RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE IN THE MATSYAPURANA: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The early references on Indian architecture come from religious texts such as Vedas, Puranas, Epics etc. These texts are also important for making the early history of India. In Vedic literature there are some references to architecture which were related to dwelling houses, not the religious architecture. References to religious architecture are mainly found in the Puranas. Religious architecture means here, the structure used only for religious purposes or where the images of Gods and Goddess were placed and worshipped. The present paper deals with the evidences of religious architecture in the Matsyapurana and tries to find out the features of this architecture. Religious architecture has got more emphasis in this paper, because there are references in Matsyapurana about 'Pithikas'(platform of the image or Garbha), 'Prasada'(Sanctum) and 'Mandapa'(Pillared Hall). These are similar to a temple or Devalaya. The present work tries to show the fine description of temple in the Puranic tradition according to the textual references of Matsyapurana. Chapters 252 to 270 in Matsyapurana give light on architecture. Matsyapurana is one of the early puranas among the 18 Mahapuranas. It is also important for North Indian Vastushastra. Even though art and architecture is not amongst the 10 major characteristics of Puranas, it is still of viable discussion as mentioned in the Puranas in a brief and scattered way. This present discussion will only focus on the architectural description of temples as per chapters 262, 269, and 270 of Matsyapurana.

From the time of Ram-Raz[1], most of the Vāstuvidyā text have been discovered from Southern India. In the Northern India topic related to Vāstuvidyā were found in fragmentary form in the puranas, and a few books of Pratistha class or Nibandhas. Later on, the text fully related to Vāstuvidyā has also been discovered from North India. Samarangana Sutradhara[2] is most remarkable of them but early text or Vāstuvidyā of Northern India are Visvakarma Prakasa, Matsyapurana, and Brihat Samhita. It is very difficult to find which is the earliest amongst these three texts of Vāstuvidyā. According to the texts on the Vāstuvidyā, Tarapada Bhattacharyya makes an

analysis that Visvakarma Prakasa's works were earlier than the other two[3]. Though Visvakarma Prakasa was chronologically the earlier of the other Vāstuvidyā texts of North India, but, the Matsyapurana contains the names of twenty kinds of temples [4], which is the earliest known classification of temples in India[5]. So, as the text of Vāstuvidyā, Matsyapurana gives a narration of temple architecture which is very much important for the study of early Indian temple architecture.

The history of Sanskrit studies shows that the Puranas were neglected for a long time and the credit goes to Wilson and Pergitor, the pioneer works done in this branch[6]. They were the first to bring to light the various kinds of information from the Purana text. Puranas are not only used for the source of comparative studies in mythology, religion, philosophy, fable, legends, etc., but they also give light to several fares of art and cultural life of contemporary people. Over and above, these Puranas are essential for the reconstruction of Indian History. There are eighteen Mahapuranas, namely Vishnupurana, Naradiyapurana, Padmapurana, Garudapurana, Varahapurana, Bhagvatapurana, Matsyapurana, Kurmapurana, Lingapurana, Shivapurana, Skandapurana, Agnipurana, Brahmandapurana, Brahmavaivartapurana, Markandeyapurana, Bhavishyapurana, Brahmapurana, and Vamanapurana. Matsyapurana is one of the three oldest Purana, two others being Brahmandapurana and Vayupurana. Matsyapurana comprises of 291 chapters in 14000 shloks as printed in Ananda Ashrama edition, Poona. There are ten characteristics of Purana which are enlisted below[7]:

Sarga- is dealt with the creation of the Earth.

Visarga- is dealt with the creation of life.

Vritti- is related to the commodity and works necessary for life.

Raksha- is related to the incarnation of god who takes Avatar and protects the Earth and also protects the devotees from suffering.

Antar- is related to the measurement of 'kala' or period. According to Siddhantashiromani, one Antar or Manvantar is equal to 30672000 years. There are 14 Manvantar and each Manvantar has one Manu.

Vamsha- It is dealt with the cronology of kings and those kings are created by the God.

Vamshanacharit- It is dealt with the description of kings, those are mentioned in the Vamsha.

- *Samastha* or *pratisarga*- it means destruction. Everything which is created by the God is the subject of destruction. One day the Earth will also be destroyed by the God which is termed as 'Pralay' in purana.
- *Hetu* –it means cause of creation.
- *Apashray/Ashray*- it is the theory in which the creation and the destruction is included. It is related to the soul and feelings of Brahma or ultimate truth and knowledge.

