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Cover: Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India.

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# STHAPATYA ANTIFRAGILE ALGORITHM



## Message from Hon'ble Minister of Culture

With immense pride, I present to you, this publication on Temple Styles of India, titled **Sthapatya: Antifragile Algorithm** as a part of the IAADB '23 – The India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale 2023.

The India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale 2023, hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India in New Delhi at the historic Red Fort, marks a pioneering event in the country. This unique event highlights the aesthetic mastery and cultural resonance of various art and architectural expressions, fostering a convergence of voices from both local and global perspectives. The Biennale presents a creative amalgamation of traditional and contemporary elements, featuring a diverse cohort of artists, architects, designers, creators, and curators. Additionally, the Biennale serves a dual purpose as a cultural prelude, aligning with the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

Temples stand as living monuments, encapsulating history, artistry, and cultural legacies. In ancient times, they thrived as economic centres and today, they shape heritage tourism while inspiring various art forms. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, temples serve as cultural hubs, hosting festivals and performances. Remarkably constructed without the aid of modern technology, they exhibit architectural brilliance and historical narratives. This book serves as a gateway to Indian temple architecture, exploring diverse styles and histories, offering enthusiasts and scholars a rich tapestry of insights into this captivating architectural realm.

I am delighted that the Ministry of Culture has spearheaded the creation of this distinctive publication aim at educating the public through appreciation of temple styles, and I extend my congratulations to the research and production team for successfully producing this vibrant and accessible work.

### Shri G.Kishan Reddy

Minister of Culture, Tourism and Development of North Eastern Region Government of India

### **Message from Secretary Culture**

I am delighted to introduce you to this well researched publication at titled **Sthapatya: Antifragile Algorithm** on Temple Styles of India aimed at educating the common public to better appreciate their architectural built heritage at the India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale 2023.

The India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale 2023 is an iconic initiative of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. This event at the historic Red Fort, New Delhi is a celebration of India's artistic legacy. Displaying a unique blend of our aesthetic value and cultural diversity, the Biennale seeks to bring together creative thought leaders, innovators, designer and artists. The launch of this Biennale from the Redfort serves as the first step towards elevating the historic place into a cultural space for art and culture.

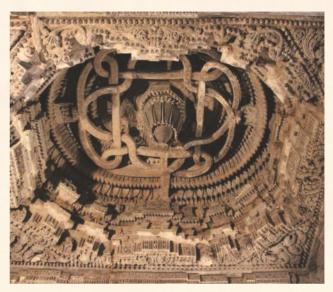
Temples in India are a perfect blend of spirituality, aesthetic sensibility and engineering brilliance. These spaces have been dedicated to celebrating life, festivals and culture since time immemorial. Sthapatya is an insight into the history of temple architecture in India. It highlights the distinct temple architectural styles- Dravida style of the South, Nagara style of the North and Vesara style of Karnataka, apart from other techniques like sandstone temples in Central India, terracotta temples in the East, Ahom style of temple in Assam and Pagoda architecture of the hills. The temples in the book are not just an expression of architectural excellence and diversity, but also symbolise the celebration of a cultural space and traditions of faith and lifestyle of its people.

This book by the Ministry of Culture is a milestone in India's art and architectural history. I would like to wholeheartedly appreciate and congratulate the entire team for this publication to educate our younger generations on our country's history and heritage.

Shri Govind Mohan, IAS

Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Culture











# contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Nagara Temples	2
3. Dravidian Temples	86
4. Vesara Temples	170
5. Independent/ Regional Temples	254



Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam

# INTRODUCTION

Temples play a vital role in a country's history, offering a captivating glimpse into the realms of architecture, visual culture, and art. They represent a unique blend of aesthetics and utility, not only enhancing the beauty of their surroundings but also providing employment opportunities, in the distant past. These ancient temples serve as a testament to the remarkable creativity and economic development of societies well ahead of their time. Interestingly, their influence persists to this day, serving as a cornerstone of the heritage tourism industry, inspiring fields such as textiles and mural art.

Not only are temples a canvas for artistic expression but they have also been fostering cultural exchange and artistic traditions. Temples often serve as the focal point for various cultural festivals and celebrations showcasing music, dance, and other performing arts.

More than mere architectural marvels, temples are like time capsules, mapping out the past and firmly placing architects and benefactors in the pages of history. They provide visual cues that enrich our understanding of the past, often complementing written records.

Not just repositories of history, temples act as reflective mirrors of the society of their era. The deities and religious symbols portrayed in temple art and sculptures are indicative of the prevailing faiths and spiritual convictions of the society. The stories conveyed through temple artwork offer glimpses into the mythology and religious narratives that carry cultural significance.

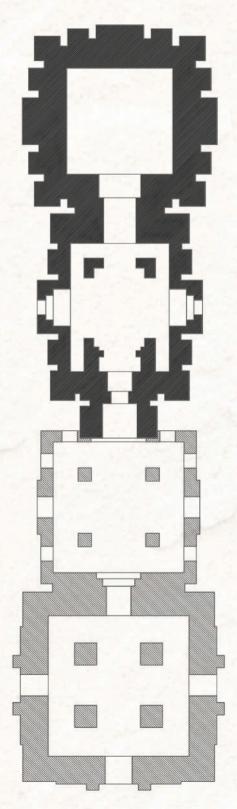
Moreover, the scale and opulence of temples can serve as indicators of the social structure of the period. Opulent temples often symbolize the sponsorship of influential rulers or affluent elites, while more modest temple structures may symbolize the humbler communities within the society.

It is astounding to contemplate the sheer scale of these structures, especially when one ponders how they were built without the aid of modern technology. However, today, thanks to the intersection of research and creativity, we find ways to utilize technology in reconstructing and preserving these marvels. Temples, therefore, are not merely structures; they are storytellers, imparting knowledge about technology, history, and have the allure of tourism. Their enduring influence threads through time, connecting our past with the possibilities of the future.

This book serves as an introduction to temple architecture in India, delving into the rich history and distinct styles of Dravida, Nagara, Vesara, and various independent temple architecture. Within its pages, you will find an exploration of these architectural types, offering a valuable resource for those interested in the fascinating world of temple architecture and design.

# NAGARA TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE





Architectural Plan of the Lingaraj Temple



Intricately carved ceiling at the Gondeshwar Temple

Nagara architecture is a distinctive style of temple construction that originated in northern India around the 5th Century AD and subsequently spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. This architectural style is renowned for its unique features, most notably pyramidal, curvilinear or convex towers known as *Shikharas*, crowned with bulbous finials called *Kalashas*.

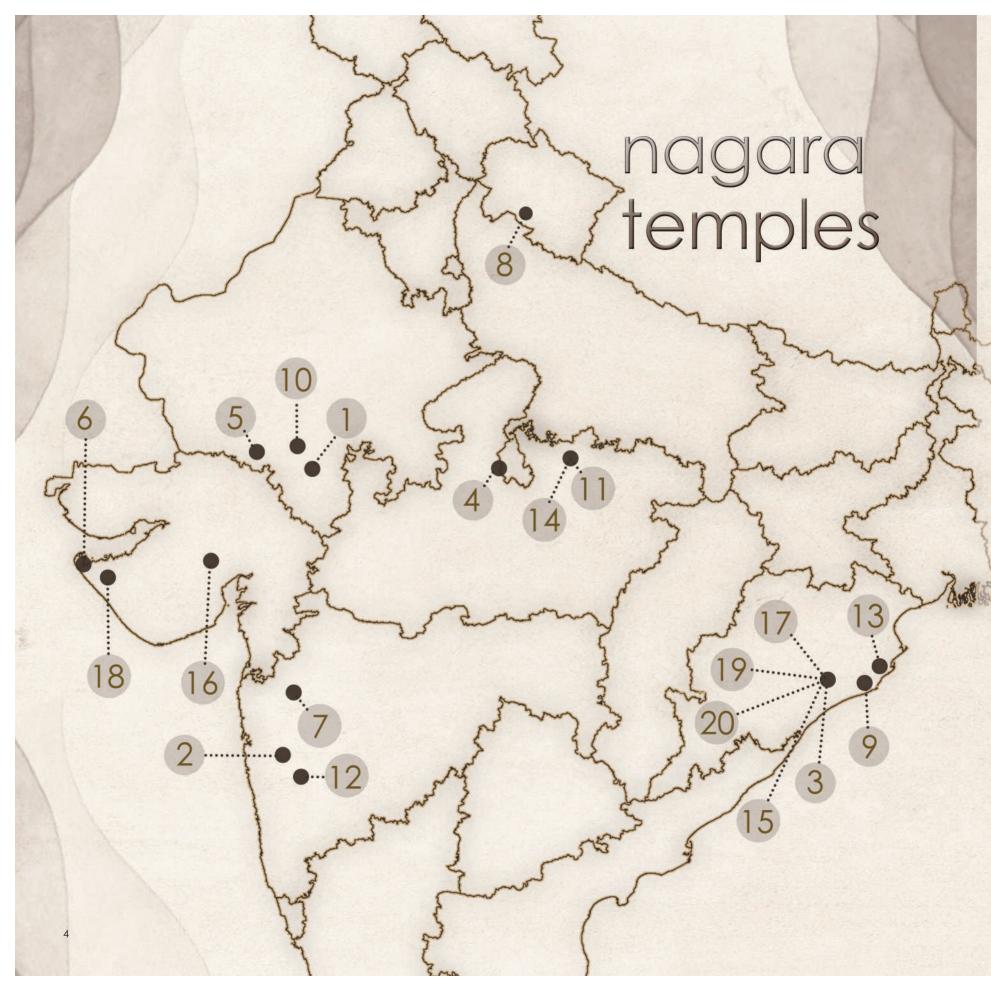
Nagara temples typically adhere to a square or rectangular plan, with the *Shikhara* placed prominently in the center. These temples often feature multiple smaller towers, known as *Mukhamandapas*, surrounding the central shikhara. The walls of *Nagara* temples are crafted from stone or brick and adorned with intricate sculptures and reliefs. The pillars within *Nagara* temples are known for their ornate carvings and support the temple's roof.

Toranas, the decorative gateways leading into the temple, are typically constructed from stone or wood and feature sculptures and reliefs. The main hall, or Mandapa, serves as the central space for devotees to gather and worship the deity.

Deep within the temple lies the Garbhagriha, the innermost sanctum enshrining the deity. One distinctive feature of Nagara architecture is the precise alignment of the tallest tower directly above the Garbhagriha.

With its distinct features and unique materials, the *Nagara* style of temple architecture forms a spectacular visual in the northern region of the subcontinent.



