THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS:

An analysis of Hindu temple-complexes. *

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ABSTRACT:

Through ages Hindu temples or temple complexes have acted as prime generator of social norms and behaviour for the people of this region. Because, this temple-architecture had been a product of religious consciousness and belief of the people with the deeper understandings of the Hindu-builders about the region and religion. Hence, most of these temples and temple-complexes steeped in profound spiritual and religious ambience, with which they exist even after hundreds of years. This script is devoted to understand these temple-complexes and their hidden dimensions of extreme profoundity.

KEY WORDS:

Temple architecture; cosmology; mode of Architectural expression; Built-form versus open space; modulation of masses; organization of spaces; construe of structure; Iconography; symbology.

INTRODUCTION:

Religious building is an ennobling expression of human soul where Architecture goes beyond physical demands and comes out as a statement or, expression of profound insight into the faith.

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*   *All the photographs & figures ore taken from 'Living Architecture: Indian, by Andreas volwahsen, unless mentioned. other-wise*
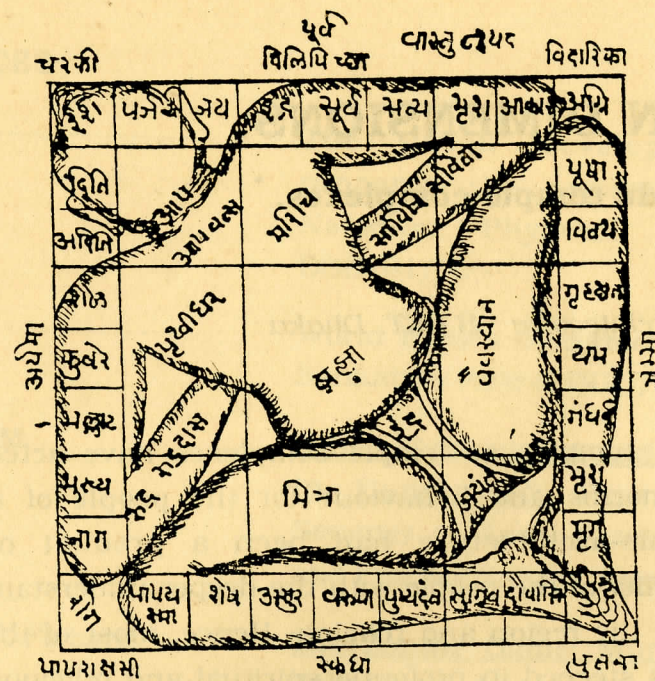
The Hindu temples or mandir, the emblem of religious tribute of the Hindus to their gods, is the veritable manifestation of their belif and faith. Through ages, in India, these temple or temple complexes or temple-cities have influenced and nourished the community environment and society as a whole. Because these religious institutions could provide the community with cultural stability, security, occupation and guidance in behavioural patterns. They helped establishing value systems and strong conviction about the validity of these systems. [1]

Nevertheless, it was not the Hinduism alone but the physical environment and architectural expressions of those temple-complexes or temple-cities together contributed significantly towards this achievement. Because they could work as catalysts to result required transformation within the participators. In order to attain that the Hindu-builders had to device some universal means of communication to establish a unique dialogue between the buildings and their users, some of which are identified here. These were also the devices which gave these institutions not only their functional expression but also their philosophical and metaphysical dimensions. Only realization of such axioms or devices in the temple architecture could produce the 'Spiritual Indian Architecture' as claimed by Percy Brown. [2]

COSMOLOGY AND TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE:

The Hindu temple-complexes represent cosmic relationship in their forms, volume and space-articulation. The Hindu builders used the divine chart Vastu-Purusha-Mandala as the basis of their constructional principle to establish such relationship (Fig: 1). To them, Vastu-Purusha-Mandala was an image of laws governing the cosmos. The diagram Vastu-Purusha-Mandala emphasises that when Vastu (environment), Purusha (energy) and Mandala (astrological chart) are brought together in a balanced manner in the architectural solutions, it implicitly becomes contextual relating to the place, people and period. [3] The Hindu builders selected square as the basis of this divine chart-because it could best symbolize the divine or the absolute. To them "The temples were meant to be permanent abode for their otherwise heavenly and

(1)   Doshi, B.V; Between notion and Reality; Architecture+Design, jan-Feb; 1989.