Apart from the main 10 characteristics of Purana, other issues are also discussed in a brief and scattered way. Even though temple architecture is not directly placed amongst the 10 main chareteristics, it is considered highly influential amongst the other issues raised in Matsyapurana. Amongst the 291 chapters, 18 chapters (252-270) [8] of Matsyapurana deal with the architectural description. These 18 chapters are:

252- dealt with the name of ancient 18 scholar of Vastavidya

253- kala or time of a building or a house or vastu, its measurement, choice of place, etc.

254- technique of building a house and different types of houses.

255- pillar/stambha and door/dvar

256- importance of directions for building of a house or palace

257- description of collecting wood; also mentions how to end the building of a house or palace

258- description and measurement of image

259- characteristic of image

260- description of Ardhanarishwar image

261- different types sacred images

262- *description of pithika or platform or plinth*.

263- characteristic of linga which is placed on pithika

264- description of kunda or sacred pond, measurement of mandap and vedi

265-267- establishment of an image and its ritual works

268- ritual works for any problem of vastu

269- description of prasad or sanctum

270- description of mandapa or the pillared hall in front of the sanctum.

Amongst these 18 chapters, 262, 269, and 270 aremost important for the description of religious architecture.

Religious architecture in this context means the structures used only for religious purposes or where the images or idols of God were placed and worshipped. The present paper deals with the description of religious architecture in Matsyapurana because there are a large number of references in Matsyapurana about Pithikas, Prasada and Mandapa which are similar to the present Mandira or Devalaya. Even though the early reference of architecture in India came from Vedas, the Vedas did not deal with temple architecture as image worship as a tradition was not a part of the Vedic culture. But, the reference of temple architecture comes up much later in the age of the Puranas. Before entering into the main narration of architecture mentioned in the Matsyapurana, it is important to acknowledge about the date and place of Matsyapurana for better understanding of the content.

The place of composition of Matsyapurana is a debatable issue amongst the scholars. According to Haraprasad Shastri[9], the people of Maharashtra composed Matsyapurana (it is mentioned in lines 37-39, in Chapter 114 of Matsyapurana, where he enunciates a charming description of Godavari river). But this argument is not accepted as this part of Matsyapurana is copied as it is from Vayupurana. Professor Pargiter argued that the place of composition Matsyapurana must be in Andhra Pradesh. He mentioned that the kali vamsha is related to the ruling period of Andhra King Yajnashri Satakarni of 2nd century A.D. But some references of Matsyapurana give a different strong view that the place of Matsyapurana is near the Narmada River (Chapter 9 and portions of Chapter 191 and 192). Descriptions of some small places near Narmada also establish this point. People living away from Narmada would not have been familiar with small, infamous areas near Narmada, hence it is possible that the people of Narmada or nearby areas composed Matsyapurana. The main independent Matsyapurana is now unavailable to us. Recently available text of Matsyapurana is a collection of texts which were composed in different periods[10]. According to the scholars: 1-14, 23-24, 43-51, 114, 124-128, 141-145 and 271-273 are the earliest compositions placed in circa 3rd or 4th century A.D. Chapter 52 was composed in near 650 A.D. Chapters 161-163, 169-178 and 179 were composed in between700-750 A.D. Chapters 161-163, 169-178 and 179 were composed in between 700-750 A.D. Chapters 149-152 and 208-214 were composed after 750 A.D. The remaining Chapters were composed very late but not after the 11th century A.D.

As mentioned earlier the three main parts of temple architecture according to Matsyapurana are Pithika, Prasada, and Mandapa. Chapter 262 deals with Pithika-Lakshana, or details of the basement. The height of the Pithika should be divided into 16 parts(Fig-1.1) as follows:

1. Bhumi-pravishta   1 part
2. Jagati   4 parts
3. Vritta-patala   1 part
4. Kanthā   3 parts
5. Kanthā-patta   3 parts
6. Urdhva-patta   2 parts
7. Pattikā   4 parts