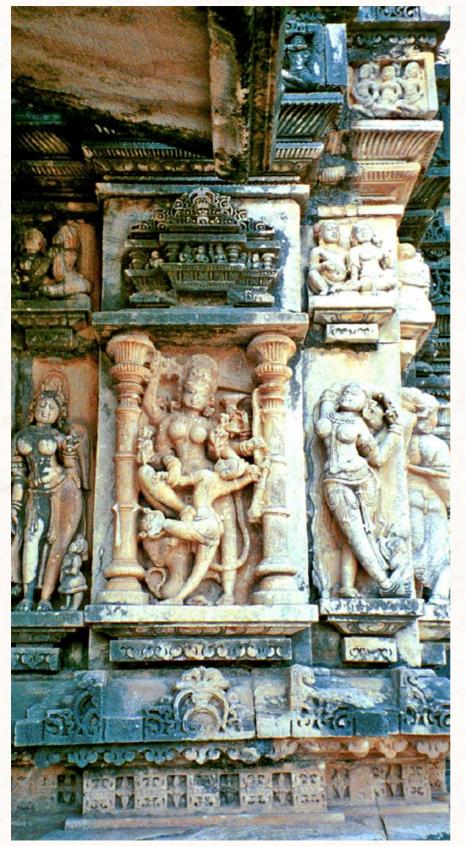


- 01. Ambika Mata Temple Jagat, Rajasthan
- 02. Bhimshankar Temple Pune, Maharashtra
- 03. Brahmeshwara Temple Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- 04. Dashavatara Temple Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh
- 05. Dwarkadhish Temple Dwarka, Gujarat
- 06. Gondeshwar Temple Sinnar, Maharashtra
- 07. Gopinath Temple Gopeshwar, Uttrakhand
- 08. Jagannath Temple Puri, Odisha
- 09. Jagdish Temple Udaipur, Rajasthan
- 10. Kandariya Mahadev Temple Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh
- 11. Khandoba Temple Jejuri, Maharashtra
- 12. Konark Sun Temple Konark, Odisha
- 13. Lakshmana Temple Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh
- 14. Lingaraja Temple Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- 15. Modhera Sun Temple Modhera, Gujarat
- 16. Mukteshwara Temple Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- 17. Navlakha Temple Ghumli, Gujarat
- 18. Parsurameswara Temple Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- 19. Rajarani Temple Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- 20. Vimal Vasahi Temple Mount Abu, Rajasthan

# 1 AMBIKA MATA TEMPLE

Jagat, Rajasthan





Intricate Carvings on the exterior facade at the Ambika Mata Temple

# **Built in** 10th century CE

**Dynasty**Guhila

**Style** Nagara

**Material**Sandstone

## **HISTORY**

The Ambika Mata temple, nestled within a small rock cleft in Jagat, Rajasthan, boasts of a rich historical legacy. It was commissioned during the reign of Rawal Allata, a Guhila dynasty ruler in Mewar. Within its sacred precincts, several inscriptions can be found, with the oldest dating back to 961 CE, documenting meticulous temple repairs. Ambika, a manifestation of the Hindu deity Durga and a revered yakshi, is the principal deity in her formidable Shakti form, associated with Hinduism through her vahana (sacred mount), the lion. Her significance extends to Jainism, owing to a visionary encounter of Vimala with the yakshi, providing counsel for the construction of the Adinath temple in Mount Abu. The temple's sanctum houses numerous images of Shakti, and it continues to be a vibrant and active place of worship, where devotees venerate the presiding deity as a Hindu goddess today.

The temple is an early transitional example of the Maru-Gurjara architectural substyle. It is a pentagonal temple with a massive rampart wall, seventeen turrets, and a pagodalike gabled roof. The intricate carvings are adorned with a variety of vegetal motifs. Notably, one corner has a carving of a mountain palace, symbolizing the heavenly abode of gods and goddesses. It is covered with detailed motifs that evoke the scene of heaven, while smaller shikharas encirclina the main tower resemble the surrounding mountain peaks. The architecture of the mountain palace is in the image of the temple itself, signifying its role as the earthly residence of the gods and goddesses.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### **Outflow Channel**

A distinctive feature of the temple is its outflow channel designed for liquid offerings. This structure resembles a rainspout but is specifically meant for pouring liquids such as milk and water onto the altar. These offerings are then collected through the spout as it flows into a trough. The spout is intricately carved in the shape of a kneeling woman pouring the liquid from a bowl.



Carvings on the capital of the column



Carvings on the base of the column



Carvings on the outflow channel

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

The temple is also known as the "Khajuraho of Mewar" because of its excellent state of preservation and the intricate iconography it showcases. This iconography features musicians, dancers, singers, and numerous surasundaris, with much detailing in the objects they use and the garments they wear. Intricate vegetal motifs separate these figures and fill in the spaces. The reliefs provide a dynamic and vibrant visualisation.

Intricate carvings on the exterior facade







Bhimshankar Temple

# **Built in** 18th century CE

# Dynasty

Peshwa

# Style

Nagara

## **Material**

Black Stone

## **HISTORY**

The Bhimshankar temple, one of the twelve jyotirlingas, is a Shaivite shrine and important place of pilgrimage. It is located on a mountain close to the source of the Bhima river. Regardless of the fact that a great deal of the temple is completely new, it has been mentioned in the writings of the Marathi saints dating back to the 13th century. The Varkari saint Namdev claimed to have visited the temple, and it is believed that saint Jnaneshwar did so as well. In the 18th century, Nana Phadnavis of the Peshwa dynasty built the temple hall and the gopuram-shikhara. According to legend, Shivaji bestowed the village of Kharosi to the temple, and Chimaji Appa added the bell. The shivalinga is thought to be swayambhyu, naturally occurring.

The temple has elements of the Hemadpanthi architecture style of the Deccan. Its interior comprises the mukhamandapa, sabhamandapa, antarala, and garbhagriha, adorned with pillars and a ceiling. One distinguishing feature of the shikhara is its graceful curve, which stands out as an exceptional illustration of architectural finesse. It is important to note that this style of temple architecture was introduced in the Deccan region during the second half of the 18th century.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

## Doorjambs with Icons and Makartoranas

The temple's beauty lies in the doorjambs that are carved with intricate makartoranas. These doorjambs, including the pushpashakha, stambhashakha, vyalashakha, and patrashakha, display exquisite ornamentation. The antarala doorjamb is adorned with intricate floral patterns; while the upper lintel features Nataraj Shiva surrounded by makartoranas, the lower section bears the surasundari icon. Additionally, the garbhagriha doorjambs display icons of the river goddesses Ganga-Yamuna, Chamardharini, and Nidhi.







# **Built in** 11th century CE

# **Dynasty** Somavamshi

somavamsn

# **Style** Nagara

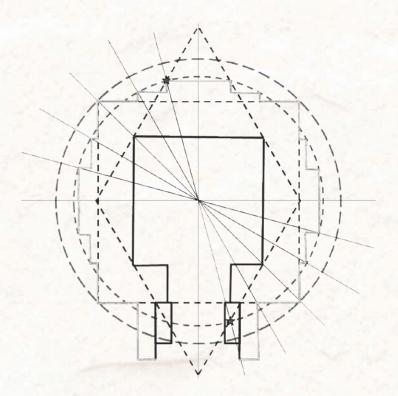
# **Material** Sandstone

### **HISTORY**

The Brahmeshwara temple was constructed by Kolavati Devi, the mother of Udyotakesari, during the 18th year of his reign as the Somavamshi king. The ruling deity is Shiva's manifestation, Brahmeswara, depicted with a *lingam* inside a yonipitha. Additionally, the temple is believed to be associated with some of the historical devadasi system practices that became prevalent in Odisha over time.



The temple is categorised as a panchayatana temple complex and is an example of the mature Kalinga architectural style. Besides the main shrine, four subsidiary shrines can be found in each of the temple's four corners. Traditional wood carving techniques on stone have been used for both the interior and exterior of the temple. The temple consists of a deula or shikhar, a jagmohana natamandira, and bogamandapa in the typical Odishan style. The Jagmohana features the iconic lion head, popular in Odisha. The jangha, the moulding below the deul and a part of the Kalinga temple architecture, displays carvings of the different forms of Shiva, including Nataraja, Bhairava, Ardhanarisvara, among others.



Plan of Subsidiary shrines

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

# Pidha Deula Jagmohana

The jagmohana of the temple is a perfect pidhadeula of Odishan architecture, featuring elements such as beki, ghanta, amla-beki, amla, khapuri, and kalasha in the mastaka. Notably, the deula and the jagmohana, despite having two different shapes, are seamlessly joined without any overlap. The temple has only one entry in the east and two balustrated windows on the jagmohana. Several intricate carvings adorn the interior ceiling.



Gateway to the Temple



Brahmeshwara Temple & the adjacent kund

# DID YOU KNOW?

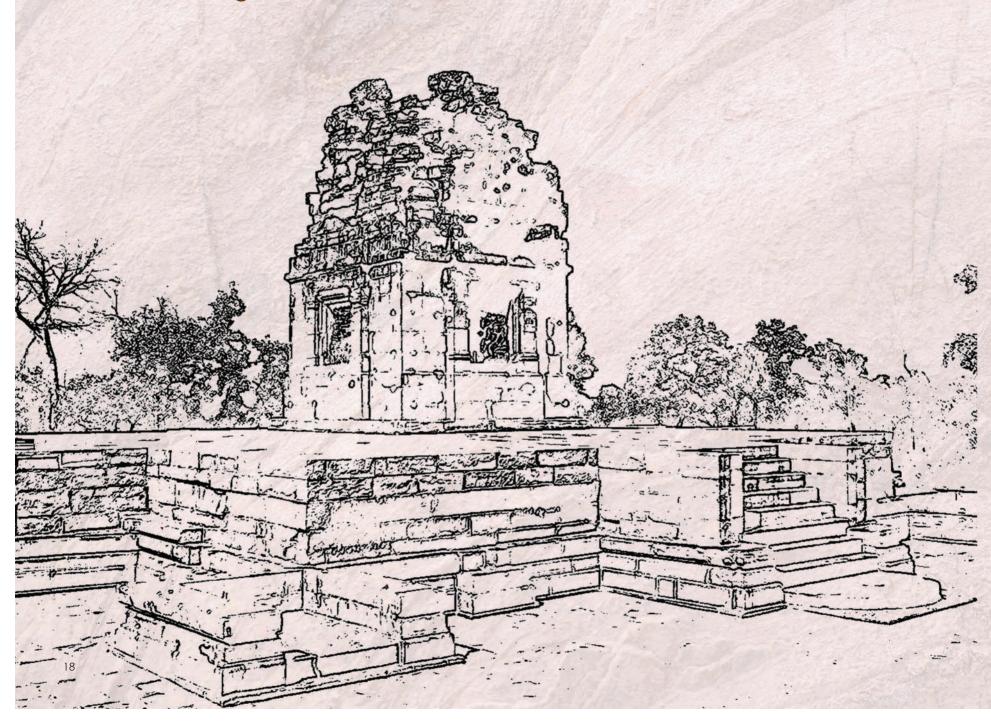
Tantric rituals and practices are believed to be associated with the Brahmeswara temple, which can be attributed to its iconography. The carving on the western facade depicts Chamunda holding a trident in one hand and a human head in another, standing atop a corpse. Additionally, there are depictions of fierce Shiva carvings.



Carvings on the exterior wall of the temple

# 4 DASHAVATARA TEMPLE

Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh





Carved entrance gateway

**Built in**Early 6th century CE

**Dynasty**Gupta

**Style** Nagara

**Material**Stone and Brick Masonry

## HISTORY

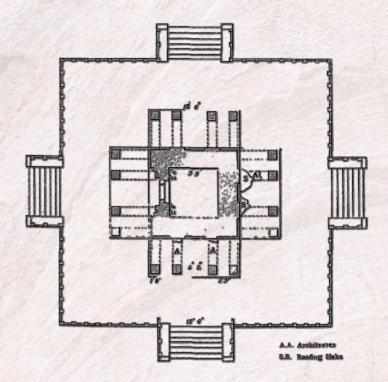
The Dashavatara temple at Deogarh was built in the early 6th century CE during the rule of the Gupta dynasty. Deogarh has a large complex of Hindu and Jain temples, with inscriptions in various languages dating back to the 8th century CE. The temple derives its name from oral traditions that suggested the presence of a relief depicting the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu on the structure, which had later vanished. The oral tradition was validated when the reliefs of Krishna, Narasimha, Vamana, and other figures were excavated.

The temple is constructed on a basement with a jagati, an extended square plinth. The platform has steps on each of its four sides, making it possible to enter from any of the four directions. The plinth is shaped in four parallel directions with rectangular panels featuring narratives from the epics placed above each side. At the centre of the platform lies the Vishnu temple platform, within a total of nine squares. An intricately carved doorway leading to the sanctum features small images of various deities, including Shiva, Parvati, Kartikeya, Brahma, Indra, Yamuna, and Ganga. There are reliefs narrating Vishnu legends around the sanctum. The shikhara, which is partially preserved atop the sanctum, is thought to have had straight edges and pyramidal levels.