(2)   Brown, percy; Indian Architecture (Hindu & Buddhist Period) 1976 (page-1)
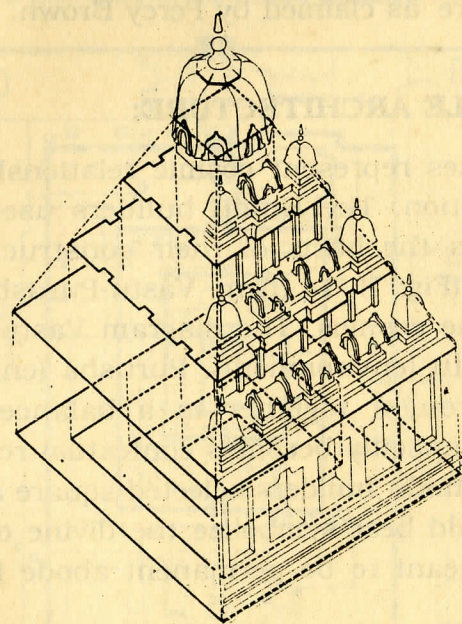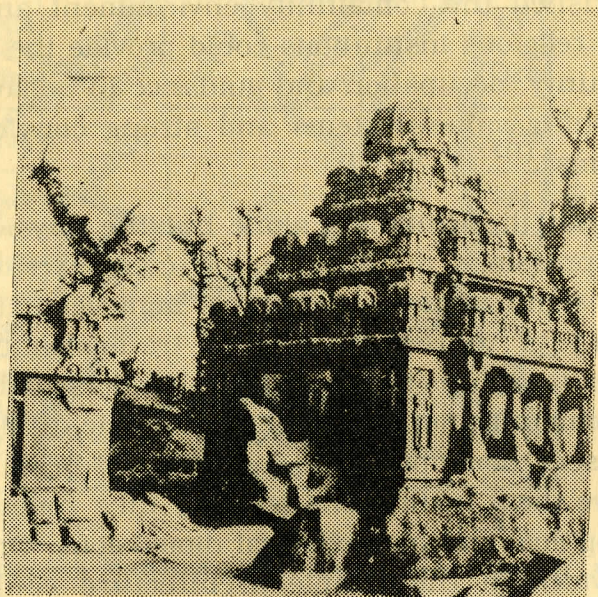
(3)   Doshi, B. V; Opcit.

Fig-3,4. The Dharma Raja Ratha of Mahaballipuram: One of the most successful effort of Hindu builders to do justice to all formal, cosmologcal and ritual requiremnts involved in construction of a temple.

elusive gods. Their images had to be installed in shaped symbolizing stability rather than mobility. The square fulfilled these aims far more appropriately" [4] If we were to look at the Bharmesvara temple at Bhubaneswara from air. we would see how the 10th century Hindu 'Sthapatis' (builders or architects), with consumate skill, were able to translate in their own idioms the doctrines of Mandala. According to Percy Brown" the Mandala, if faithfully followed, would make failure impossible" [5]

Similarly, the conception of cosmic centre has taken many forms in the Hindu temples and temple-complexes. In the South Indian temple-city of Srirangam, it is found that the cosmos is represented as an image of the worlds situated in concentric rings around the centre Brahma (Fig:2). Again, the pyramidal arrangement of miniature temples (aedicules) on the temple mass reflects the ancient myth of mount Meru, the centre of cosmos. Dharmaraja Ratha of Mahaballipuram is one of the most successful effort to do justice to all formal, cosmological and ritual requirements involved in construction of a temple. [6] Here in the outer limit of the tiered roofs and of the octagonal domes contained a central Brahma-Sthana and the rings of deities, human and demons. It is an integral diagram transposed into spatial mandala (Fig: 3, 4).

MODE OF ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSIONS:

The Architectural expressions for the Hindu temple complexes or cities are, for most of the time, indefinite and amorphous rather than finite. Hence, the Hindu temple complexes often donot hold a high place as an architectural entity. Usually they donot follow conscious plans in their arrangements; there exists no decisive preliminary conception; they gradually evolved from small nucleus in the form of shrine until in the course of time they spread out into the indeterminate and in some respects, unsystematic complexes as most of them now present. Such an approach often established dual or even multiple ordering systems in the same complex and influenced the 'Sthapatis' (builders) to conceive complex designs. But one can hardly fail to be impressed by the profoundly religious atmosphere. emotional and often

(4)   Grover, Satish; The Architecture of India (Buddhist & Hindu period); 1980.

