

1. Discuss temple architecture in Ancient India. 10 marks

*Answer:* In Ancient India, 'art was not for arts sake.' Indian art according to Prof. S.P. Gupta was part and parcel of the Hindu concept of *dharmā*. The construction of the temple was an important aspect of Indian art & architecture in the ancient period. The Indian temple was not only a place of worship, or the 'house of God' but it was the cosmos in miniature form. Stella Kramrisch defined the Hindu temple as 'monument of manifestation.' In addition to images of Gods and Goddesses, the Hindu temple also had representations of men, women, animals, birds, and the world of waters. From the Gupta times temple pillars are shown as emerging from *kalasa*, since water was believed to be the basis of all creation and its sustainer. In this essay we will discuss the basic structure of a Hindu temples and its different styles as prevalent in ancient India.

### THE BASIC FORM OF THE HINDU TEMPLE

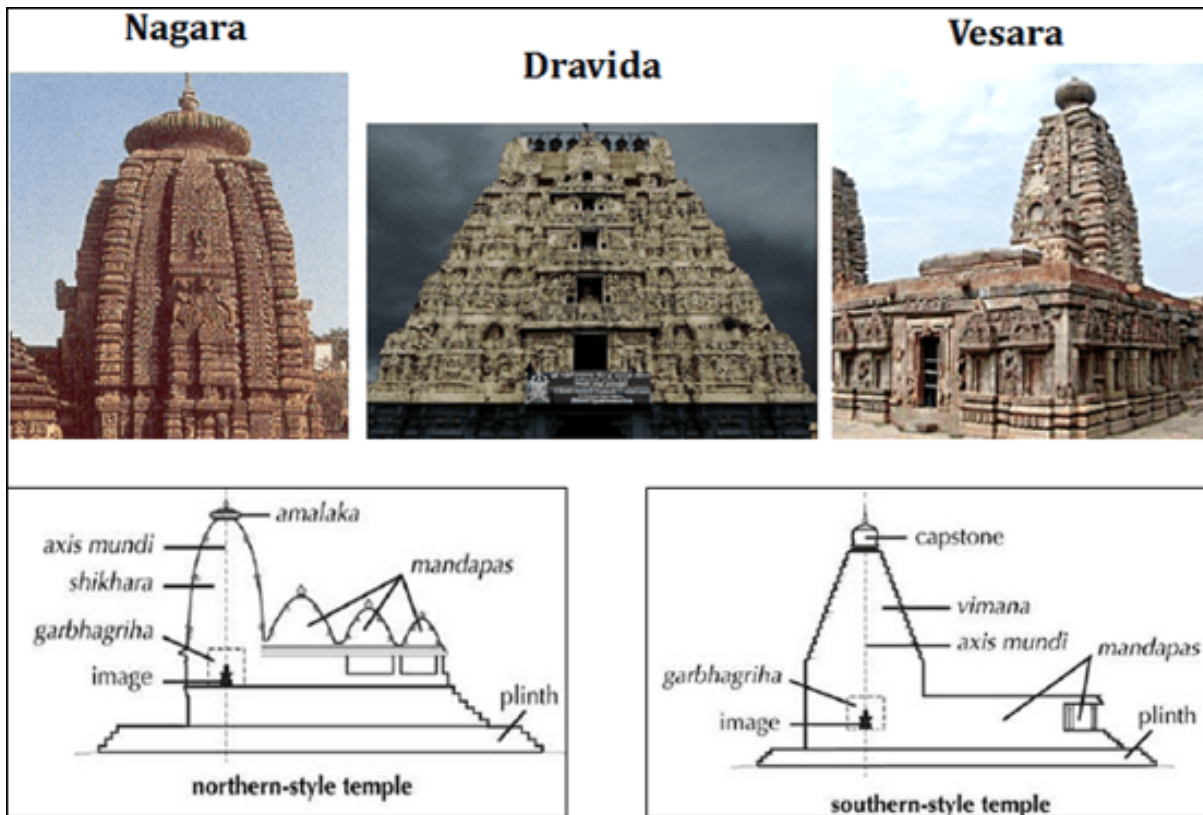
The basic form of the Hindu temple comprises the following: (i) sanctum (*garbhagriha* literally 'womb-house'), which is made to house the main deity (ii) the entrance to the temple known as a *mandapa*; (iii) freestanding temples tend to have a mountain-like spire, which can take the shape of a curving *shikhara* in North India and a pyramidal tower, called a *vimana*, in South India; (iv) the *vahan*, i.e., the mount or vehicle of the temple's main deity along with a standard pillar or *dhvaj* is placed axially before the sanctum.

Two broad orders of temples in the country are known— *Nagara* in the north and *Dravida* in the south. The *Vesara* style of temples is created through the selective mixing of the *Nagara* and *Dravida* orders.

