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The Philosophy behind Indian Architecture

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Abstract

Describing art I would say, it is something beautiful which contains intellect. That is to say transforming ideas into something physical is art, be it painting or music or something else.

According to art scholars, art is not only a piece of work but it is more of a kind of social, cultural and spiritual expression, that is why scholar like Dr. Shiv Shikhar Misra has mentioned Lethaby in the context of architecture. He quotes him "Architecture is the matrix of civilization."^[1]

It means it is the origin place of any civilization. Artist makes his artistic work with such kind of devotion which shows that he desires to say something to communicate or to a kind of message by his artistic work. As we know Aristotle has stated, "Essentially the form of art is an imitation of reality, it holds the mirror up to nature."^[2] Therefore art is the only actual copy of this world and also it can be stated that the real existence provide a kind of shape to the art. Therefore it can be stated that it is a kind of expression from inward knowledge to outward. There are mainly five components in fine arts – painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry.

If we see architecture in Indian context, it can be found that it includes spirituality in such a manner which gives us message that the elements which exist in our inner knowledge also exist in our outer space.

In Indian context, the field of architecture is very wide. Therefore the focus will be made on only two views

1. The thought of Indian spirituality in the temple and its creation (in special context of Brihadeeswara temple and khajuraho temple)
2. The ideas in relation to the script of Natyamandapa of acharya Bharat muni.

Key Words: Arts, Architecture, Spiritual, Vastu, Temple

Introduction

The Indian culture has always been thought orienting and involved in process to know the real picture of world and its greatness or worldly affairs since its beginning. The basic theme which came out from this thinking process is spiritualism, which must be kept on top level. Spiritualism means adhi+atmani, which is concerned about spirit in a body. It assumes that there is no difference between outer world and inner world. Whatever differences and diversity we see in the outer world or in worldly affairs, the same kind of diversity exists in inner world too, but there is one alimant which is common in both and that is consciousness, and in this way the ultimate process of life is to protect the Sāṁīī (atman) by ending the gap between body and spirit. The same kind of object was existing in the heart of makers of ancient Indian architecture. Therefore it can be stated that architecture is not only a kind of work or piece of creation but it is the best medium to showcase the idea of Indian spiritualism.

The Meaning of Word VāStu

The word architect has been derived from the root वस् निवासे and suffix is तुन् ^[3]. That means "वसन्ति प्राणिनो यत्र" । according to Acharya Maya the definition of Vāstu is, "it is a kind of construction on which God and human being resides permanently and temporally" ^[4]. There are four type of architecture – bhumi (land), bhawan (building), yaan (vehicle) and saiyaa (bed). In this there are so many meanings of word Bhawan, of which one is VIMANA. According to scholars the meaning of Vimana is, "whole Vimana is like a body, the Deity in this Vimana is like the atman presents in the body" ^[5].

VāStu, In Art Form

In Sukranēeti, architecture is mentioned as one among the 64 arts. About art, Aristotle has said that, "essentially the form of art is an imitation of reality, it holds the mirror up to nature" ^[6].

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The shape which looks of any art is made by main reality. This is called ‘the shaping force of reality’ [7]. According to Aristotle, ‘the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance, and not the external mannerism and detail’ [8]. Architecture presents the cultural views of any country, that’s why Dr. Shiv Shikhar Misra has quoted the sentence of LETHABY – ‘Architecture is the matrix of civilization’ [9].

So the Indian culture which is full of spiritual thoughts, which can be seen in Indian architecture today as well. As in our knowledge tradition, concepts of Rasa Brahma, Sabda Brahma, Nāda Brahma have been mentioned, similarly the concept of Vāstu Brahma (architectural God) is also described, which highlights the concept of the unity of god and human being. This is based on the vedantic view.

According to vāstu śāstra, the temple parts correspond to the six parts of the body of vāstu-puruṣa

1. The sanctum is the head.
2. The antarāla (vestibule) is the neck.
3. The mukha-maṇḍapa (porch) represents the bāhu-s (shoulders).
4. The large pillared in the same axis represents the nābhi (belly).
5. The prākāra (open courtyard) with Naṇḍī: dhvajastambha (the flag-post), and the bali-pīṭha (sacrificial platform) corresponds to the anujam (legs).
6. The entrance gate or gopura represents the pāda of the lord [10].

The south Indian temples are most suitable example for that.

The Brihadiswara Temple Of Tanjavar

Situated in the Tanjavar of Tamilnadu, built by the Chola king Rajaraj pratham in 1003-1010 A.D., this temple is also known as Rajarajeswara temple.

