krishna Deva Raya and is seen in South Indian temples constructed over the next two centuries. Vijayanagar temples are also known for their carved pillars, which depict horses, figures from Hindu mythology, and yali (hippogryphs). Some of the larger temples exemplifying the Vijayanagar style include the Virupaksha temple at Hampi and the Hazara Rama temple of Deva RAYA I. [3,5,7]

Sculpture

Sculpture was integrally linked with architecture in the creation of Vijayanagar temples. Large life-size

figures of men, women, Gods and Goddesses adorn the gopuram of many Vijayanagar temples. Another element of Vijayanagar style is the carving and consecration of large monolithic statues, such as Sasivekalu Ganesha and Kadalekalu Ganesha at Hampi; the Gommateshvara (Bahubali) monolithic in Karnataka and Venure; and the Nandi bull in Lepakshi.

Example

1. Virupaksha temple (14th -16th)
2. Hazara Rama (1460-1542)
3. Chandikeshwara (1545)
4. Kallina Ratha (1529-1546)
5. Someshwara (16th CE)

Madura Style Temple Architecture (1600 AD)

Architectural Features

The culmination of Dravidian style is seen in the period of the Nayak Rulers of Madurai, who also continued the building style and technique of the Pandyas and improved on it. The notable features of the Nayak architecture are the hundred-pillared mandapas, the lofty gopurams embellished with figures in their minute detail, the closed prakarmas with huge pillars on either side, the beautiful corbel brackets as in the Ramanatha temple in Rameswaram and full-sized figures of animals and riders on rearing horses in the Srirangam temple. The best examples of this style are seen in the temple of Madurai and the surrounding areas. The Madura style, as it is called, is marked by high concentric boundary walls around the temples, intervening courtyards called prakarmas which contain pillared halls, store rooms, other smaller shrines and square water tanks for ritual baths. The tank is surrounded by a pillared cloister and has steps leading down to the water. [4]

Example

1. Vishnu or Ranganath (Tiruchirappalli)
2. The Shiva temple (Chidambaram)
3. The Meenakshi temple (Madurai)

Some Temples as Examples

**Mahendravadi:** The Mahendravadi rock cut cave temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to lord Vishnu, located at Mahendravadi village in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. This rock-cut temple was constructed by Mahendravarman 1. The sanctum houses an image of lord Narasimha. Among the seven rock-cut caves accompanying the inscription of Mahendravarman 1. Mahendra-Vishnugriha is the lone rock-cut cave temple dedicated to Vishnu (Murari). The inscription in the Mahendra-Vishnugriha (Mahendravadi) mentions the presence of Mahendra-Thataka (Mahendra Lake) around Mahendravadi.

**Panchyapandapa Rathas (Mahabalipuram):** Panchyapandapa Rathas, known as the five Rathas of Pandava. It is a monumental complex at Mahabalipuram, on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, in the Kanchipuram district of the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Pancha Rathas is an example of monolithic Indian rock-cut architecture. The complex was carved during the reign of King Narasimha Varman (630-668 AD); the idea of realising monolithic buildings, an innovation in Indian architecture, is attributed to this ruler. The monoliths are named after the Pandavas – Arjuna, Bhima, Yudhishtira (Dharmaraja), Nakul, Sahadeva and Draupadi. These names are considered to be a misrepresentation as the structures have no link to the iconic character of the Mahabharata epic.

**Design:** The structural design and elevation are with towers or domes with single (ekthala) to triple (trithala) towers, which present a unique exhibition of South Indian Dravidian architecture. The chiselling

done by the stone sculptures is occasional along joints between the sequentially partitioned. The projections and recesses in these walls give the appearance of a set of shallow pilasters. The niches created in the walls are of rectangular shape and have carved sculptures of Gods and the kings. The skirting around the images is of wild aquatic animals with “foliated tail and open jaws”.

**Shore temple of Mahabalipuram:** The shore temple (c.725 AD) is a complex of temple and shrines that overlooks the shore of the Bay of Bengal. It is a structural temple, built with blocks of granite, dating from the 8th century AD. At the time of creation, the site was a busy port during the reign of Narasimha 2 of the Pallava dynasty. As one of the Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram, it has been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1984. It is one of the oldest structural (versus rock-cut) stone temples of South India.