Total   16 parts
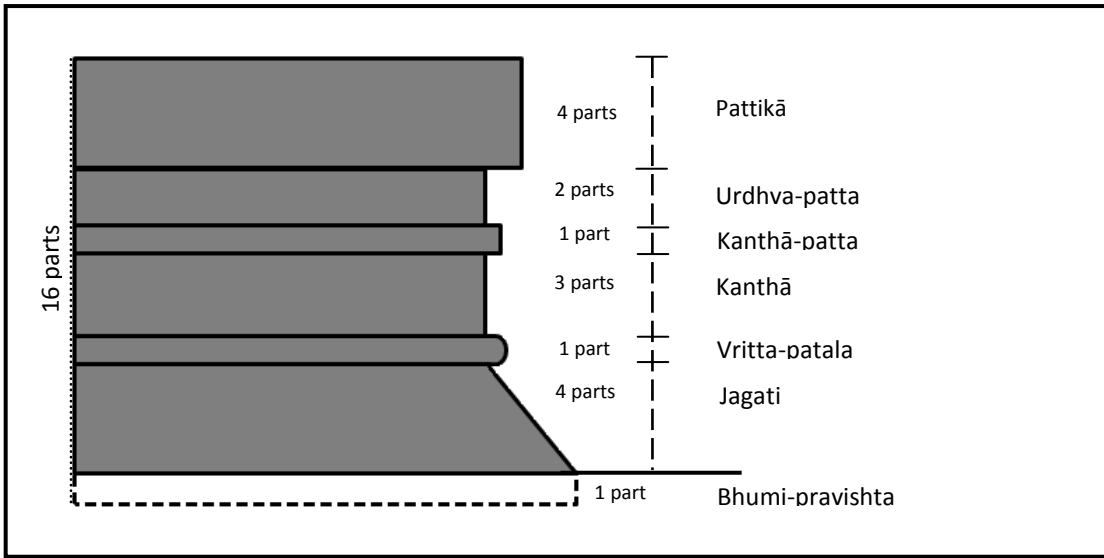
Fig 1.1: Pattika and its parts

These are the various mouldings of the basement(pithika).one special moulding known as Jagati in Matsyapurana and popular in Gupta period. The three parts of Jagati should be Successively recessed and above them the moulding should be projecting up to the upper most pattika.At the level of the pattika there should be a channel(pranala)for rater flowing(vari-nirgamanartham). The text then listed ten kinds of Pithikas(pithika dasakirtitah).the pedestal for all other images should be equal in length to that of the image but not so in the case of siva-linga. The ten kinds of pedestal as follows –

1.Sthandila, squar in shape without any mekhala or girdle moulding.

2.Vapi, with two girdle-like mouldings.

3. Yakshi,with three mouldings.

4. Vedi, rectangular in form not recommended for siva linga.

5.Mandala, circular in form with two or three mekhalas.

6.Purna Chandra, with two mekhalas.

7.Vajrik, hexagonal in form and having three mouldings.

8.Padma, 16 sided in form and somewhat narrower at the base.

9.Ardha-sasi, crescent shape in form.

10.Trikona, triangular in shape.

Chapters 268-269 describe the building of temple or Prasada, and chapter 270 of Mandapa. Building of a temple started with the instruction to perform the passification ceremony of the Vastu Purusha(Vastopasamana).For a

temple, the diagram 81 squares is recommended. Then 269 actually describes the construction of a temple.now, the main characteristic of temple and Mandapa is listed bellow as mention in Matsya purana text.