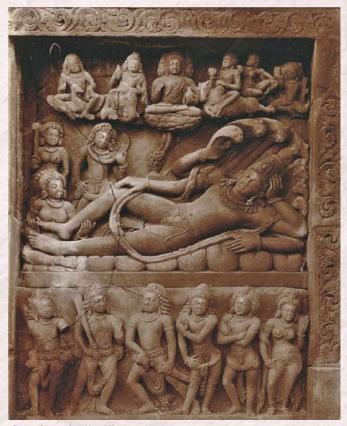


## Vaishnava Legends

Deogarh's magnificent temple is dedicated to Vishnu and its walls are adorned with the subject of numerous legends. Among the legends are depictions of Nara-Narayana sitting in *lalitasana*, Anantasayi Vishnu in a reclining posture, and Gajendra-moksha flying with Garuda. The temple is located with a slight elevation to the south and a western orientation. The Vishnu idol in the main temple at the centre is illuminated by the golden rays of the setting sun, creating a mesmerising effect.



Architectural Plan of the Dashavatara Temple Complex



Carvings in the Temple



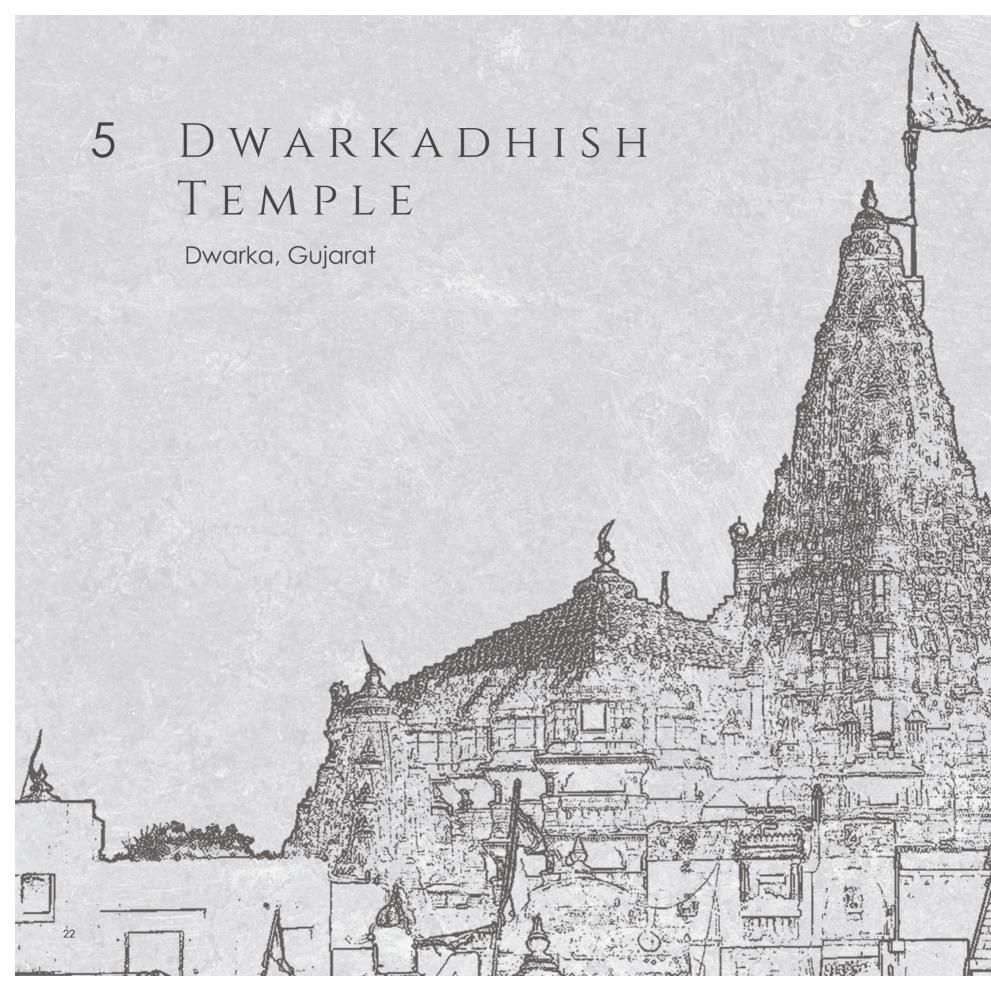
A view of the Dashavatara Temple

# **DID YOU KNOW?**

There is a belief that the Dashavatara temple in Deogarh is identical to the Sarvatobhadra-style temple described in the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*. Notably, the text was written at least a century after the temple was built, leading to speculation that the author was so captivated by the Deogarh temple that he felt compelled to provide a detailed description of its unique architectural style.



Carvings on the exterior wall





**Built in** 16th century CE

**Dynasty**Gujarat Sultanate

**Style** Nagara

**Material**Limestone and Sand

## **HISTORY**

The Dwarkadhish Temple in Dwarka, Gujarat, boasts a lengthy and intriguing history strongly connected to mythology. With origins dating back thousands of years, the temple has undergone centuries of evolution and has been preserved by various dynasties and rulers, ensuring its enduring role as the centre of religious and cultural activities. The temple contains some materials that predate even 200 BCE. The present-day temple was rebuilt in the 16th century under the direction of the revered saint Vallab Acharya, the founder of the Vaishnavite Pushti Marg sect.

The architecture of the temple is in the Chaulukya substyle. Standing five stories tall, it is approximately 78 feet (24 metres) high. The temple's layout, which includes a mandapa, shikhara, and garbhagriha, is well-organized. The main entrance, known as the moksha dwar or the "door to salvation," is a grand and intricately carved structure, serving as the gateway to the inner sanctum. Inside the temple, the mandapa, referred to as the jagat mandir, is supported by an impressive array of 72 intricately carved pillars. The shikhara, a prominent architectural feature, is designed in a step-like or pyramidical style, lavishly adorned with sculptures and motifs. Above the sanctum sanctorum, there is a smaller dome or vimana. Inside the temple, a rich array of images and reliefs depict myths and stories from Vaishnavism, particularly those related to Lord Krishna.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### Moksha Dwar

The carvings on the *moksha dwar* or the main door of the Dwarkadhish Temple showcase a magnificent display of intricate craftsmanship and artistic devotion. They provide a visual feast for visitors and devotees approaching the temple's entrance. The door is adorned with a plethora of mythological scenes and depictions from Hindu scriptures, which vividly bring to life the stories and legends associated with Lord Krishna, the presiding deity of the temple. Various deities from the Hindu pantheon find a place in the carvings, and the minute details in each carving highlight their distinct qualities and meanings. Narrative panels from Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana can also be found in some sections of the door.





# 6 GONDESHWAR TEMPLE

Sinnar, Maharashtra





Gondeshwar Temple

## **Built in**11th-12th centuries CE

**Dynasty** Seuna

**Style** Nagara

Material Black Basalt, Lime

#### HISTORY

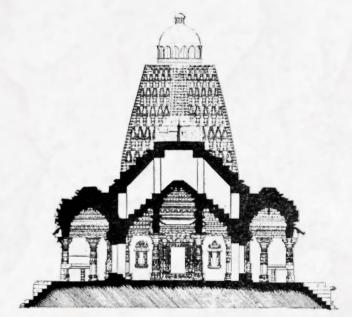
The historical origins of the Gondeshwar temple delve deep into the ancient annals of time, going back to the illustrious Seuna (Yadava) dynasty that reigned over parts of medieval Maharashtra. This architectural masterpiece, believed to have been constructed in the 11th or 12th century, bears witness to the rich historical tapestry of its era. The enormous task of building the temple was undertaken by Rav Govinda, the son of Rav Singhuni, who is credited with commissioning it. According to local folklore, Rav Singhuni, a Yadava-line Gavali chief, is credited with establishing the town of Sinnar. Scholars have connected Sinnar to Seunapura, a town influenced by the rule of the Yadava King, Seuanchandra.

The Gondeshwar temple is a panchayatana complex, consisting of a central shrine encircled by four subordinate shrines. The temple stands on a rectangular platform measuring 125 x 95 feet, with the central sanctum dedicated to Lord Shiva, housing a large linga. This shrine, along with the Nandi pavilion directly facing it, rests on an elevated plinth. The temple's entrance is through a mandapa with porches on three sides. Its unique Bhumija-style shikhara features central projections on each face, surrounded by miniature spires in both vertical and horizontal rows, culminating at the top. The temple's exquisite craftsmanship is evident in the meticulously carved ceilings of the porches, adorned with cusped ornamentation and central carvinas. The facade of the octagonal band showcases sculptures depicting processions, musicians, dancers, sages, warriors, everyday life scenes, and elements of erotica. Elephant motifs grace the base of the walls, while intricate floral patterns complete this remarkable architectural masterpiece.

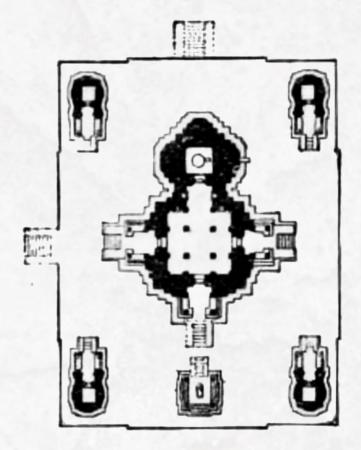


#### **Hemadpanti Architecture**

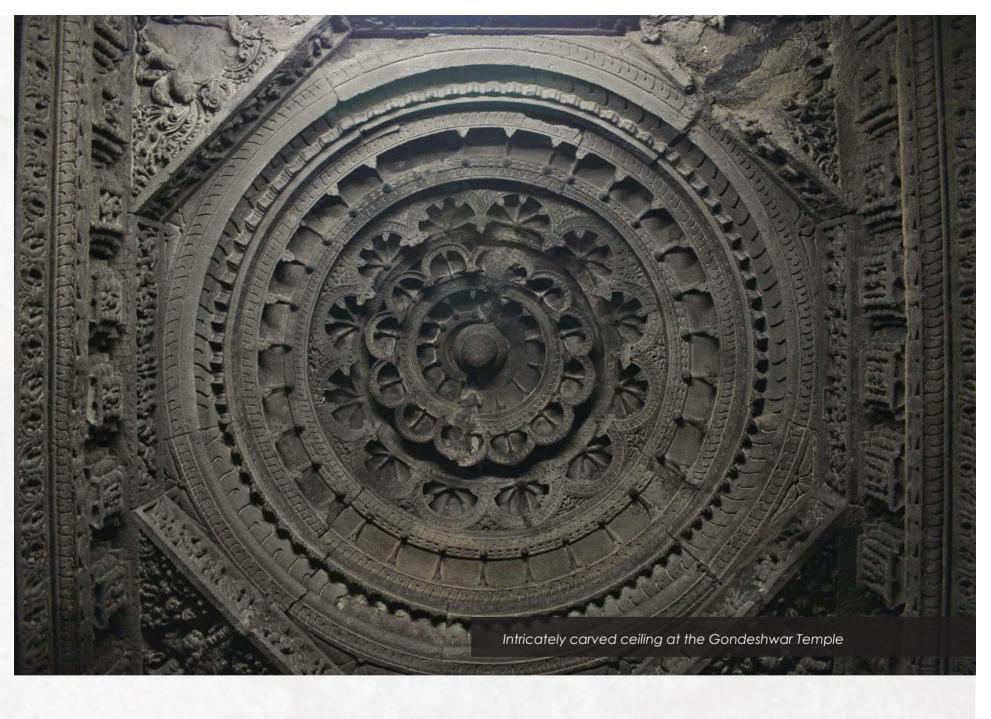
The Gondeshwar temple stands as a splendid example of Hemadpanti architectural style, distinguished by its enduring beauty. Hemadpanti temples feature a distinctive star-shaped architectural design for their outer walls. This unique layout incorporates a zigzag pattern, creating a captivating interplay of light and shadow. The significance of the center of mass in the construction of every element is paramount in this style of architecture. In contrast to various other architectural styles, Hemadpanti construction eschews the use of adhesives and instead relies on the precise placement and equilibrium of each component to maintain structural stability.