**Kailashnath temple, Kanchi:** The Kailashnath temple, also referred to as the Kailasnathar temple, is a Pallava-era historic Hindu temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India. It is dedicated to lord Shiva. It was built about 700 CE by Rajashima (Nagashima 2) with additions by Mahendra 3. A square plan temple, it has a mukhya-mandapa (entrance hall), a maha-mandapa (gathering hall) and a primary garbhagriha (sanctum) topped with a four-storey vimana. The main sanctum is surrounded by nine shrines, seven outside and two inside flanking the entrance of the sanctum, all with forms of Shiva. The outer walls of the temples' prakara (courtyards) are also surrounded by cells.

**Vaikunda Perumal temple, Uthiramerur:** The Vaikunda Perumal temple in Uthiramerur, a village in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, is dedicated to the Hindu God Vishnu. The temple is constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture. Vishnu is worshipped as Vaikunda Perumal and his consort Lakshmi as Anandavali. The temple was originally built by the Pallavas. The temple has a 1000-pillared hall, each pillar having a statue carved on it. The complex/boundary wall has a pillared corridor on the inner side. The lion is a repetitive figure in the complex, especially in the columns. The arrangement for circumambulation is similar to that of the Stupa at SANCHI. The tower is tiered into 4 levels, with a gallery at each level.

**Rameswaram or Ramanathswamy temple:** The Ramanathswamy temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to the God Shiva, located on Rameswaram island in the state of Tamil Nadu. It is also one of the twelve Jyotirlinga temples.

#### Architecture

1. The complex has 2 shrines enclosure measures 880 ft.\*672 ft.
2. The most attractive feature is the columned corridors of 17 ft.-20 ft. wide, around the main shrine.
3. The external wall enclosing the complex is 25 ft. high. Gopuram at the main entrance is 150 ft. high, having 2 storeys.
4. The complex has other structures together with the shrines. The temple has 22 wells, and it is said that each tastes different from the other.

**Mukteswara temple:** The Mukteswara temple is a 10th-century CE Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. It has an inscription dating back to the time of Nandivarman. The temple has been built in a mixed style of architecture on a raised platform. The small but magical temple has sculptures and carvings on its walls to rival the finest workmanship of that period. The temple consists of the sanctum and the mukhya mandapa. Enriched in the sanctum and the carvings of lord Shiva, Mata Parvati and Kartik Swamy. Two Dwarapalas can be seen on the side of Somaskanda. The walls of the sanctum have carvings of various Devatas on them.

**Brahmapureswara temple:** The temple of Brahmapureswara is a Hindu temple located in Trichy, India. There are includes the garden adjacent to the temple. These Shiva lingams were installed and worshipped by lord Brahma. Most of these Shiv lingams are housed in separate shrines, which are situated around the Brahma Theertham. Brahma Theertham is the pond from which lord Brahma took water for performing puja to lord Shiva. The temple complex also has the Jeeva Samadhi of Yogi Patanjali, the author of Yoga Sutras and the father of Ayurveda.

**Brihadeswar temple:** The Brihadeswar temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in south bank of the Cauvery River in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, India. It is called as Dakshin Meru (south point). It was built by Chola king Rajaraja Chola between 1003 and 1010 AD.

**Architecture:** The Brihadeswar temple is planned, and development utilises the axial and symmetrical geometry rules. It is classified as Perunkoli (also called Madakoli), a big temple built on a higher platform of a natural or man-made mound. The temple complex is a rectangle that is almost two stacked squares, covering 240.79 metres. The temple is also called the Rajrajeshvara temple. Two-columned mandapas stand with a porch. The main tower of the temple consists of three important parts: the square base is 82 ft. side and 50ft high, the tapering pyramid is in 13 tiers, and the third part is a domical top. The tower is 190 ft. high. Overhangs and balconies projected mark the horizontality, which is broken away by the vertical pilasters with sculpture work. The Nandi pavilion is a simple elevated platform with columns supporting the flat-roof mandapa and is approached by a flight of steps. The roof has overhanging eaves. This pavilion was added in the 16th century CE. Sculptures include Dwarapalas and lord Shiva in various postures.