(5)   Brown, Percy; Opcit.

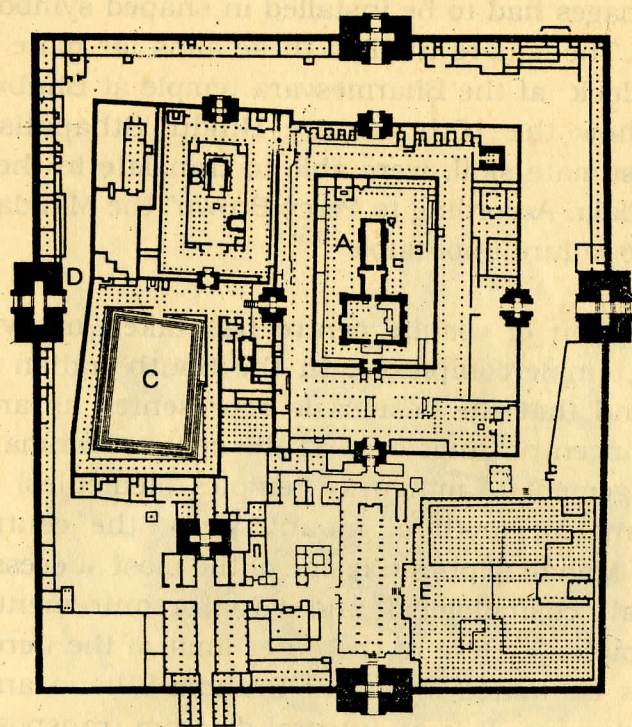(6). Volwahsen, Andreas; Living Architecture: Indian; 1969 (p-138)

Fig-5.   The temple city of Madurai: A vast composite Symbol of essential Hinduism.
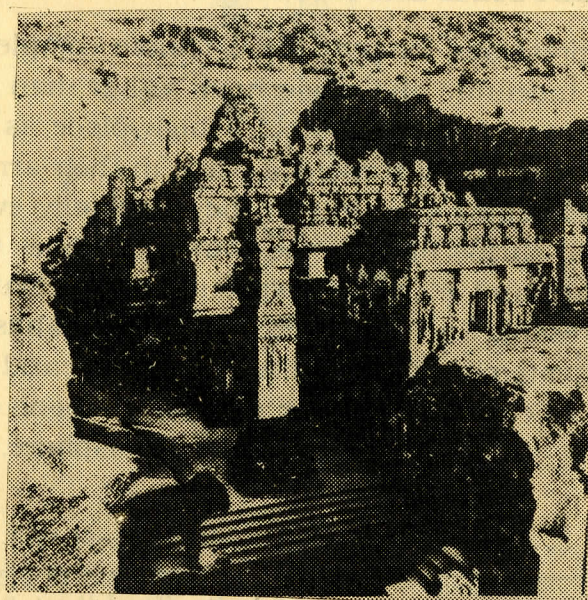

Fig-6.   The temple of Kailasa at Ellora: 'An amazing artistic statement by the Hindu builders amidst rough and barren out-crop.

intellectual content, in which many of these temple complexes are steeped, making them a vast composite symbol of essential Hinduism [7]. The temple cities at Madurai, or Srirangam may best exemplify this (Fig: 5). This spirituality might have been the outcome of the uncompromising attitude of the builders to recreate microcosm or, to manifest the microcosm in the temple-complex.

Yet another mode of expression was the juxtaposition of perfection and imperfection. This is a quality or principle that temple architecture exhibits with great strength and this occupied a major place in the aesthetic sensibility of the Hindu-builders. In fact this had been an effective means to evoke sympathetic relationship with the viewer and the architecture itself. The seemingly disorderliness introduced by such juxtaposition often contributes liveliness to the scheme and results a better public response. [8] Thus, it is not surprising for a Hindu complex that delicately curved columns can be viewed against left-over rough surfaces or, an amazing artistic statement like the temple of Kailasa at Ellora amidst rough and barren outcrop (Fig: 6).