Characteristics of Temple in Matsyapurana

- There are four kinds of Prasada according to the Garbhagriha and the ground plan as mentioned in Matsyapurana (Fig 1.2).Horizontal parts of a temple as mention in Matsyapurana are accordingly Garbha griha, Antarala mandapa (Pragriva), Mandapa and mukha Mandapa. Among the four kinds of temple, two are without Mandapa and Mukha Mandapa.Thera is a Pradakshina around the Garbha griha.It is not sure but may be the projections of the wall of the Garbha griha are called Kapola or Bhadra.
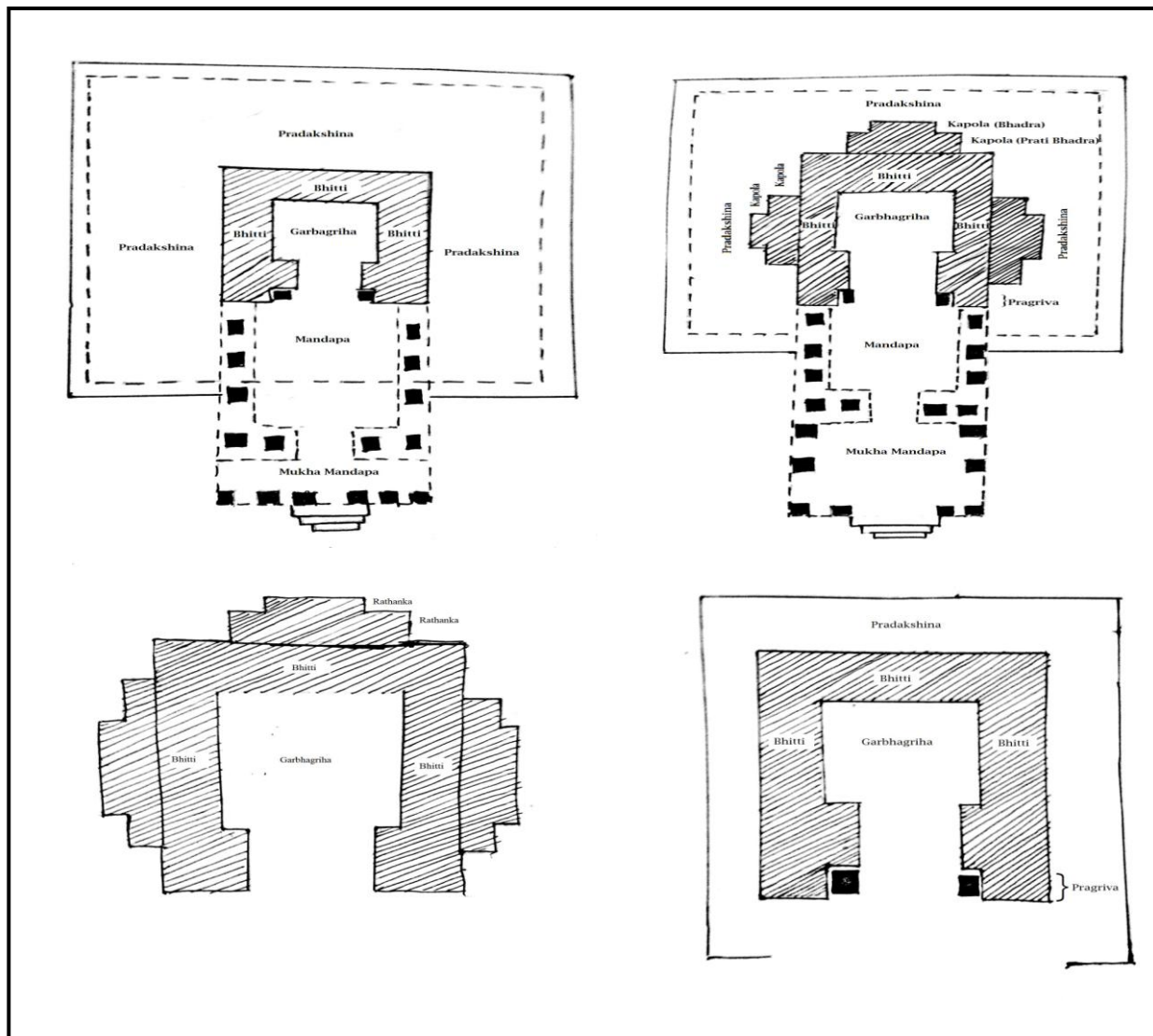

Fig 1.2: Ground Plan of Four Kinds of Temples (Matsyapurana, 269)

Vastu place can be divided into 16 divisions or 9 divisions and the middle part of these divisions is called Garbha (Fig. 1.3).
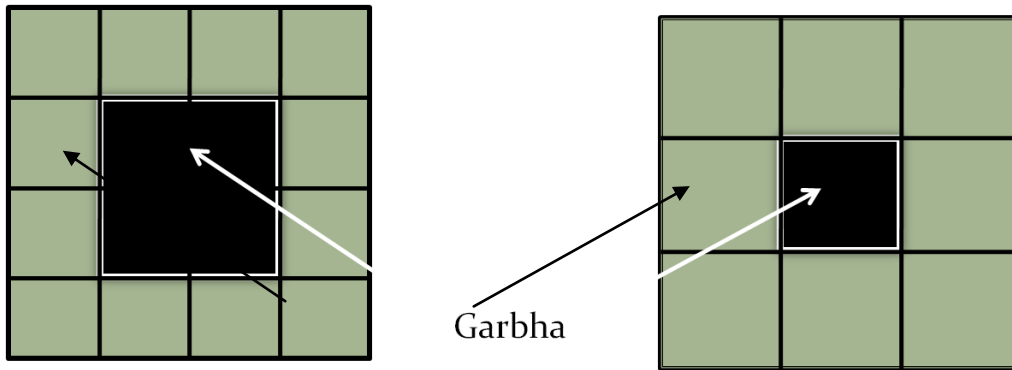