**Meenakshi Amman temple:** Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple is a historic Hindu temple located on the southern bank of the Vaigai River in the temple city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu. It is dedicated to the Goddess Meenakshi, a form of Parvati and her consort, Sundareshwar, a form of Shiva. The temple also has numerous pillared halls called 'mandapams'. Two principal sanctuaries (accessible only by Hindu) sit at the centre of the temple complex: one dedicated to Meenakshi and another dedicated to Sundareshwarar. The massive towers or gopurams, which are actually entry gates, are marked on the plan above as black rectangles. There are fourteen gopurams roughly oriented to the cardinal direction and flanking either the temple of Meenakshi or Sundareshwarar or the entire walled compound. The multitude of brightly-coloured figures excites some visitors and repels others. Likely, most Hindu temples (just like their ancient Greek and Egyptian counterparts) were painted in vibrant hues, and many are still today. The temples, shrines, pillars, sculptures and paintings are populated with a dazzling quantity of divine beings who engage in various activities, can manifest multiple guises and places simultaneously, and are subject to dissolution and rebirth.

**Nataraja Chidambaram temple:** Nataraja Chidambaram temple, also known as Thillai Nataraja temple, is a Hindu temple dedicated to lord Shiva-Nataraja as the lord of dance. The temple has ancient root and a Shiva shrine existed at the site when the town was known as Thillai. The nine gateways denote the nine orifices in the human body. The gopuram on the east side has 108 postures of Indian dance, 'Bharatnatyam'. Entrance is through 4 gopurams on 4 sides of the enclosure. Lower storeys of the gopuram are rectangular in granite having passageways at the ground floor. Other structures in the complex are the Parvati temple, shrines for 63 prime devotees of lord Shiva, lord Ganesha, etc. There are five sabhas/halls, including the main sanctum. The natya sabha and the hall of 1000 pillars.

**Virupaksha temple:** The Virupaksha temple in Hampi is dedicated to lord Shiva. The distance from Bangalore to Hampi is 350 KM. Hampi is a temple town of South India and is acknowledged as one of

the World Heritage Sites of UNESCO. This temple was constructed with the assistance of Lakkana Dandesha, who was a commander under King Deva Raya 2. The Virupaksha temple's chronicle is unremitting from around the seventh century. The temple has a shrine or a holy place of worship, a hall with several pillars and 3 antechambers. There are courtyards, a pillared monastery, a few small shrines, and entrance ways surrounding the temple. Among all the gateways, the eastern gateway is the greatest. It is nine-tiered and 50 metres in length. It is well built and has some previous structures. The framework is of brick and includes a gravel base, giving way to the court outside. This court contains various sub-sanctum. The inner eastern gopurams are graced with three storeys, while the northern gopuram has five storeys. The Kanakagiri gopuram towards the north takes the tourists to a little enclosure with a supplementary sanctum. A renowned Vijayanagar King, Krishna Deva Raya, was a contributor to the temple. It is believed that the main pillared hall, which is the most adorned structure of this temple, is in addition. There is a stone slab beside the hall that has an inscription that explains his offerings for the temple. Surrounding the Virupaksha temple are plenty of dilapidated mandapams. There was an ancient shopping centre interlined with mandapams in front of this temple.

Ranganath temple: The Ranganath temple is constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture; the temple complex is massive in scale and spread over 156 acres. According to some scholars, this makes Sri Ranganathaswamy temple the largest functioning temple in the world and is often found ranked amongst the largest religious complexes of the world, including the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet; Angkor Wat in Cambodia; Borobudur in Indonesia; Machu Picchu in Peru and the Vatican City. Apart from the 7 prakarmas with massive walls, the temple complex has 21 very colourful sculpted gopurams, 50 sub shrines, 9 sacred pools, a gilded vimana over the sanctum, sanctorum of the presiding deity and other interesting features such as fresco paintings. Another unique feature of the Srirangam temple-cum-township-lay-out is that starting with the eastern outer wall of the sanctuary. There are consecrated mini-mandapas housing the blessed feet of the lord in collinear formation through the seven enclosures. The inner three enclosures taken together, with the Aryabhata and the Parama-pada gates defining the south-north axis, constitute the inner court and the entire outer area occupied by the rest of the enclosure is known as the outer court. Evidences prove the origin of the temple in the 1st CE during the Sangam period (3rd BCE- 45th BCE)