Architectural Section of the Gondeshwar Temple



Architectural Plan of the Gondeshwar Temple Complex



The ambiguity surrounding the temple's origins only deepens its enigmatic allure. A theory regarding the construction of the Gondeshwar temple, also known as Govindeshvara, suggests that it might have been commissioned by a Yadava feudatory named Govinda-raja. However, this legend lacks concrete historical evidence to substantiate the claim.





#### **Built in**

9th -11th centuries CE

#### **Dynasty**

Katyuri

#### Style

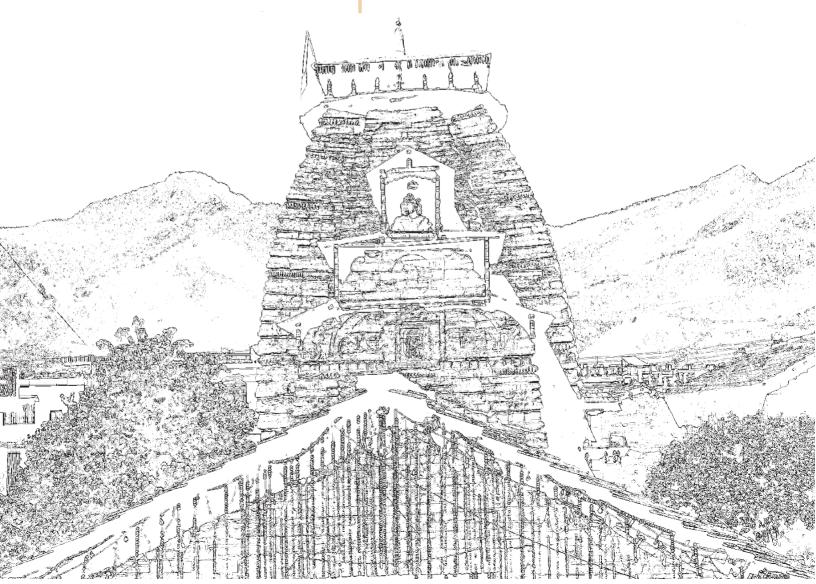
Nagara

#### **Material**

Stone

#### **HISTORY**

The Gopinath temple is one of the twelve jyotirlingas or manifestations of Shiva. Believed to have been constructed between the 9th and 11th centuries CE by the powerful Katuri kings, inscriptions provide evidence of its existence by the 12th century. As one explores the temple's surroundings, remnants of several fragmented idols scattered around provide compelling evidence that Gopeshwar was once home to numerous temples. Today, the Gopinath temple stands as a highly revered pilgrimage site, following the pancha kedar shrines in importance.



The architectural style of the temple is similar to that of Tunganath and Kedarnath. At the apex of the temple, a magnificent shikhara enhances its structural design, though not as tall as its North Indian counterparts. The intricate layout of the temple is truly fascinating. The garbhagriha or sanctum sanctorum, the most sacred space within the temple, covers an approximate area of 30 square feet. What adds to the temple's uniqueness is the presence of a total of 24 doors leading to the garbagriha. The mandapa's roof is slanted, a feature exclusive to the mountainous terrain. While the shikhara, both inside and outside is decorated with elaborate carvings, the mandapa's exteriors maintain a simple look.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Ashtadhatu Trident

Within the temple's premises, there is a striking 5 metre tall trident made from a unique blend of eight different metals, or ashtadhatu, with origins dating back to the 12th century. This remarkable artefact bears inscriptions attributed to Anekmalla, the reigning King of Nepal during the 13th century. One of these inscriptions provides historical evidence of Anekmalla's contributions, particularly his role in the construction of a royal structure. Additionally, it is worth noting that the trident's metal has been remarkable well-preserved over the centuries and displays minimal signs of weathering or deterioration despite prolonged exposure to the elements.







# **Built** in HISTORY 12th century CE **Dynasty** Ganga Style Nagara **Material** Khondalite Stone

According to the inscription on the Dasgoba copper plate, the renowned Jagannath temple in Puri was built during the reign of Ananta Varman Chodaganga. As a testament to his religious authority and personal brilliance, the king constructed this magnificent temple in Chaudwar after subduing the Cholas, Somavanshis, and Kalachuris and relocating his capital from Kalinganagara. It is believed that the temple replaced an older one. The exact timeline as to whether the temple was completed during Ananta Varman's rule or that of his successors remains a subject of debate. During this period, Odisha saw a significant shift towards Vaishnavism, with the Jagannath temple serving as a prominent landmark. The temple is dedicated to the worship of the three deities Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. The idols' decorations change with the seasons, and they are carved from neem loas. Every year, thousands of devotees travel to Puri to pay their respects during the grandiose rath yatra hosted by the temple.

The temple complex covers an expansive area of more than 4,00,000 square feet, surrounded by a high wall known as the Meahnada Prachira. The main temple is built in a pancharatha style and follows the rekha deula architectural design, while the jagmohana is built in the pidha deula style. Within the complex you can also find the mukhasala and the bhoaa mandapa. The shikhara is situated on a stone platform and is 214 feet tall, towering above all the other temples. There are at least thirty small temples and shrines in the entire complex. The crown, referred to as the nila chakra, adorns the temple. The main gate opens on the eastern side facing the Grand Road and is named the singhadwara because of the crouching lion statues flanking it on either side.



Jagannath Temple Complex

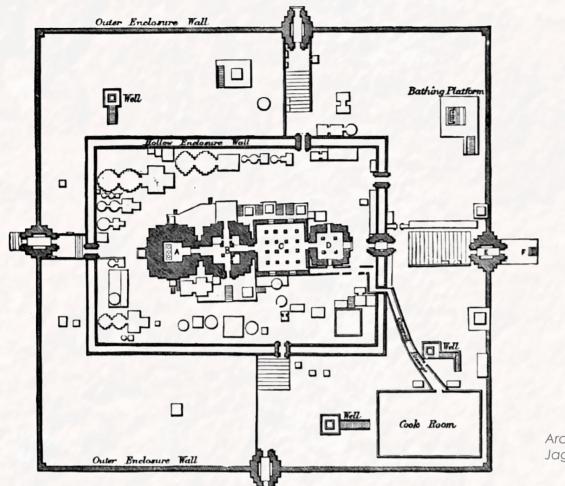
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Nila Chakra

The *nila* chakra, crowning the *shikhara*, is said to symbolise the deity Vishnu. It is made of ashtadhatu, an alloy comprising eight metals, and stands at a height of 11 feet 8 inches high with a circumference of about 36 feet. The flag atop the disc is changed every day. The outer rim of the disc is adorned with eight *navagunjaras*, mythical creatures composed of nine distinct animals, all facing the flagpole.



Nila Chakra crowning the shikhara



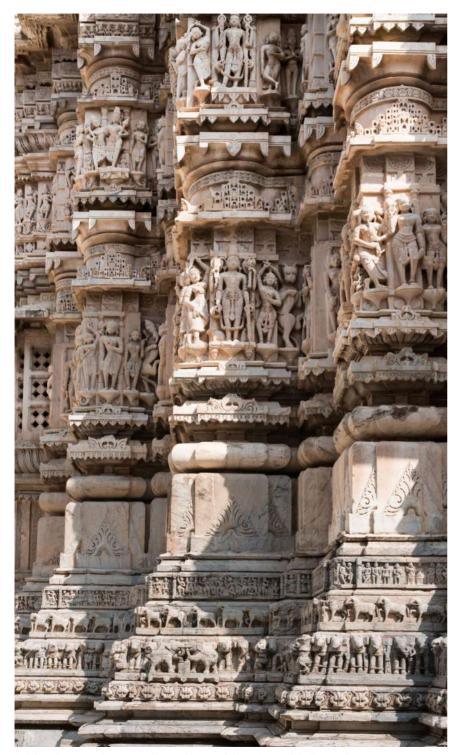
Architectural Plan of the Jagannath Temple Complex

The worship of wooden images gained prominence in Hinduism after the construction of the Jagannath temple in Puri. Some scholars suggest that these wooden images bear remnants of ancient tribal deities worshipped in northern Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, eventually becoming assimilated into the Brahmanical pantheon. It also raises questions about the historical prevalence of former Buddhist traditions in this region, given the temple's practice of relic worship.



Artwork showing Balarama, Subhadra and Jagannath in the temple at Puri





Intricate carvings on the pillars of the Jagdish Temple

#### **Built in**

17th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Mewar

#### Style

Nagara

#### **Material**

Stone and Marble

#### **HISTORY**

Situated within Udaipur's city palace complex is the Jagadish temple, devoted to Jagannatha, a manifestation of Vishnu. Maharana Jagat Singh of the Mewar dynasty constructed the temple in 1651, making it the largest temple in Udaipur. The temple's entrance is located about 150 metres from the Bara Pol of the City Palace. To preserve its historical and architectural significance, the temple has undergone numerous restorations and renovations over the years. The temple is a hub of activity during many festivals and is especially busy during the much-anticipated and deeply devotional Rath Yatra of Jagannath.

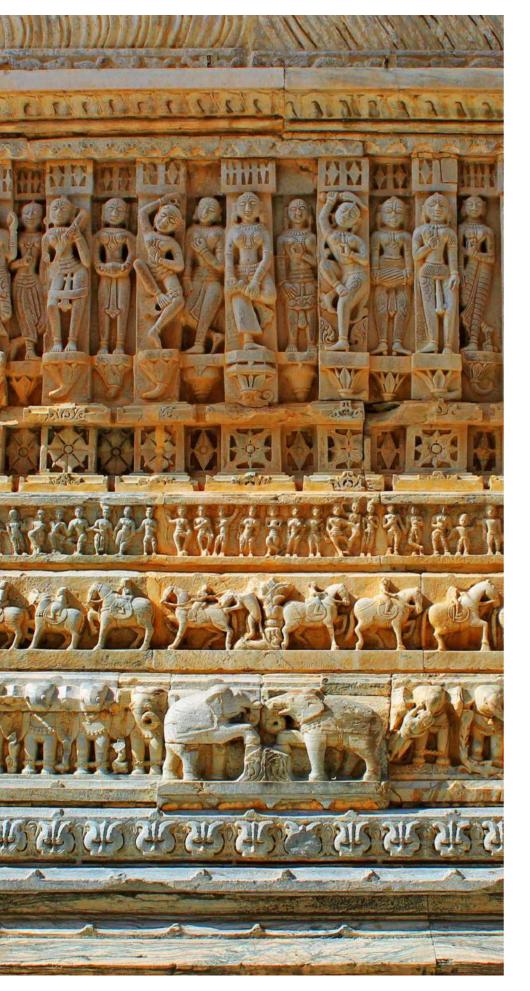
The Jagdish temple is an excellent representation of Maru-Gurjara style of architecture. It is elevated on a lofty platform and connects a two-story mandapa to a two-story saandhara or sanctum with a covered pathway. The mandapa conceals an additional level within its pyramid-shaped samavarna or bell-shaped roof. The intricately designed spire above the sanctum encompasses two more levels, although they are non-functional. Notably, the shikahra is nearly 79 feet in height, making it the largest temple in the city. To reach the primary shrine, one must ascend 32 marble steps, encountering a brass statue of Garuda, the divine mount or vahana of Vishnu, along the way. Inside the garbhagriha, the main deity, Jagannath, is enshrined. The idol, crafted from black stone, has four arms adorned with flowers, and is a significant object of devotion for the local community.