BUILTFORM VERSUS OPEN SPACE:

"The Hindu temple complexes are experienced not only as a collection of gopurams or shrines but also as a pedestrian path through sacred spaces." (Charles Correa). [9] The deities in a Hindu temple is envisaged in two capacities; a spiritual and a temporal. In its spiritual capacity the deity remains enshrined within the darkened mystery of the cella, where passively he receives homage of the devout (Fig:7). To provide for such a condition there is, therefore, the inner portion of the temple, strictly reserved and secluded as the sacred habitation of the god. On the other hand, on certain prescribed occasions this divinity personifies a less abstract embodiment and emerges form his retreat in his temporal capacity, assuming a physical form. [10] Thus it is seen that, to conform to these two contrasting attitudes or appearances, the temple resolves itself into two manifestations- an inner, covered and most sacred part, and an outer, open, more public and less sanctified part. These outer part of the temple area is generally formed of concentric rings or, series of couryard called prakamas or pradaskhina patha, enclosed with high walls but open to sky. These prakamas also provided ample space for buildings connected with more secular aspect of the caremonials (Fig: 8).

(7)   Brown Percy; opcit; (p-96).

(8)   Doshi, B.V; opcit.

(9)   Correa, Charles (Monograph); Ed. Hassan Uddin Khan; 1987
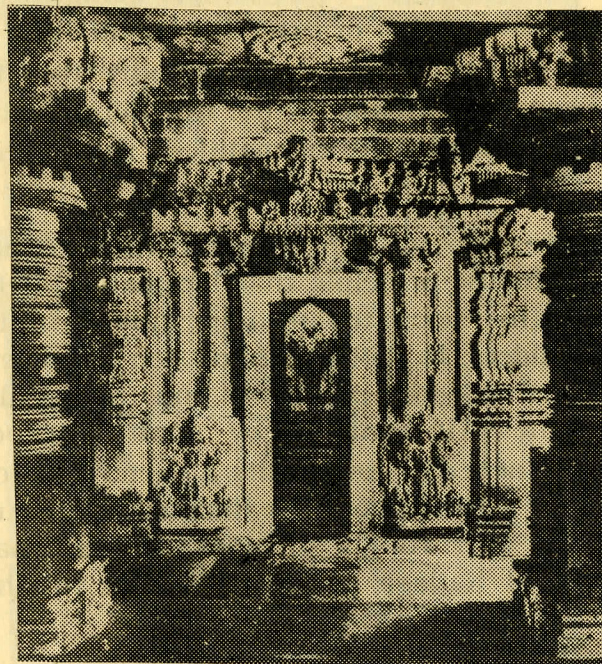
(10)   Brown, Percy ; opcit; (p-95)

Fig-7.   The Image of god enshrind in the darkened cella with its spiritual capacity.
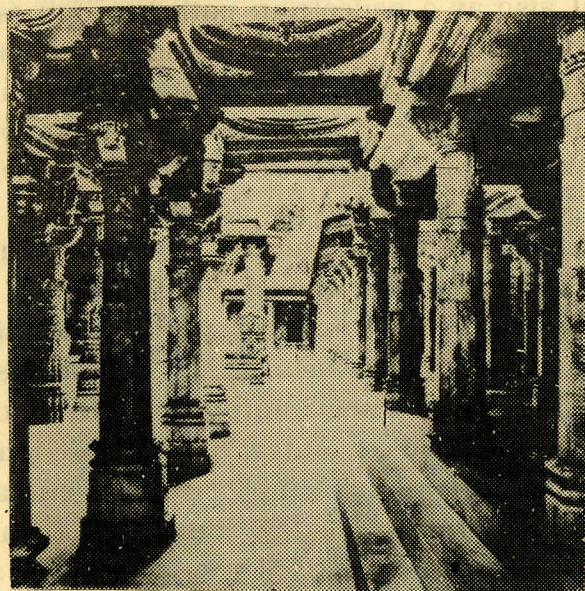

Fig-8.   Parkama in a temple complex.