### **VESARA OR DECCAN STYLE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE (CENTRAL INDIA)**

The Vesara style is a mix of the Nagara style and Dravida style. The Vesara style became popular in the 7th -8th CE. In the Deccan plateau, Karnataka witnessed the transition from rock-cut to the structural temples, which began to be constructed during the Chalukyan period. There are contrasting examples of Nagara as well as Dravidian style. [2,7]

Some Important Features of Vesara Architecture

1. Combination of features of Nagara and Dravida style.
2. More ornamental and decorative
3. The tower used repeatedly was an ornamental structure.
4. In the border areas between the two major styles, particularly in the modern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, there was a stylistic overlap of architectural features.
5. Hoysala plans are star-shaped. A typical example is the Hoysala temple with ornate carving. It is an important feature that created a distinct sub-regional group.

The Hoysalas built a large number of temples in the Mysore territory, which exhibit an amazing display of sculpture exuberance. The most typical and well-known examples are the Keshava temple at Somnathpur, the Chenna Keshava at Belur and the Hoyalesvara at Halebid (Dvarasamudra). Commenting on the temple at Halebid, Ferguson, an authority on Eastern as well as Western architecture, observes that, like the Parthenon in Athens, it is the best example of its class. 'The Parthenon represents the best in human intellect, the Hoysalesvara the best in human feeling'. Also, the Kakatiyas built many temples at Hammakonda, Palampeta, Pillalamari and several other places. Roman merchants and businessmen built a temple of Augustus at Muziris.

Some temples as Examples

**Ravana Phadi Cave:** The Ravana Phadi is one of the oldest rock-cut cave temples in Aihole. The temple dates to the 6th-century architecture of the Chalukyan dynasty. Ravana Phadi cave temple is a Shiva temple, which houses a Shivalinga in the inner sanctum. The interiors of Ravana Phadi are filled with carvings depicting Hindu mythologies. A big, colossal pillar placed on a quadrangular base is located in front of the entrance hall to the temple. There is also a figure of Nandi-bull. There are more over the entrance area is ornamented with stone carved columns. There are artworks of well-built deities on the sides of the entrance, which probably depict the sentinel of wealth, Kubera. There is a rectangular hallway inside the cave, known as a mandapa, which appears even bigger than the hallways of the Badami Cave Temples. The ceiling is decorated with a big carved lotus that is intricately detailed. There are two chambers on the sides of the Mandapa. On the left side, some stairs lead to one of the chambers that contains a stunning artwork of lord Shiva in Nataraja incarnation. Beyond the mandapa, there are more stairs that lead to a smaller chamber that contains beautiful artworks on the side walls. Some pillars are decorated with carvings of Apsaras. 3 access points lead to the most important shrine, where a lingam of lord Shiva is located.

**Lad Khan temple:** The Lad Khan temple is the most ancient Hindu temple located at Bangalkot, Aihole in the state of Karnataka, India. The temple was made in the 5th CE. It is dedicated to lord Shiva. It is located in the same complex having Durga temple and many other shrines. Some temple in the complex has an SI roof pattern. The temple has a rectangular porch with sloping slabs, and timber details of that roof are copied. The main hall is 50 ft. square. A stone jail/screen is employed for admitting light. Entrance from the eastern side is through open pillared porch. Internal space is a pillared hall having 2 aisles and a cella/garbhagriha. The capitals and columns are interesting features. Columns topper towards the top with a capital and an abacus above it. These are intricately carved with a sloping roof at a lower level and a flat roof on a raised cuboid at the upper level. The construction is in dry masonry, and wooden joinery details are copied beautifully. It is constructed in the Panchayatana style of architecture. The shrine has a garbhagriha (inner sanctum), which leads to the Sabha Mandapa. There is also a Maha mandapa (great hall) with open windows. The Mukhya mandapa is a pillared hall, whereas the other halls are spacious. There are a large number of sculptures on the pillars and the koshtas. Numerous sculptures of amorous couples and the jalandhars are very eye-catching. The roof of the mandapa has a naga holding a lotus. The upper garbhagriha wall has niches in which are found sculptures of Vishnu, Surya and Shiva. Bearing in mind all the architectural features, the Lad Khan temple is considered to represent an important stage in the development of early Chalukyan art. The temple is called Lad Khan because an attacker with this name lived in this temple, and consequently, the local populace began to call it so.