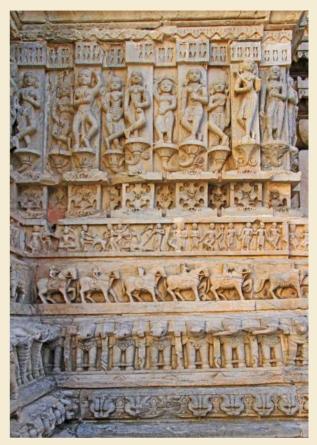
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Carvings on the Temple

The Jagdish Temple in Udaipur is renowned for its intricate and detailed carvings that adorn its walls, pillars, and ceilings. These carvings are a testament to the exceptional craftsmanship of the artisans from the Mewar region. The carvings predominantly feature scenes and figures from epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as representations of various deities, including Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, and Durga, among others. The ceiling of the Jagdish Temple is a masterpiece in itself, with elaborate paintings and carvings. Their frequent depictions of cosmic and celestial themes give the interior of the temple an air of grandeur. The temple also showcases intricate stone screens with geometric or floral patterns, known as jali work. These screens filter the incoming sunlight, creating a mesmerising play of light and shadow within the temple.



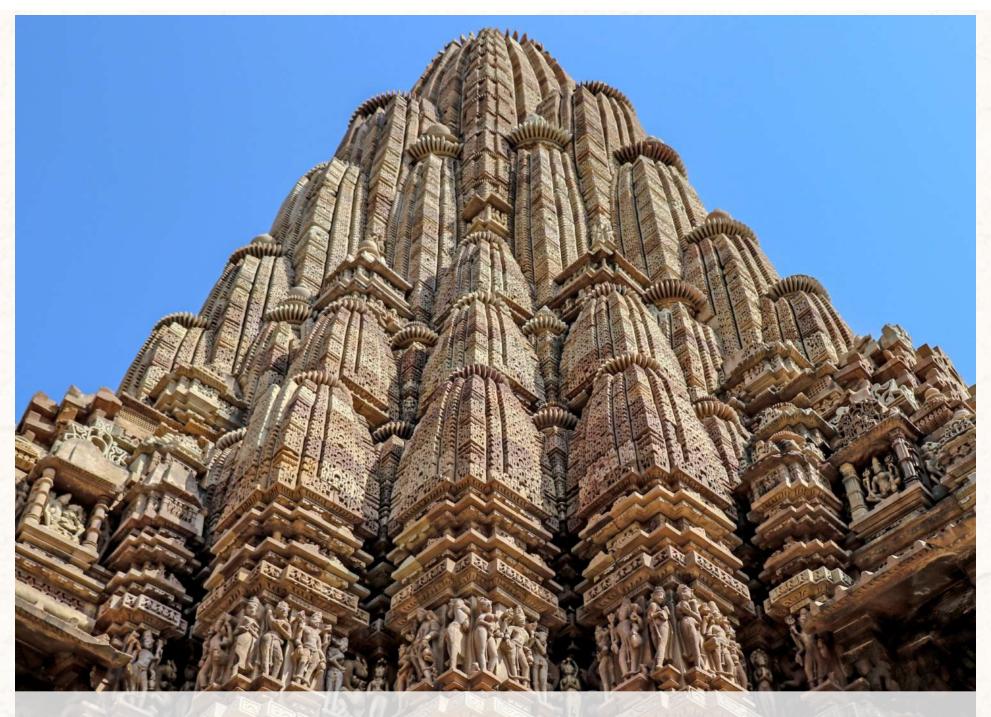




Intricate carvings at Jagdish Temple

It is reported that the temple's construction cost an estimated 1.5 million rupees. To this day, the temple serves as a symbol of Rajasthan's rich cultural heritage.

Carved horizontal bands on the exterior wall



## 10 KANDARIYA MAHADEV TEMPLE

Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

\*UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Year 1986

## **Built in** 1025 - 1050 CE

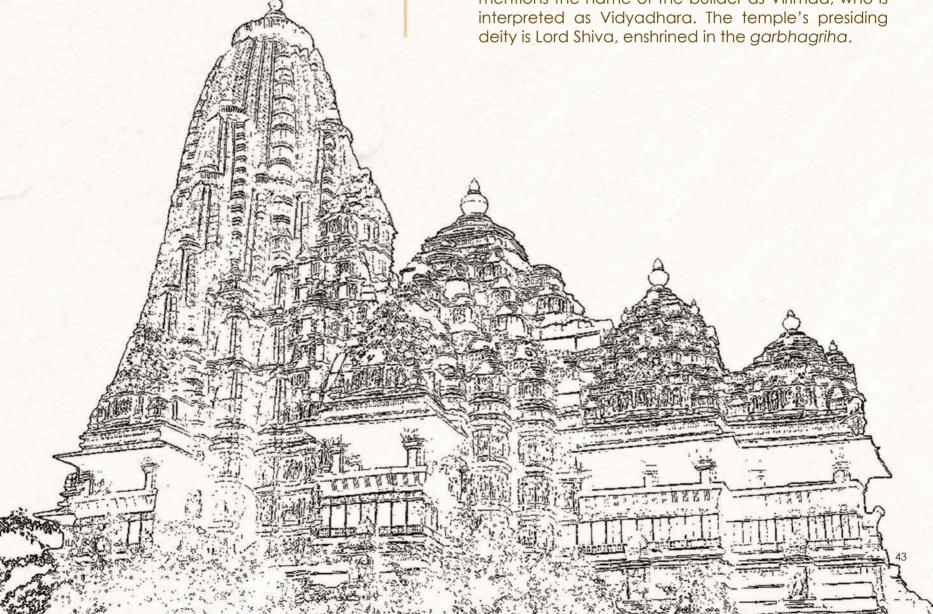
**Dynasty** Chandella Dynasty

**Style** Nagara

**Material**Granite and Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Kandariya Mahadev temple is considered the most magnificent of temples in the western complex of Khajuraho. Built during the reign of the Chandella king, Vidhyadhara (1003-1035 CE), this temple is one of the most elaborate examples of the northernstyle of temple architecture. Vidyadhara played an important role in the movement against Mahmud of Ghazni. One of the significant wars took place at the fort of Kalinjar, where both emperors eventually called a truce and parted with gifts. It was to commemorate this victory that Vidyadhara, a true patron of art and culture, built the Kandariya Mahadev temple. An inscription found at the mandapa of the temple mentions the name of the builder as Virimda, who is interpreted as Vidyadhara. The temple's presiding deity is Lord Shiva, enshrined in the garbhagriha.

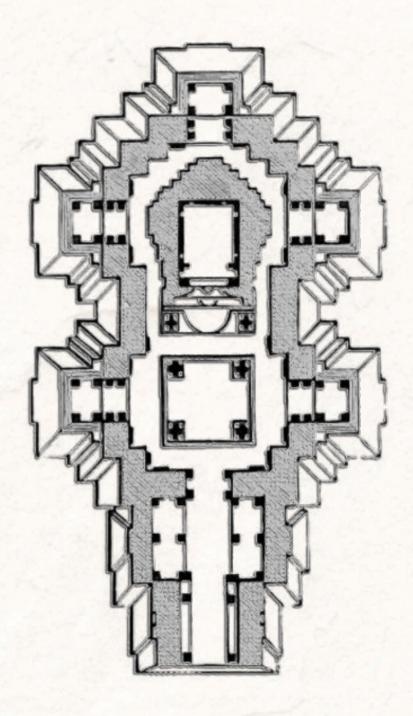


The temple is situated on an elevated granite platform, four meters in height. The plan is somewhat similar to the Lakshmana temple, wherein a visitor has to enter from the east and pass through an ardha-mandapa, a mandapa, and a mahamandapa before reaching the sanctuary. The temple features five projecting balconies and an ambulatory around the sanctuary. In order to lend support to the towering peak, which is thirty-five meters in height, the walls of the temple are much thicker than its predecessors. The inner sanctum consists of three shrines; a small one dedicated to Shiva, one to Parvati, and the central shrine with a large Shiva linga. The sanctuary and balconies within the temple are dimly lit, which gives them a starkly different appearance from the exterior. As the name implies, the interior essentially bears a striking resemblance to a cave or kandariya.

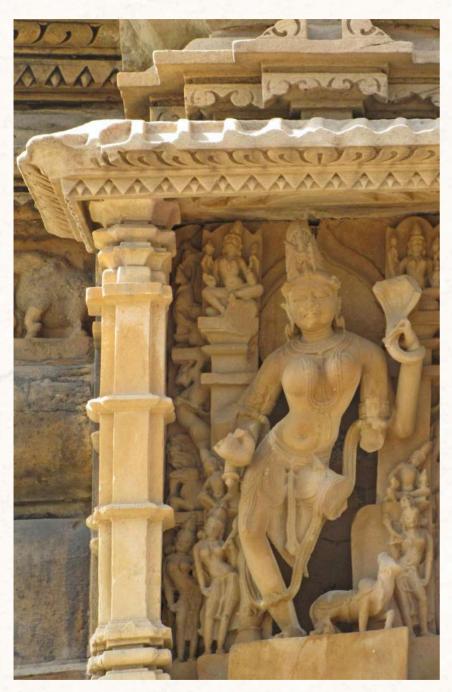
## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### **The Towering Verticality**

Kandariya Mahadev is a visually striking temple, with the most towering verticality among the western complex of temples at Khajuraho. In order to achieve this effect, the architects employed a plethora of features, which included a curvilinear mandapa roof, a gradual rising slope in the roof over the entrance hall leading to the summit of the tower, a number of decorative pillars flanking the main pillar, and seven projections on the sides of the main pillar in order to accentuate its size.



Architectural Plan of the Kandariya Mahadev Temple



Carvings at the Kandariya Mahadev Temple

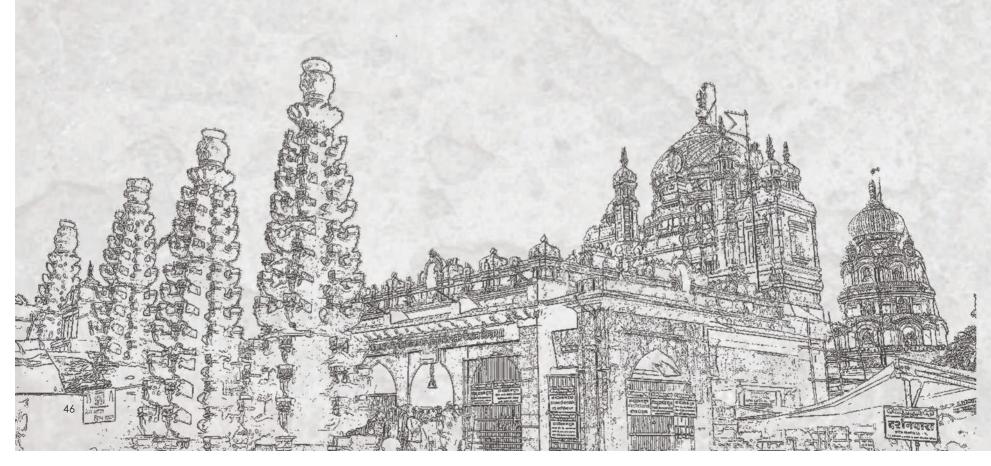


Intricately carved brackets and columns

The western group of Khajuraho's temples forms a hexagonal cosmic design with three faces representing Shiva and three representing Devi. Among these, Kandariya Mahadev, along with the temples of Matangeshwar and Visvanath, represents one of the three faces of Shiva.