MODULATION OF MASSES AND SOLID-VOID RELATIONSHIP:

Like the Summerian Ziggurat or the Buddhist Stupa, to the Hindus the temples are also the microcosm - its vertical axis is the axis of the universe and the relationship between the centre and the periphery, here, is the symbol of relationship of God to the World. This relationship has traditionally been thought of as dynamic by the Hindus as a process more than static. [11] The interrelationship of forms on the temple exterior expresses this dynamism. So we find that the greatest energy of the Hindu builders were concentrated on the orchestration of the external volumes of the temple (Fig: 9). For the interior space also, the solid-void relationship had always been an important aspect to the Hindu-builders. In the early Hindu-temples, the interior, aesthetically speaking, generally singnified a space where solid masses of columns obtruded into the void and pondorously asserted their presence in it. But in the later period, the interior came to mean the void itself intruding into the solidity of the ordered columnar files, not only by corroding their evenness, but also by boring crevices in their masses, with the consolidated blocks of columns themselves bursting out of their simple geometrical compactness and branching out into the void. Though the basic uniformity of the colonnade was maintained in principle, but the evenness of the shapes of the columns were consistently fragmented in the Hindu-temples of later period as in Vijayanagar or in Madurai (Fig: 10. Thus the regularity, symmetricity or, the continuity of the prospect in the interior was rendered visually ambiguous and the sharp division of solid and empty spaces in the interior are exchanged for an ambivalent and energized interaction between them. [12] This ambivalence or the ambiguity in the interior spaces of the Hindu-temples even now being a pivotal element for tranforming an individual when he is with in a temple or temple-complex.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SPACE & ORGANIZATION OF SPACES:

'Layering of spaces and interiority of spaces had been fundamental to the organizational attitude towards space of the Hindu-builders. Because these support the behavioural norms, societal values.' [13] This layering of the spaces is also a climatic

(11)   Hardy, Adam; Pattern of thought & form in Hindu temple Architecture; Architecture + Design; September-October, 1989; November-December, 1989.

(12)   pereira, Jose; Elements of Indian Architecure; 1987 (p-42)
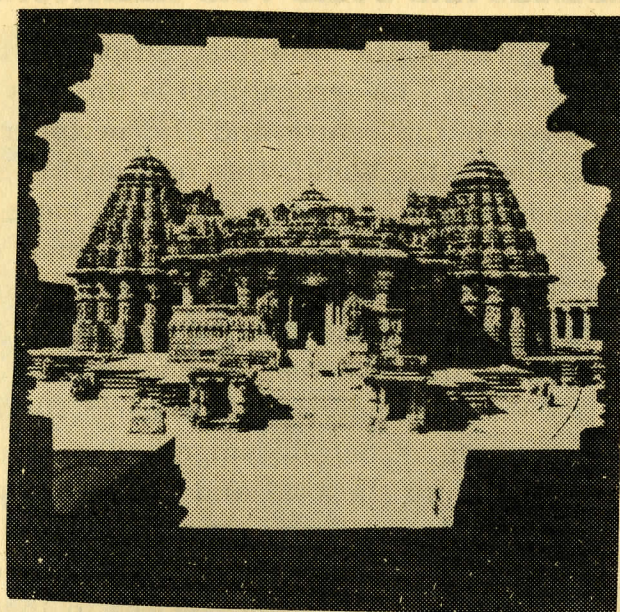
(13)   Doshi, B.V opcit;

Fig-9. The Kashava temple at Somnathpur- The orchestration of the external volumes of the temple expresses the traditional belief of dynamic interrelationship between the God and the World.
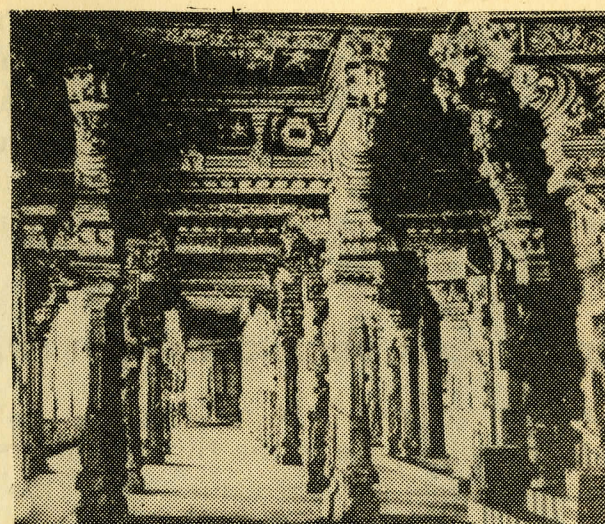

Fig-10 A columnar hall in the temple-city of Madurai where the evanness of the columnar files are consistently fragmented for an energized interaction between the solid masses of columns and the space which contains them.