**Durga temple, Aihole:** The Durga temple is an early 8th-century Hindu temple located in Aihole, Karnataka, India. Originally dedicated to Surya. Apart from its fine carvings, it is notable for its apsidal

plan (In architecture, an apse is a semi-circular recess covered with a hemispherical vault or semi-dome, also known as an exedra) rare example among early Chalukyan Hindu temple architecture. Though dedicated to Surya, the temple is now named Durga because a durg or fortified lookout was constructed on top of it after the 13th century during the wars between Hindu kingdoms and Islamic Sultanates. The Durga temple has an apsidal plan for its sanctum, one that fuses with a square plan for the mandapa. It is the largest plan for the mandapa. It is the largest of a group of over 120 temples at Aihole and illustrates a mature example of the Badami Chalukya architecture. Garbhagriha is in a semi-circular end, thus forming the apsidal end of the temple plan with a pradakshina path around. A columned veranda exists around the building. Stone grilles are employed around the building. Stone grilles are employed for the intake of light to interiors. Walls of the sanctuary have niches with sculpture and are richly carved. The pediment has gavaksha in the NI style, and the roof is in the SI style. The tower above the main shrine is incomplete, but still shows that it is a shikhara having gavaksha motifs and corner amalakas. The shafts/pillars at the entrance are carved beautifully with supporting brackets. Sculptures include Durga, Shiva, and Nandi in different postures. Philip Harding elaborates on how the architecture may have constructed the temple using principles of geometry and late 7th-century tools.

**Pattadakal temple:** Pattadakal, also called Pattadakallu or Raktapura, is a complex of 7th and 8th-century CE Hindu and Jain temples in northern Karnataka (India). Pattadakal (place of coronation) was considered a holy place, where the Malaprabha river turned northwards towards the Himalayas and the Kailash Mountain (Uttara-vahini). It was used during the Chalukya dynasty for coronation ceremonies, such as that of Vinayaditya in the 7th CE. The Pattadakal monuments reflect a fusion of two major Indian architectural styles, one from North India (Rekha-Nagara-Prasada) and the other from South India (Dravida-Vimana). Four temples were built in the Chalukya Dravida style, four in the Nagara style of Northern India, while the Papanatha temple is a fusion of the two. The nine Hindu temples are all dedicated to Shiva and are on the banks of the Malaprabha River. The temple structures were built using the sandstone found abundantly locally at Pattadakal. Some of the sculptures are carved from polished black granite. It even found a mention in Ptolemy's Geography in the 2nd CE.

**Halebid temple or Hoysalehwara temple:** The Hoysalehwara temple, also referred to as simply the Halebid temples is a 12th-century CE Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva. The Hoysalehwara temple, also Spelt as Hoysalesvara temple, is a twin-temple. The two temples are of the same size and their sanctums open to the east, facing sunrise. The sanctum of the "Hoysalehwara" (the king) and that of "Shantaleswara" (the queen Shantala Devi) both have a Shiva-Linga. Outside on the east side of the main temples are two smaller shrines, each with a seated Nandi. To the east of the southern Nandi shrine, there is a 7 ft. (2.1m.) tall Surya statue facing Nandi and the sanctum. Entrance to the temple is via a flight of steps, leading to a doorway. The structure stands on a platform /base 5 ft. high, with horizontal bands of carvings. The doorway is simple, having carved Dwarapalas on each side and a carved lintel. Interiors have closely spaced columns with heavy bracket capitals. Pillared hall/mandapa is a detached building. Perforated jaliworks patterns can be witnessed in elevation, between the carved columns. Sculptures include carving of elephants, lions, horsemen, scenes from war, etc. Carving is also done on frizzes, cornices, etc. The sculptures are intricately carved, showing details to close perfection. [6,7]