#### The Nagara Style

The style of temple architecture that became popular in northern India is known as *nagara*. In North India it is common for an entire temple to be built on a stone platform with steps leading up to it. Further, unlike in South India it does not usually have elaborate boundary walls or gateways. While the earliest temples had just one tower, or *shikhara*, later temples had several. The *garbhagriha* is always located directly under the tallest tower.

Among the *Nagara* style of temple is the Deogarh temple (in Lalitpur District, Uttar Pradesh) which was built in the early sixth century CE. This makes it a classic example of a late Gupta Period type of temple. This temple is in the *panchayatana* style of architecture where the main



shrine is built on a rectangular plinth with four smaller subsidiary shrines at the four corners (making it a total number of five shrines, hence the name, panchayatana). The Lakshmana temple of Khajuraho, dedicated to Vishnu, was built in 954 by the Chandela king, Dhanga. A nagara temple, it is placed on a high platform accessed by stairs. There are four smaller temples in the corners, and all the towers or shikharas rise high, upward in a curved pyramidal fashion, emphasising the temple's vertical thrust ending in a horizontal fluted disc called an amalaka topped with a kalash or vase. The crowning elements: amalaka and kalash, are to be found on all nagara temples of this period. The temple also has projecting balconies and verandahs, thus very different from Deogarh. The Kandariya Mahadeo temple at Khajuraho is the epitome of temple architecture in Central India. Khajuraho's temples are also known for their extensive erotic sculptures; the erotic expression is given equal importance in human experience as spiritual pursuit, and it is seen as part of a larger cosmic whole. Many Hindu temples, therefore, feature mithun (embracing couple) sculptures, considered auspicious.

The temples of Odisha constitute a distinct sub-style within the nagara order. In general, here the shikhara, called deul in Odisha, is vertical almost until the top when it suddenly curves sharply inwards. Deuls are preceded, as usual, by mandapas called jagamohana in Odisha. The

ground plan of the main temple is almost always square, which, in the upper reaches of its superstructure becomes circular in the crowning *mastaka*. This makes the spire nearly cylindrical in appearance in its length. Compartments and niches are generally square, the exterior of the temples are lavishly carved, their interiors generally quite bare. Odisha temples usually have boundary walls. At Konark, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, lie the majestic ruins of the Surya or Sun temple built in stone around 1240. The whole temple comes to resemble a colossal processional chariot.

### **The Dravida or the South Indian Temple Style**

Unlike *the nagara* temple, the *dravida* temple is enclosed within a compound wall. The front wall has an entrance gateway in its centre, which is known as a *gopuram*. The shape of the main temple tower 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, the word '*shikhara*' is used only for the crowning element at the top of the temple which is usually shaped like a small *stupika* or an octagonal cupola— this is equivalent to the *amlak* and *kalasha* of North Indian temples. Whereas at the entrance to the North Indian temple's *garbhagriha*, it would be usual to find images such as *mithunas* and the river goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna, in the south you will generally find sculptures of fierce *dvarapalas* or the door-keepers guarding the temple. It is common to find a large water reservoir, or a temple tank, enclosed within the complex.

The Pallavas were one of the ancient South Indian dynasties who were great builders of temple. The shore temple at Mahabalipuram was built in the reign of Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha who reigned from 700 to 728 CE. The magnificent Shiva temple of Thanjavur, called the Rajarajeswara or Brahadeeshwarar temple, was completed around 1009 by Rajaraja Chola, and is the largest and tallest of all Indian temples. Temple building was prolific at this time, and over a hundred important temples of the Chola period are in a good state of preservation, and many more are still active shrines. Bigger in scale than anything built by their predecessors, the Pallavas, Chalukyas or Pandyas, this Chola temple's pyramidal multi-storeyed *vimana* rises a massive, 70 metre (230 ft. approx) structure topped by a monolithic *shikhara* which is an octagonal dome-shaped *stupika*. It is in this temple that one notices for the first time two large *gopuras* (gateway towers) with an elaborate sculptural programme which was conceived along with the temple. Huge Nandi-figures dot the corners of the *shikhara*, and the *kalasha* on top by itself is about three metres and eight centimetres in height.

In the southern part of the Deccan, i.e., in the region of Karnataka is where some of the most experimental hybrid styles of *vesara* architecture are to be found. The hybridisation and incorporation of several styles was the hallmark of Chalukyan buildings. The most elaborate

of all Chalukyan temples at Pattadakal made in the reign of Vikramaditya II (733-44) by his chief queen Loka Mahadevi is Virupaksha temple.

**Conclusion :** Ancient Indian art was both spiritualistic as well as materialistic and ‘combined in its personality both the mind and matter. The urge to carve and paint emerged from a deep sense of spirituality as well as the urge to live a life of fulfilment in terms of materialistic enjoyments. This was how ‘stone was turned to image, image that stirs your heart as well as mind and takes them together to the eternal bliss.’



**Shikara**



**Vimana**

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