# 11 KHANDOBA TEMPLE

Jejuri, Maharashtra





Khandoba Temple

#### **Built in** 12th century CE

#### **Dynasty** Seuna

#### **Style** Nagara

**Material**Black Stone

#### **HISTORY**

The Khandoba temple located in Jejuri, Maharashtra, is a significant and revered temple dedicated to Khandoba, also known as Malhari Martand or Mhalsakant. Khandoba, a regional deity in Maharashtra, is considered a manifestation of Shiva. He is depicted as a Warrior God riding a white horse while wielding a sword and shield. Over the centuries, various rulers and patrons are believed to have contributed to the development and expansion of the Khandoba temple. The temple was built in the Hemadpanthi architectural style, which is distinguished by black basalt stone and intricate carvings. This style was popular in Maharashtra during the medieval period, suggesting that it was built around the 12th century CE. Over time, the Khandoba temple evolved from a simple shrine into a significant pilgrimage destination.

The temple architecture predominantly follows the traditional Hemadpanthi style, known for its use of black basalt stone and intricate carvings. The main shrine is dedicated to Khandoba. It adheres to the classic temple layout, featuring a garbhagriha, mandapa, and a surrounding courtyard. The complex also houses smaller shrines, gateways, and other ancillary structures. The main shrine's shikara rises above the sanctum sanctorum, while the mandapa, characterised by its decorative pillars and elaborate carvings, serves as a gathering space for devotees.

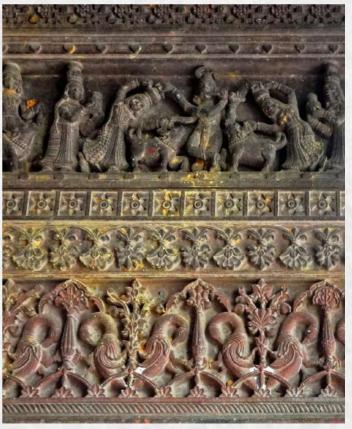


#### Carvings in the Temple

The intricate carvings on the Khandoba temple are one of its most notable features. Finely detailed sculptures and decorative elements adorn the temple's walls, pillars, and ceilings. Various mythological scenes, deities, and motifs are depicted in these carvings. These carvings often narrate stories from ancient texts like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Puranas*. Various deities from the Hindu pantheon are prominently featured. Khandoba, the temple's main deity, is often portrayed in different forms, including his iconic warrior form mounted on a horse. Additionally, detailed representations of other deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Parvati, and Ganesha can also be found.



Architecture of the Khandoba Temple



Carved horizontal bands in the Temple



Khandoba Temple Complex

The temple's history is closely tied to the mythology of Khandoba. According to legend, Khandoba, a warrior deity, came to the rescue of a local shepherd boy, Mhalsa, and his parents when they were oppressed by the demons Malla and Mani. This courageous act earned him the title "Malhari Martand."



Deepmalas at Khandoba Temple

## 12 KONARK SUN TEMPLE

Konark, Odisha

\*UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Year 1984





Konark Sun Temple

#### **Built in** 13th century CE

#### **Dynasty** Eastern Ganga

## **Style**Nagara

## **Material**Chlorite, Laterite, Khondalite

#### **HISTORY**

Around 1250 CE, Narasimha I of the Eastern Ganga dynasty built the Konarak temple dedicated to Surya, the Sun God. Today, only a portion of the temple remains, and it is believed that the original temple with the shikhara was at least twice as tall. The temple is designed in the shape of a 100-foot chariot, complete with large horses and intricately carved wheels. Konark was historically significant as a port city, and its temple is one of the few whose construction details are documented in palmleaf manuscripts. Even today, the Konark temple remains a revered sacred site, drawing thousands of pilgrims annually for the Chandrabhaga Mela.

The temple layout at Konark is reputed to have followed the *Silpasastra*. The main deul no longer exists. The pidha deul is a square structure with a pyramidical roof built in the pancharatha style. The jagmohana is approximately 100 feet tall, with six pidhas remaining. The mastaka is circular, while the remaining sections are square. The natmandir on the eastern side has a carved platform. Apart from these two, only the bhogmandapa has survived. Various stones used include chlorite for the door and sculptures, laterite for the platform core and staircase, and khondalite for the remaining parts. The architects and masons skillfully created ashlar to conceal the joints.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### **Chariot Temple**

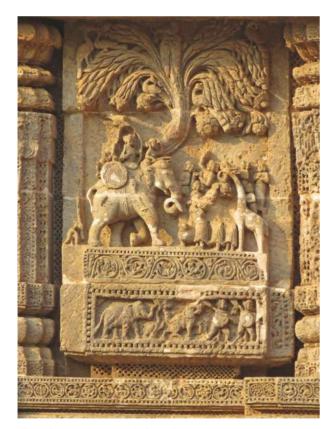
The Konark temple was built based on the legend of Surya riding in a chariot drawn by seven horses. Its architecture is highly symbolic, featuring twelve pairs of wheels that represent the twelve months of the year, with each month having two cycles - the Krishna and Shukla pakshas. These wheels are approximately two feet in diameter and are intricately carved with scenes from daily life, showcasing people at work, at play, and in love.

Carvings at Konark Sun Temple

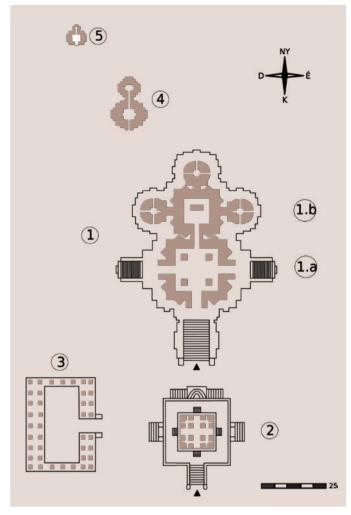




The Stone Chariot Wheel at Konark Sun Temple



Carvings at Konark Sun Temple

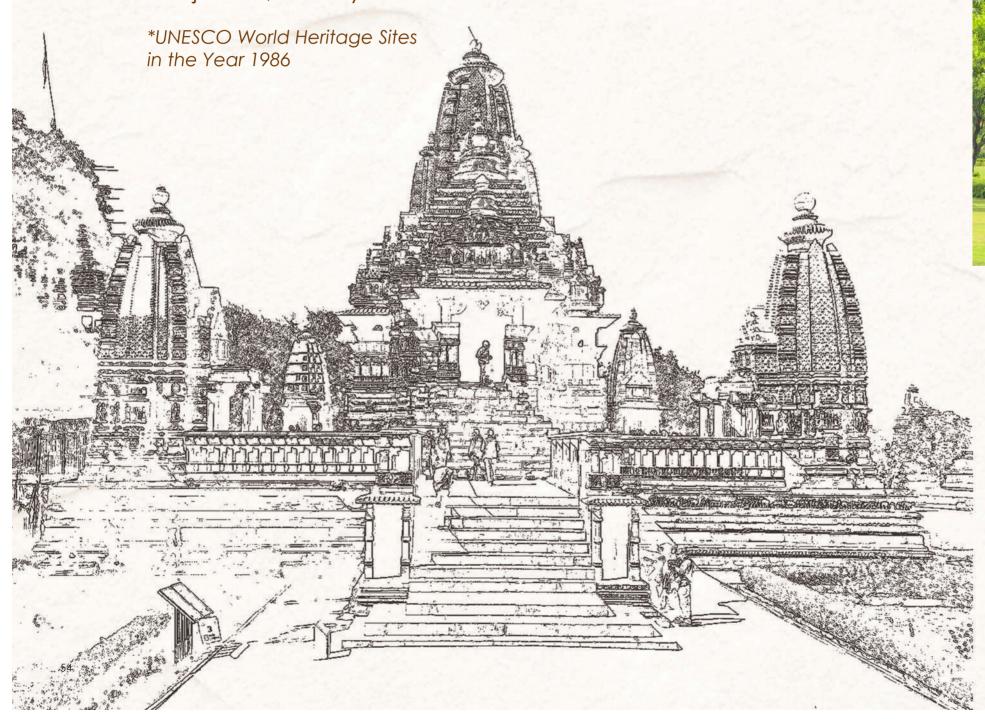


Architectural Plan of the Konark Sun Temple

The Konark temple is referred to as the "Black Pagoda" in the diaries of European sailors dating back to the 17th century. This could be because, when viewed from the sea, it resembled a dark-coloured pyramidal tower. The Jagannath temple in Puri is known as the "White Pagoda" due to its appearance. Both these temples serve as important landmarks for those travelling by sea.

# 13 LAKSHMANA TEMPLE

Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh





Lakshmana Temple, Khajuraho

## **Built in** 930 CE - 950 CE

#### **Dynasty** Chandela Dynasty

## **Style**Nagara

## **Material**Sandstone and Granite

#### **HISTORY**

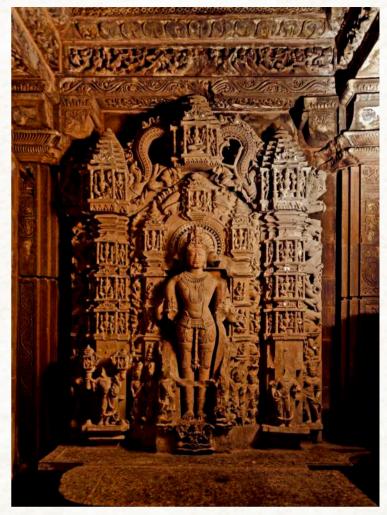
The Lakshmana temple, situated in the western complex of temples at Khajuraho, is the oldest among them. The architecture of this temple set the foundation for what would become the defining feature of Khajuraho temples. The temple is dedicated to Vaikuntha, a form of Vishnu, and was constructed sometime in the first half of the 10th century CE by King Yashovarman of the Chandella dynasty. This period witnessed a shift in religious traditions from Pancharatra to a greater emphasis on advaita and bhakti doctrines. The architecture and iconography of the Prabhodchandradaya strongly resemble the Lakshmana temple, leading some scholars to believe that a prototype for this temple may have existed at some point.

The temple is built in the panchayatana style, with a central shine and two shrines in the front and two at the back. Worshippers enters from the eastern side and pass through an ardhamandapa, a mandapa, and a larger mahamandapa before reaching the garbagriha or sanctum sanctorum. In contrast, the Lakshmana temple marks a significant departure where the mahamandapa and the garbagriha are seamlessly combined into a single unit. Additionally, two smaller towers clinging to the side were built to accentuate the verticality of the central tower above the sanctuary.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### **Horizontal Bands**

The Lakshmana temple is a remarkable example of architectural innovation. It was the first temple to introduce horizontal bands of carvings at the temple's waist, resembling the three-stranded girdles adorning apsara sculptures. From then on, this design became popular and can be seen in other temples within the Khajuraho complex, like the Chitragupta and Devi Jagadamba temples.