necessity Which helps to filter out the hostile climatic alements. This specific attitude of the Hindu-builders construe or interpret the multiple elements they invest in a temple complex. For example, in the temple-city of madurai there are multiple elements and multiple centres, each with separate meaning-- but all these relatively separate elements are unified by layers of spaces defined by high enclosure walls. Again, in the city of Srirangam, there are layers of space -- the inner most layer is bordered on either side by ancillary shrines and prayer halls; the second layer is for the dwelling of the priests and for a number of stalls where flowers and fruits are sold for puja sacrifices and the further the layer from the centre less the importance or sacred its use. (see, Fig:2) The layering of spaces and interiority of spaces often stimulate the individual instinct by reaffirming the individual's existence and significance with respect to the surrounding. This also vibrates with life because of the multivalent relationship of the elements, or, the ' unity in diversity' with in a temple-complex.

SPACES AND STRUCTURE:

Use of multiple structural element to characterize spaces- this notion of the Hindu-builders worked as a complement to the concept of layering of spaces. Because, they used the structural elements to define and modulate the spaces so as to generate different reactions and emotions amongst the onlookers. Thus, to them structure was a live element or instrument -- sometimes they are perfectly geometric, sometimes they are highly sculptured, sometimes they are dispersed in the dimness of the interior or, sometimes their protean arabesqye contours are high lighted and coruscated by controlled illumination, keeping with the ambience of the spaces (Fig: 11). This is evident in the temple-complex of Madurai, where at least four major groups of columns can be identified wih different types of spaces, like the square moulded and patterned type, the rampant dragon type, the type with the portrait of the donor and, the types with the figures of deities. [14]

ICONOGRAPHY AS A DEVICE FOR COMMUNICATION:

Use of iconography or treatment of wallsurfaces with plastic form had been unique means used by the Hindu-builders to establish communication between the inert material of the temples and the visitors. The Curvings and the Icons, with which the Hindu-builders used to modulate the surface of the temples, depicted invariably all glorious gods of age-old mythology (Fig: 12). And it was also not infrequent that the
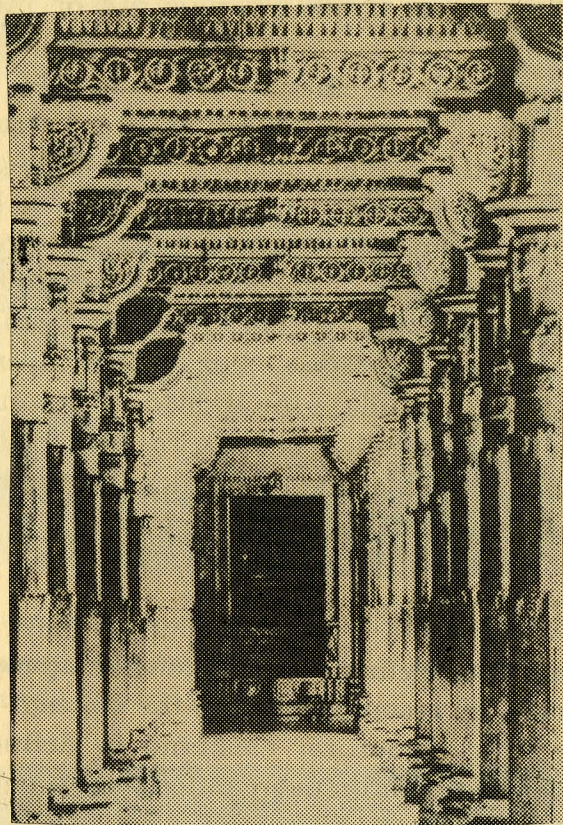
(14) Brown, Percy ; opcit (p-91-94)

Fig-11.   This similarly patterned colonnade defines an ambutatory space in a Hindu temple complex-reflects the notion of the Hindu-builders to define spaces with similar structural elements.

Fig-12.   Relief scenes, from the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, on the walls of the lower storey of the kailasa temple at Ellora.

builders used elements like erotic, intoxicated, abberative dancers or, events of great historical importance or, domestic scenes of great humour or, such like these. But whatever may be the subject, these undoubtedly act as an important link between the on-lookers and the architecture. Their participation and presence within the temple complex becomes exilarating through these transfigural and kaleidoscopic depictation of their gods and glorious eventful past. So, they feel the urge for searching the root of their origin and existence.