**Somnathpur Temple:** The Somnathpur temple, located on the left bank of the Cauvery River, is a palace not to be missed on the road to Mysore. This grey stone sanctuary, built on a surprising star-shaped platform, is certainly the best ambassador of Hoysala architecture with Belur and Halebidu. Somnathpur temple, also called Prasana Chennakeshava, is another breathtaking shrine erected by Hoysala rulers. It

was built in 1268 CE, Somnath, the illustrious general of King Hoysala Narasimha 3. Like all Hoysalas temples, this one is also built on an elevated star-shaped platform (jagati). This soap-stone temple is richly carved, among others, with frizzes from the Indian epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the childhood of lord Krishna. The pillars of the mandala inside the temple are lathe-turned, a characteristic feature of the Hoysala style. It boasts three interconnected inner sanctums on the west, south and north sides, dedicated to Keshava (the beautiful Krishna), Venugopal (Krishna as a flute player) and Janardan (the protector), three different aspects of the lord Vishnu. Another feature of this temple is its ceiling divided into 16 finely carved symmetrical squares, some of which represent the lotus flower at different stages of blooming.

Chennakeshava temple, Belur: The Chennakeshava temple, also referred to as Keshava or Vijayanarayana temple of Belur, is a 12th-century Hindu temple in Hassan district of Karnataka. It was commissioned by King Vishnuvardhana in 1117 CE, on the banks of the Yagachi River in Belur, also called Velapura, an early Hoysala empire capital. The temple was built over three generations and took 103 years to finish. Chennakeshava (lit 'handsome' Keshava) is a form of the Hindu God Vishnu. It is estimated that the temple initially had a tower in the Bhumija style. The structure is approached by 2 flights of steps with small temple-like structures having shikaras on both sides. The plan of the garbhagriha is star-shaped/stellate. It is a 16-pointed star. There is a platform in a star shape surrounding the temple structure, following the star-shaped profile of the plan. The mandapa is a pillared hall. Jaliwork is employed for light intake in the interiors. Sculpture includes those of lord Vishnu, Shiva, Kali, Ganesh, Dwarapalas, etc. There is intricate sculpture work on the frizzes. No part of the elevation is left blank.

Kailashnath temple, Ellora: The Kailasha or Kailashnath temple is the largest of the rock-cut Hindu temples at the Ellora Caves, Aurangabad district, Maharashtra, India. Its construction is generally attributed to the Rashtrakuta King Krishna I. It represents a typical Dravidian temple. It is the largest monolithic temple in India, carved out of basalt stone. It represents the sacred mountain of lord Shiva. There are smaller shrines surrounding the main garbhagriha. There is a small mandapa with 16 columns. Sanctuary is covered with 3-tire tower, which soars upwards in imitation of the mountainous dwelling of Shiva. Each storey is decorated with miniature buildings to represent the homes of Gods, and the stupas at the summit (highest point) follow the precedent set by the Rathas at Mamallapuram. On either side of the main temple of the Kailash complex stand 50 ft. high pillars decorated with relief carvings. These monumental pillars were made by excavation and are monolithic and not created by construction. These pillars are an adaptation of the Ashoka pillars. They also resemble the Obelisks of the Egyptian civilisation. The architect has copied all the details of timber-made structural temple carefully on the façade temple, at the walls having pilasters and parapets with roof top as a stupa (a small representation of stupa form on the top of the tower). Sculpture works include seated lord Shiva and Parvati, Hanuman and scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata.

### Conclusion

Hindu temple architecture stands as one of the most remarkable manifestations of India's civilizational continuity, artistic excellence, and spiritual philosophy. It reflects the highly sophisticated development of building design and planning in ancient times. Textual sources such as the Vastu Shastra and Shilpa Shastra indicate that temples were conceived not merely as devotional structures, but as sacred metaphysical spaces rendered in stone. Their layouts, based on the Vastu Purusha Mandala, geometric grids, axial alignments, and cardinal orientations, illustrate the integration of cosmology with architectural design. The evolution of the Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara styles demonstrates how these foundational principles

were interpreted across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. The shikhara or vimana rising above the sanctum symbolises the cosmic axis (axis mundi), while the garbhagriha, or inner sanctum, represents the womb-chamber of creation, reinforcing the temple's role as a metaphysical centre. The geographical distribution of these styles reveals the profound interaction between environment, local craftsmanship, dynastic patronage, and religious expression. In contemporary discourse, the study of Hindu temple architecture remains essential for understanding India's cultural heritage and architectural evolution. By examining stylistic diversity alongside conceptual unity, this paper underscores the enduring significance of temple architecture as both a sacred institution and a monumental achievement in the history of world architecture.

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