Stone Sculpture at Lakshmana Temple

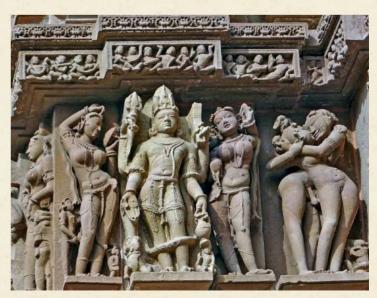


Horizontal Bands with Carvings



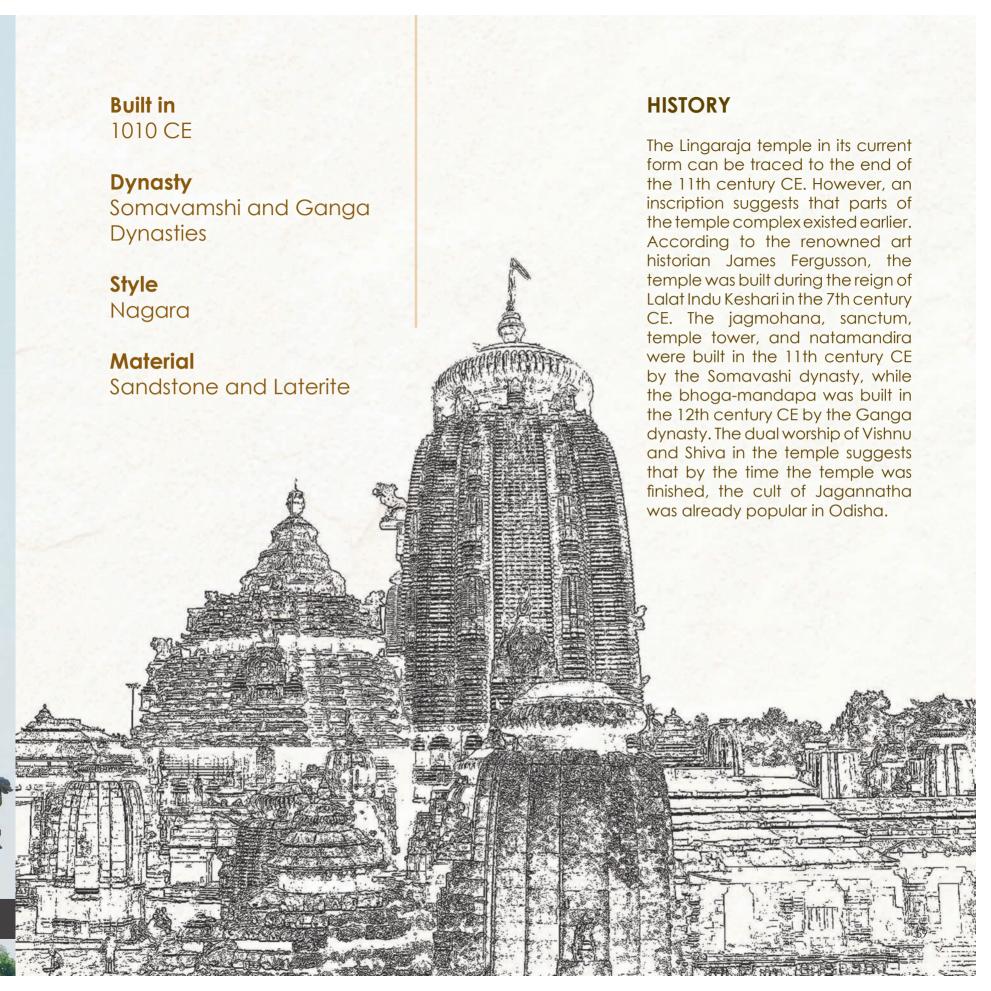
Lakshmana Temple Complex

Aninscription at the temple traces the history of Vaikuntha Vishnu's main idol. According to legend, the King of Bhota obtained the image from Kailash and gifted it to the King of Kira in Kashmir, who subsequently passed it to Herambapala. Yashovarman, the Chandella king responsible for constructing the Lakshmana temple, obtained the idol from Herambapala's son, Devpala.



`Intricate carvings on the temple walls



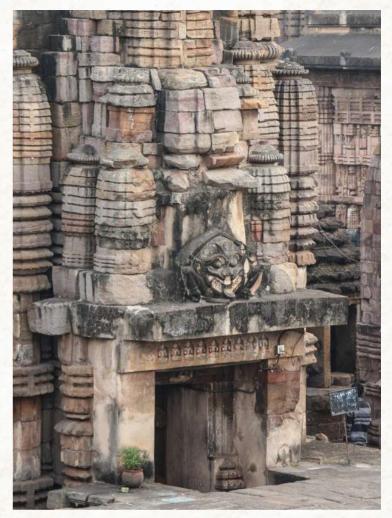


The Lingaraja temple, Bhubaneswar's largest, exemplifies the final form of Kalinga architecture. It is enclosed within a protective laterite compound wall with an inner terrace. The temple rises to a height of 180 feet and is set upon a 60 square foot base. The other structures gradually descend in height, giving the shikhara an even more elevated appearance. Every inch of the tower has been intricately sculpted. The jagmohana, with pyramidal pidhas, stands close to the shikhara. Originally, the jagmohana had two balustrated windows in the north and another in the south. Female figurines and couples have been sculpted into the balustrades. The northern window remains. while the southern one was removed to make room for a new entry into the jagmohana. The entrance porch door is made of sandalwood, with the main entrance situated on the east side and smaller entrances on the north and south sides.



#### Deula Style

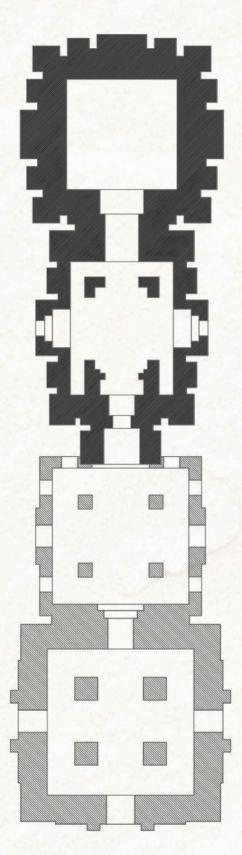
The Lingaraja temple is constructed in a deula style and has four main components: the vimana with the sanctum, the jagmohana or the assembly hall, the natamandira or the festival hall, and the bhoga-mandapa or the hall of offerings. These four are arranged in axial alignment with descending heights. The natamandira is linked to the devadasi system, which was prevalent in Odisha at the time.



Architecture of the Lingaraja Temple



Deula style construction of the Lingaraja Temple



Architectural Plan of the Lingaraja Temple

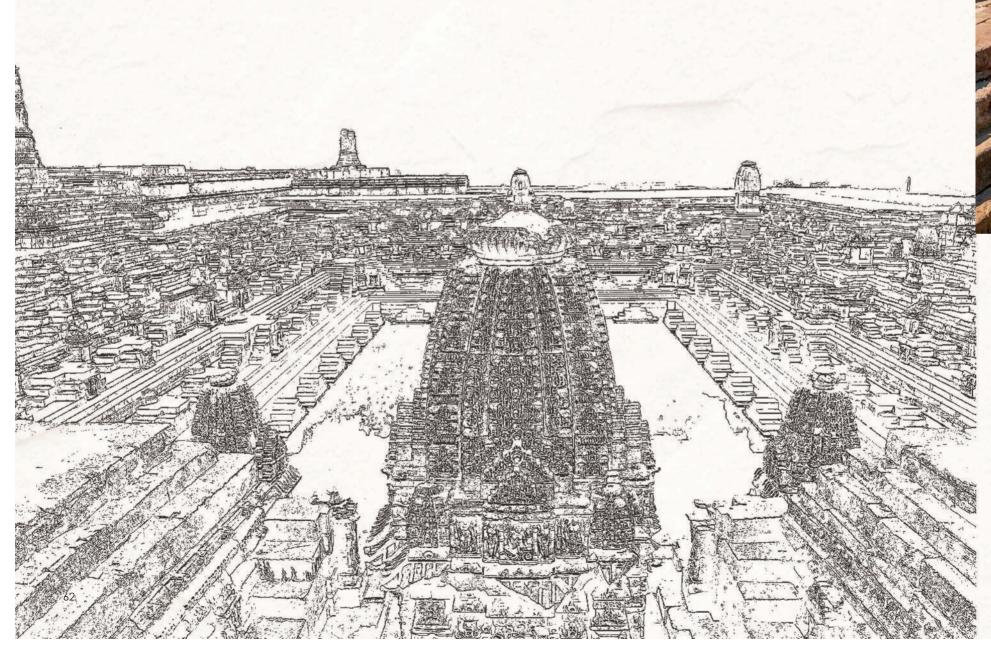
The Ganga dynasty's rulers were Vaishnavites, and they remodelled the Lingaraja temple to incorporate more Vaishnavite elements. During this period, two Vaishnavite dwarpalas, Jaya and Prachanda, were added. Notably, the temple flag atop the shikhara was replaced with a pinaka, in contrast to the trishul that is typically found on Shiva temples.



Shikhara of the Lingaraja Temple

# 15 MODHERA SUN TEMPLE

Modhera, Gujarat





Modhera Sun Temple

**Built in** 11th Century CE

**Dynasty** Chaulukya

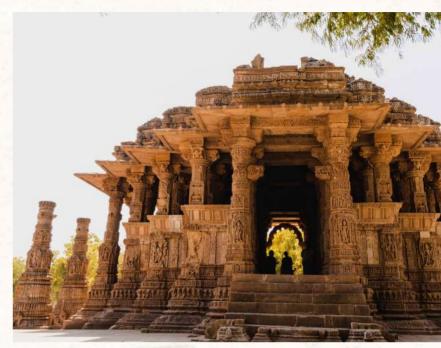
**Style** Nagara

**Material** Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Modhera Sun temple was constructed in the Maru-Gurjara architectural style, a subset of Nagara architecture. Its dating primarily relies on an inverted inscription that only mentions the date *vikrama* samvat 1083, which corresponds to 1025-1026 CE. Although it is unclear what the date corresponds to, the general consensus is that it is the construction date, which is also consistent with the architectural style used during the reign of Bhimadeva I (1022-1066 CE). The temple, however, was built in at least three phases, with the tank constructed in the early 11th century and the main temple completed after 1026, the year Bhimdeva I regained his territories.

The temple complex is divided into three distinct sections: the gudumandapa (main temple), the nrityamandapa (dancing hall), the sabhamandapa (assembly hall), and the kunda (reservoir). The gudumandapa is a long rectangle divided into two parts by a deep niche - the garbagriha and the hall. The garbhagriha has two cells, one of which has a collapsed roof. The sabhamandapa is a parallelogram featuring a stepped pyramid roof, rows of intricately carved pillars, and entrances that open diagonally. The kunda has four terraces and recessed steps leading to the bottom, and the main entrance is situated on the west side.



Architecture of the Modhera Sun Temple

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

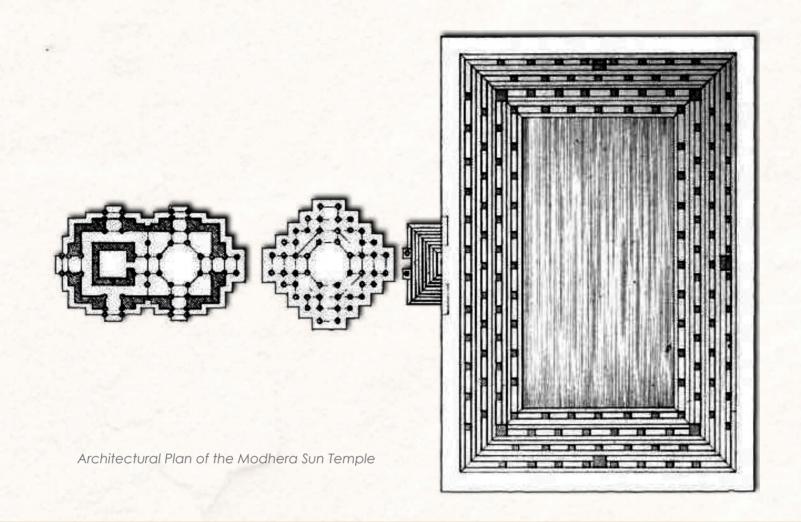
#### **Ornate Carvings**

The outer walls of the temple are ornately carved and decorated. The carvings are exquisitely divided, with the *pitha* or base having two square carvings, then a cyma recta carving, and finally, an inverted lotus carving or *padmaka*. These are followed by more layers of carvings at the base. Similarly, the wall mouldings or *mandovara* feature detailed carvings arranged in layers, each showcasing sculptures of different gods. Among them, the depiction of Surya is noteworthy.