The Architecture & Philosophical Sigh of This Temple

- There are nine gateways in this temple. There is gopuram structure on four gateways. It is East, West, North, South gateways. The Eastern gopuram is renowned for its complete enumeration of 108 poses of Indian classical dance Bhatatnatyam, detailed in small rectangular panels along the passage that leads to the gateway. From the philosophical point of view 9 gateways signify the 9 orifices in the human body.
- The sanctum sanctorum represents the heart which is reached by a flight of 5 stairs called the Panchaatchara padi –panch means 5, achhara – indestructible syllables – ‘SI VA YA NA MA’.
- The main sanctum is the symbol of heart (hridhya). In human body heart lies in left side. Same in garbhagriha the main shivlinga is also in left side.
- The sanctum sanctorum is held by 28 pillars – representing the 28 agamas or set methodologies for the worship of Lord Shiva.
- The roof is held by a set of 64 beams representing the 64 forms of art and is held by several crossbeams representing the innumerable blood vessels.
- The roof has been laid by 21,600 golden tiles with the word SI VA YA NA MA inscribed on them representing 21600 breaths.
- The golden tiles are fixed using 72,000 golden nails which represents the number of nadis exists in human body.

- The roof is topped by a set 9 sacred pots or kalasas, representing the 9 forms of energy.
- The ardha mandapa (sanctum) has six pillars denoting the six śāstras (holy texts).
- The hall next to the ardha mandapa has eighteen pillars symbolizing the eighteen Puranas [11].

There are five halls or sabhas inside the temple

1. Chit Sabhai– which is the sanctum sanctorum housing lord Nataraja and his consort Sivakami Sundari, and gave the templetown its name.
2. Kanaka sabhai- the golden hall in front of the chit sabhai, from where the daily rituals are conducted.
3. Nrithya sabhai – according to tradition Nataraja outdanced kali and established his supremacy.
4. Raja sabhai – 1000 pillared hall which symbolizes the yogic chakra of thousand pillared lotus or sahasraram (which is yoga is a chakra) at the crown of the head and is a seat where the soul unites with God. This chakra is represented as a 1000 petalled lotus. Meditating by concentrating at the Sahasrara chakra is said to lead to a state of union with the Divine force and is the pinnacle of yogic practice. The hall is open only festiv days.
5. Dev sabhai – which houses the pancha moorthis, the dities of Ganesh, Somaskanda, Sivananda nayaki, Muruga and the image of Chandikeswarar [12].

A classical Shiva temple as per Agama rules will have five parikramas (closed precincts of a temple) or circuits each separated by walls one within the other. The outer parikrama will be open to the sky except the innermost one. The innermost one will house the main deities. There will be massive wooden or stone flag post exactly in line with the main deity. The innermost parikrama houses the sanctum sanctorum.

These 5 parikramas are the symbol of 5 layers of body. According to taittiriyanisad

1. First one is annamaya koṣh which is the symbol of physical body (bhautika sarira).
2. Second is pranmaya koṣh which is the symbol of energy or pran.
3. Third is manomaya koṣh which is the symbol of man (mind).
4. Fourth is vijyankaya koṣh which is the symbol of buddhi (wisdom).
5. Fifth is anandmaya koṣh which is the symbol of happiness (anand) [13].

But the pure consciousness is beyond these five layers. The sanctum of Brihadiswara temple is also beyond the five walls. Other importance of this temple is –

- The flag pillar on the top of the main building (viman) is symbol of susumana nadi. In human body which start from the muladhar and goes to the shahsra (mastiska ki sikha).
- The entrance gopuram is compare to human feet which seems that a man is lying on his back body and has raised his thumb to up.
- The temple is supposed to be located at the lotus heart of the universe: virat hridaya Padma sthalam.
- The gold –roofed stage is the sanctum sanctorum of the Brihadiswara temple and houses the lord in three forms :
 1. The ‘form’ – the anthropomorphic form as an appearance of Nataraja, called the Sakala-thirumeni.

2. The 'semi form' – the semi-anthropomorphic form as the crystal linga of Chandramaulishvara, the Sakala-nishkala-thirumeni.
3. The 'formless' – an empty space within the sanctum sanctorum, the Nishkala-thirumeni.

The Significance of Anand Tandava Posture

The Ananda-tāṇḍava posture of Nataraja represents pancikritya functions of the godhead believed to have created the dynamic force to create the world.

- The demon under Lord Nataraja's feet signifies that ignorance is under His feet.
- The fire in His hand (power of destruction) means He is the destroyer of evil.
- The raised hand (pataka mudra) signifies that He is the savior of all life forms.
- The arc of fire called Thiruvashi or Prabhavati signifies the cosmos and the perpetual motion of the earth.
- The drum in His hand signifies the origin of life forms.
- The lotus pedestal signifies Om, the sound of the universe.
- His right eye, left eye and third eye signify the sun, moon and fire/knowledge, respectively.
- His right earring (makara kundalam) and left earring (sthri kundalam) signify the union of man and women (right is man left is women).
- The crescent moon in His hair signifies benevolence and beauty.
- The flowing of river Ganga through His matted hair signifies eternity of life.
- The dreading of His hair and drape signify the force of his dance ^[14].