SYMBOLOGY IN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE:

Investments of symbols is another essential element of the Hindu temples and templex complexes. The temple is a house of god. It is the link between the god and man, actual and ideal, earthly and divine. People go to the temples for Darshana i.e. to see the gods, The temple is not merely a shelter but a concrete object of devotion which is full with the presence of god. One text says "the concrete form (murti) of Shiva is called the house of god (Develaya). So one should contemplate and worship it first". [15] Hence, the temple is got to be symbolic.

The Hindu-builders were the adroit exploiters of symbology. For example, they identified different parts of the temple and temple complexes with the different parts of the body of the god-- both vertically and horizontally. Horizontally (i.e. in plan), the garbhagriha (womb house) is the head of the god and gopurams are the feet of the god and other parts of the building complex are identified with other parts of the body. While vertically, the garbhagriha represents the neck, the shikhara the head, the kalasa (finial) the tuft of hair and so on (Fig: 13).

A Hindu temple is also analogous to both human body and human psyche. The names of some parts of temple reflect this association with temple and human being-like the jangha (thigh), griva (neck) etc. More singnificant is that it also represents the subtle body with seven psychic centre or chakras. The first three chakras are located below the ground, the fourth one is the garbhagriha, the fifth and sixth are in the Shikhara area and the seventh is located in the topmost part of the kalasa. [16]

(15)   Hardy, Adam; Opcit.

(16)   Swami Harshananda; All about Hindu Temples; 1988.

DIAGRAM SHOWING PRINCIPAL PARTS OF AN ORISSAN TEMPLE

REKHA DEUL

KALASA

AMLA

GRIVA

PIDA DEUL

SUKANASIKA

AMLA

BHUMI

BHUMI

AMLA

FARAGHAR

URU SRNGA

GHANTA KALASA

BHUMI

PIDA

KARNA SRNGA

AMLA

JANGHA

ADHISTHANA

PITHA

BARANDI

JAGATI

JANGHA

PISTA

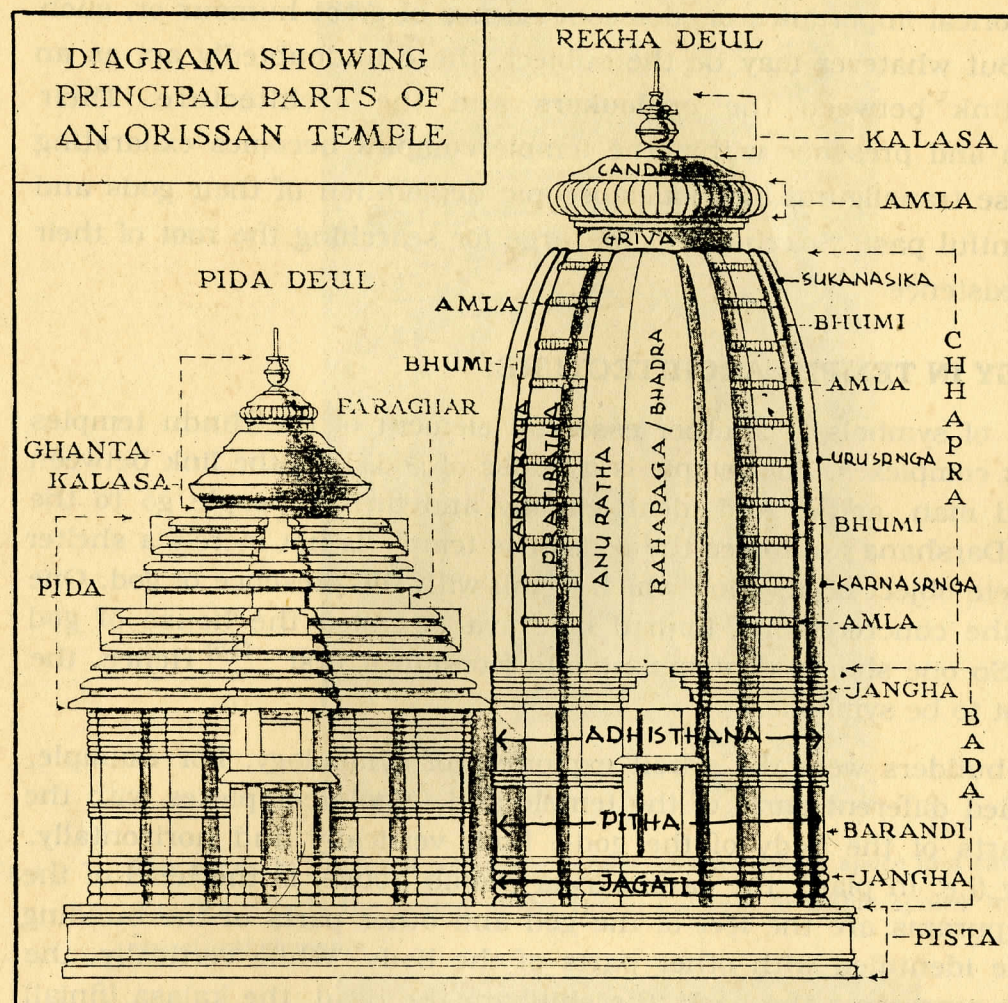PABHAGA · ANU RATHA · RAHAPAGA / BHADRA · CH HA P R A · BA DA