Garbha

Fig 1.3: Measurement of Garbha

The base of Garbha should be $1/4^{th}$ of the total height of Prasada and the Sikhara should be double of the base. Up to the vertical height of the Garbha griha a portion or shrine called Mandovara and Sikhara was the portion rising above the cubical Mandovara. In the middle of the Sikhara Suka Nasa is situated i.e. the projecting back of the palace. Suka Nasa portion would be as much as the depth of the Antarala Mandapa in front of the Garbha griha. Above the Suka Nasa was made some moulding called Vedi-Bandha and it would be continued up to the Kantha. Last two top most portions of the vertical line of a temple as mention in the Matsyapurana are Amalasaraka and Kalasa (Fig. 1.4).
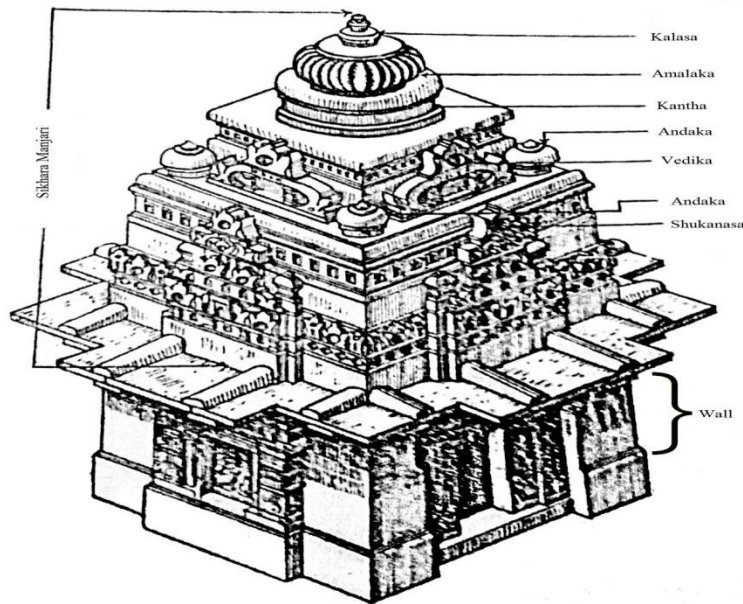
According to the Sikhara and the shape of base, there are 22 kinds of Prasada:

Meru, Mandar, Kailas, Kumbha, Simha, Mriga, Vimana, Chhandaka, Chaturasra, Astasra, Sorashasra, Borttul, Sarvvtodrak, Simhasya, Nandan, Nandivardhanak, Hamsa, Brisa, Suvarnesh, Padmak and Samudgak.

Mandapa or pavilions are classified in terms of the number of pillars that are used in their construction(*Matsyapurana, 270*).

There are twenty-seven main types of pavilions mention in the Matsyapurana.

1. A pushpaka pavilion has sixty-four pillars.
2. A pushpabhadra pavilion has sixty-two pillars.
3. A suvrata pavilion has sixty pillars.
4. An amritanandana pavilion has fifty-eight pillars.
5. A doushalya pavilion has fifty-six pillars.
6. A buddhisamkirna pavilion has fifty-four pillars
7. A gajabhadra pavilion has fifty-two pillars.
8. A jayavaha pavilion has fifty pillars.
9. A shrivatsa pavilion has forty-eight pillars.
10. A vijaya pavilion has forty-six pillars.
11. A vastukirti pavilion has forty-four pillars.
12. A shrutinjaya pavilion has forty-two pillars.
13. A yajnabhadra pavilion has forty pillars.
14. A vishala pavilion has thirty-eight pillars.
15. A sushlishta pavilion has thirty-six pillars.
16. A shatrumardana pavilion has thrity-four pillars.

CONCLUSIONS

- If the place where Matsyapurana was composed is in the region of Narmada or any nearby areas, then the description of architecture would also share the same origin.
- The main architectural parts of temple in Matsyapurana are Garbhagriha, Mukhamandapa and Mandapa.And the architectural terms used in the text are Garbha, Pradakshina, Mandapa, Mukha Mandapa, Pragriva,Sikhara, Kapola, Manjari, Suka Nasa, Vedi, Amalasaraka, Andaka(small shrines

placed on the main Sikhara), Rathanka(portion of the wall where images placed exteriorly), and Nemi(niches of the wall where image are placed).

• There are no evidences that Gupta Mandapa had so many pillars. So the description given in Matsyapurana is not related to the Gupta temple.

• There are references of many Shikhara temples in Matsyapurana which is also not related to the Gupta temple.

• So, the architectural part in Matsyapurana is reflected in the later period after Gupta and the style of the architecture is related to the Nagara temple as the evidence of Amalasara on the top of Shikhara is mentioned in the text.

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