Religious Significance of the Temple

Panch Bhoot Stalam refers to the five Shiva temples, each representing the manifestation of the five prime elements of nature – land, water, air, sky, fire. Panch indicates 5, Bhoot means elements, Stalam means place. The five elements are believed to be enshrined in the five lingams. And each of the lingams representing Lord Shiva in the temple has five different names based on the elements they represent. In the temple Shiva is said to have manifested himself in the form of sky. The other four manifestations are prithivi LINGAM (representing land) at Ekambareswara temple, Appu Lingam (representing water) at Thiruvanaikaval, Agni Lingam (representing fire) at Annamalaiyar Temple and Vayu Lingam (representing air) at Srikalahasti Temple. All these temples are located in south India with four of these temples in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhra Pradesh.

So we can say that the whole temple is full of spiritual thoughts and these forms are presenting the socio-cultural environment of that time. So the Indian civilization and culture is full of high philosophical thought and prosperity.

Theatre (Natyamandapam)

Before beginning of a drama, there is a custom of worship and that is not possible in absence of stage. Therefore Acharya Bharata defined four type of design for the construction of theatre –

1. Vikruist – “विभागेन कृष्टः दीर्घः इति विकृष्टः” that means, the length and breadth is designed in all four direction differently. कृष्ट refers that length is more than the breadth.
2. Chaturasra – “चतसृषु दिक्षु साभ्येन कृष्ट इति चतुरस्रः” it means that all the four sides are made equals.

3. Trayasra – “त्रिस्रः अश्रयः अस्मिन्निति त्र्यश्रः” it means the three corners are triangular.

These three have three measurements also – that is jyestha, madhyam and adham. On the basic of the experiments the design of three stages has been given.

Enshrined of Gods and Goddess in Theatre (with scientific approach)

There is a custom of worshipping god and goddess for removal of miss happenings and problems in Indian culture. In the same way acharya Bharatamuni has explained with reasons the importance of each and every SPOT of a theatre in relation to God and Goddess. IN THIS SERIES God moon has been given and nominated with special status above all. Acharya a gupta writes in the commentary of theatre that the presiding deity of whole theatre should be of gentle and peaceful nature. That's why moon has been appointed for this cause.

- For the protection of each direction Lokpals are being appointed. In the east side Indra, west side Varun, north side Kuber and in the south side Yama has been place.
- For the protection of corners the Marudgan are being appointed. They are called corner (kona). They are situated in the middle point of two direction i.e. between east and south Igneous (aagneyakona), between south and west nairitya, between west and north Vayavya and there is Ishan in the middle point of north and east. Marudgana means air ditie is a God to solve the summer problem and due to crowd in theatre the presence of summer is obvious, that's why marudagana are worshipped and thus this God is given place in on corner of the theatre.
- In same way in Nepathya side there is place of sun because light is needed for wearing clothes and ornaments.
- In the sky side Varun Dev is enshrined, so that any problem coming from that side will be solved.
- There is tradition to enshrine Agni Dev for the protection of Vedika or Rangpeeth. The sun is God of energy and it is believed that sun will enlighten the actors and actress coming on the stage to perform, as well the sun will eradicate all the evil spirits and problems either existing or coming from audience.
- As well as the all other Gods are enshrined to protect the musical instruments and other mechanical instruments. Scholar Abhinagupta has accepted the concept of Sadrish LAKSHNA (SIMILAR QUALITY). It means according to these concept appointment of different people on the various spots in theatre should be done by considering their quality with equality the qualities of different Gods and where these concept of Sadrish Lakshna does not exist there by the rule of Niyamadrish the appointment of special people should be done ^[15].
- For the protection of four pillars, four Vasrna are being appointed. For other pillar twelve Aditya and eleven Rudra are being appointed.
- For the protection of door pillar God Yamaraja and Kala are being appointed and for the door protection two snakes are being appointed Anata and Gulika.
- In the middle of the theatre the God Brahma is being appointed. In the starting of the drama He worshiped by flowers for that He will destroy all the problems and will save all the creatures. All God also become happy and public got prosperity.

- For the protection of the lower part of the theatre three snakes are being appointed – Yaksha, Guhayaka and Pannaaka.
- For the protection of every character Gods are being appointed – God Indra for the hero protection, Goddess Saraswati for the heroine, Omkar for the Vidushka and God Shiva for the rest of the character.
- Acharya Bharata has explained with rationality for the enshrining and worshiping Gods in each special spots in the theatre. Thus it presents the specialty of Indian culture with real sense that is being followed even today by the people of this country.

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Conclusion

Lastly it can be said that these pieces of work are telling the philosophy of the element of PIND and BRAHMAND. They bring out the element of philosophical thinking of our country. The idea of being and brahma is visible in all these creations, which is supposed to help humans in this as well as the other world.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I have written this article. And this is my original work. Before this it has not been publish on any other places. If it found I will be guilty for it.

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