Fig-13.   Principal parts of an Orissan temple-shows its relation to different parts of the humanbody in its nomenclature (source: Indian Architecture, percy Brown; 1976)

LIGHTING THE INTERIOR SPACES:

Intuitive to the Hindu-builders was the understanding of the nature of light and its nuances. Controlled disposition of illumination on the surfaces of the interior spaces of the temples and temple-complexes had been an unavoidable tool for them to create necessary ambience which is evident in south Indian temple-cities and temple-complexes. In these temple-complexes, the sculpted columns form a continum of ambiguously multiform shapes that melt into the surrounding darkness when at some significant points this shadowy continum is allowed to be broken by shafts of light which transfigure some of those columns into profile of luminous arabesque; at other times, the light is permitted to stream down from an opening in the roof and thus produce an unearthly glow as it flickers over the protean contours of many bracketed pillars dispersed through the dimness. [17] There, thus, arouses a sense of impermanence in the vistas of the broken contoured shafts with its variform capitals and arching brackets-- especially when the reflected light flashes vibrantly on the mouldings of the columns as in the interior of the Chanekesava temple at Belur, or coruscating on the prodigious assemblage of animals, dwarfs and deities, clustered with colonnattes as in the Vitthalaswami temple of Vijayanagar (Fig: 14).

CONCLUSION:

However, it is true that all these aspects of architecure could not be engaged simultaneously in all the Hindu-temple complexes built by the Hindu builders. But it is evident that throughout the history, the Hindu temple-architectre showed very little changes and variations in its form and idea. This testifies that the intention and the purpose of the temple architecture were never dissimilar to the Hindu builders. To them the fundamental purpose of building art was to represent and to support the religious belief and consciousness of the people. So, instead of showing structural inventiveness or any special attempt to solve structural problems, they had been much more clinging to theological discipline which ultimately could steep in the spirituality of absorbing awe and reverence with which the temple complexes exist even after hundreds of years.
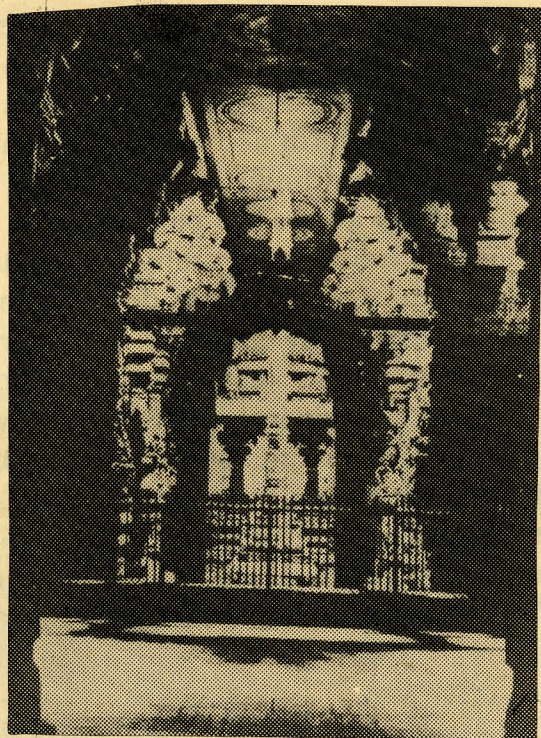
(17)   Pereira, Jose; Opcit; (p-43)

Fig-14.   Only at a few places does day light enter the dark vestibule leading to the sanctum a Hindu temple.

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