Ornate Carvings on External facade of the temple





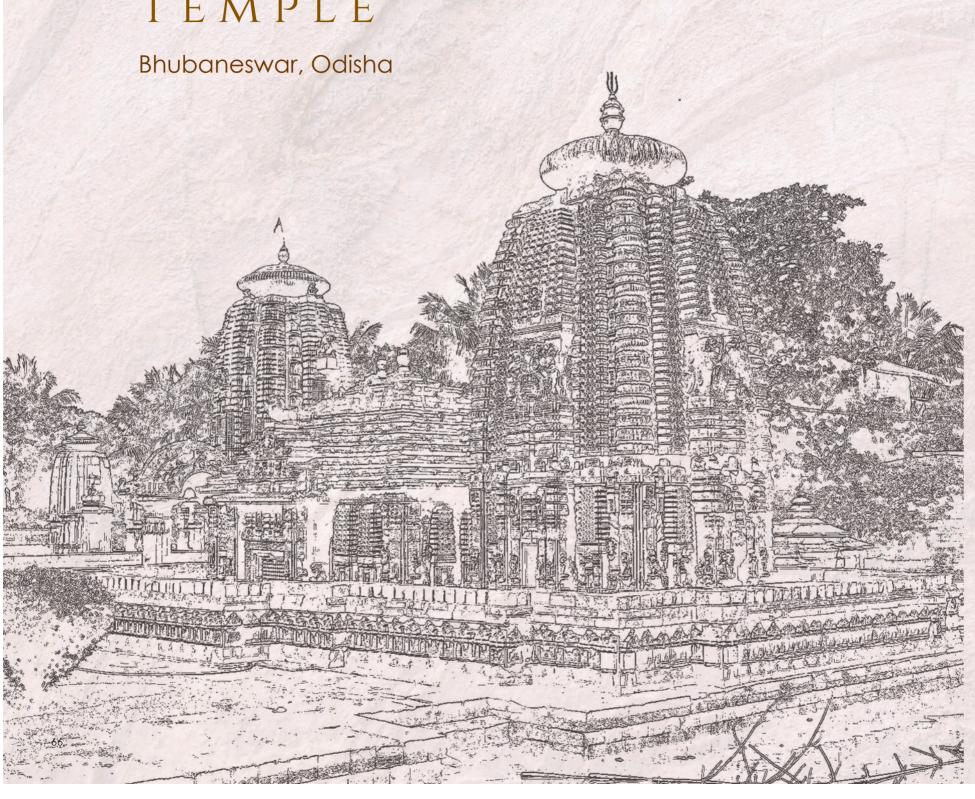


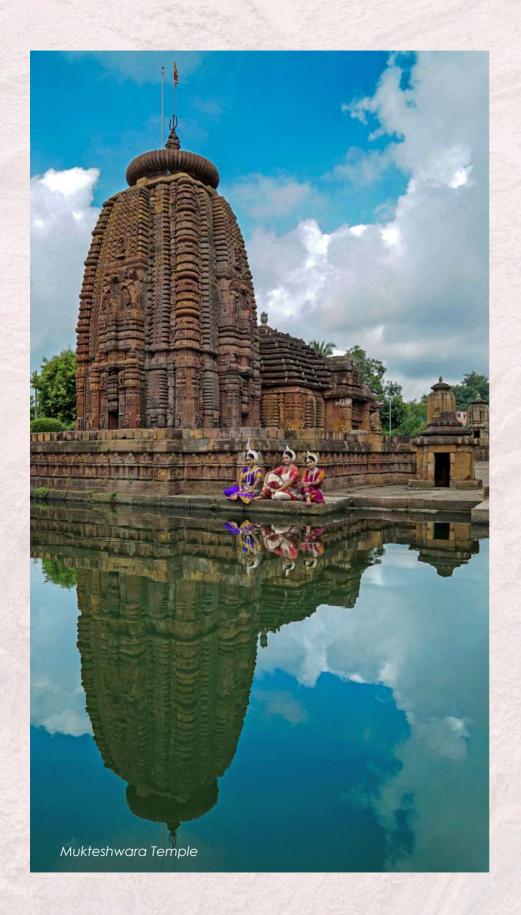
The main temple in the complex was built in such a way that the first rays of the sun on the day of the solar equinox always fall on the deity, Surya. At noon on the summer solstice, the sun shines directly on top of the temple and casts no shadow.



Central corbelled dome in Sabhamandapa

# 16 MUKTESHWARA TEMPLE





## **Built in** 950-970 CF

#### **Dynasty**

Somavamshis (also called Kesharis)

#### Style

Nagara (Sub category: Kalinga Style)

#### Material

Red Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Mukteshwara temple, often referred to as the "Gem of Odishan Architecture." marks one of the earliest architectural endeavours of the erstwhile Somvamshi dynasty in present-day Odisha. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this temple is one the finest examples of the transition towards the mature phase of Kalinga architecture, which reaches its pinnacle in the Lingaraja temple. Though historical evidence is scarce, it is widely believed that the temple was built by King Yayati I Mahashivagupta (922–955 CE). According to Walter Smith, the Mukteshwara temple served to legitimise the Somavamshis as the successors of the legendary Bhuma-Karas, who had hitherto ruled the region, and to establish Yayati's "divine kingship" as the deputy of Lord Shiva. Architecturally, the temple is a spiritual successor of the lineage of Shiva temples that began with the Parasurameshwara temple of Bhubaneswar, built by the Shailodhbavas of Odisha.

The abode of Lord Shiva, Mukteshwara in Bhubaneswar is a red sandstone marvel with a richly sculpted vimana, jagamohana, and sanctum, in addition to the torana. The vimana has one nataraja and kirtimukha sculpture on each side, and three relief carvings of the king. The structure over the sanctum, which is comparatively smaller among the same group of temples, marks the inception of vairamastaka motifs (called 'bho' by the local artists) in the Kalinga style. The octagonal jagamohana (assembly hall), where the figurines of Ganga, Yamuna, Rahu, Ketu, and Lakulisa, among others, can be found, is surrounded by elegantly sculptured walls. The torana stands at the entrance to the jagamohana, and the sanctum, embellished with heavenly damsels and nagas and naginis on the ceilings, is cubical in shape but is offset by the exterior walls.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

## The intricately sculpted *Torana* of the Mukteshwara Temple

Among the Kalinga style temples, the Mukteshwara temple houses the first arched gateway, called the torana. This architectural element signifies the onset of the mature phase of the Kalinga style. The torana reflects the explicit Buddhist influence that pertained to the 10th-century temple buildings in Odisha. The thick pillars of the gateway have exquisite identical carvings on both sides. Notably, the sculptures within the torana showcase a rich fauna, representing some of the earliest instances within the region's temples. The female figurines in the arch exhibit charming bead ornamentations, which are etched with perfection.

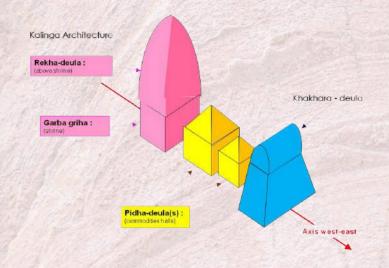


Illustration of the architecture of Mukteshwara Temple



Intricately carved Torana



Mukteshwara Temple Complex

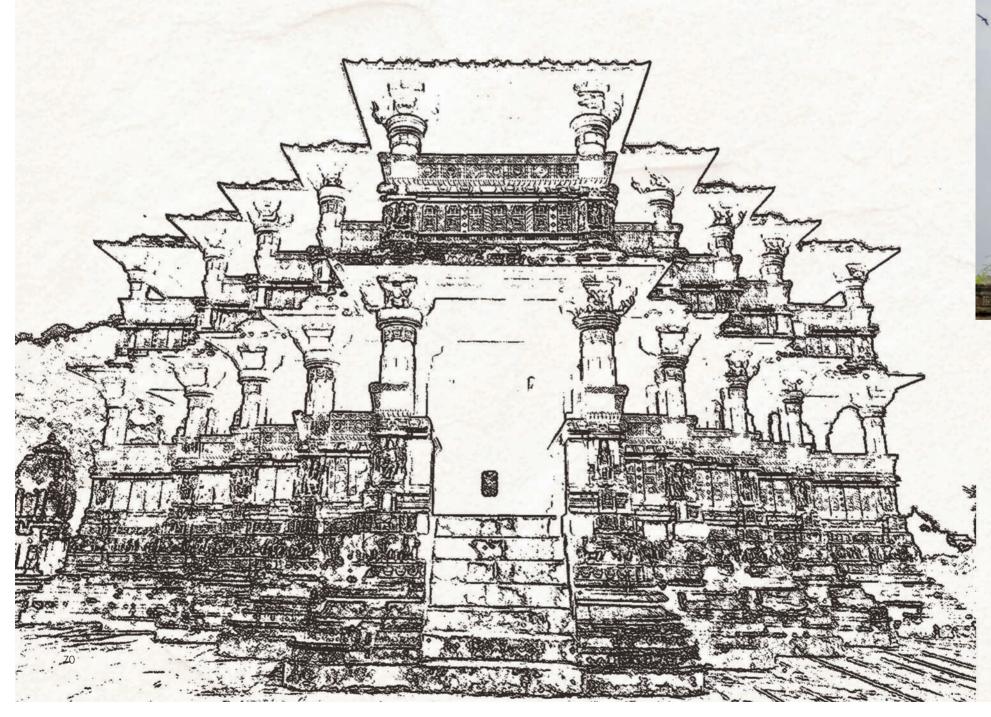
Within the premises of the Mukteshwara temple, there are two temple tanks. The tank on the eastern side, called the Marichi Kunda, holds important religious significance among the locals. According to legends and beliefs, the water of the kunda has magical powers that could heal infertility in women. Thus, women who aspire to have children take a dip in the tank while offering prayers on the night before the Ashokastami festival, which falls during the Shukla Paksha of the Chaitra month, typically in March according to the Hindu calendar.



Torana Decoration at Mukteshwar Temple

# 17 NAVLAKHA TEMPLE

Ghumli, Gujarat





Navlakha Temple

**Built in** 11th Century CE

**Dynasty**Jethwa

**Style** Nagara

**Material** Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Navlakha temple located in the small village of Ghumli near Porbandar, is the oldest sun temple in Gujarat. The temple was built during the reign of the Jethwa dynasty, as a symbol of their victory over the region. Ghumli once served as the capital of the Saindhava dynasty, which ruled over western Saurashtra from the 8th to the middle of the 10th centuries. In 1220, the Jethwa ruler Rana Shiyaji, who assumed the title of Rana of Ghumli, declared it the capital. Unfortunately, the Navlakha temple is believed to have been destroyed in the 14th century during an attack led by Jadja Jam Barmiyanji.

The architecture of the Navlakha temple seamlessly blends elements from the Solanki and Maru-Gurjara substyles. The temple faces east and has the region's largest base, measuring 45.72 by 30.48 metres. Presently, the kirti toran, or entrance arch, has collapsed. The mandapa, a two-story structure, is supported by eight-sided pillars, and it connects with the rangamandapa and the main temple through a mix of projections and recesses, creating a lovely light and shadow effect. A pradakshina path with balconies, surrounds the sanctum sanctorum. The temple's depictions include Brahma and Savitri in the south, Shiva and Parvati in the west, and Lakshmi and Narayana in the north. On the temple wall, relief carvings narrating Saiva mythology can be found.

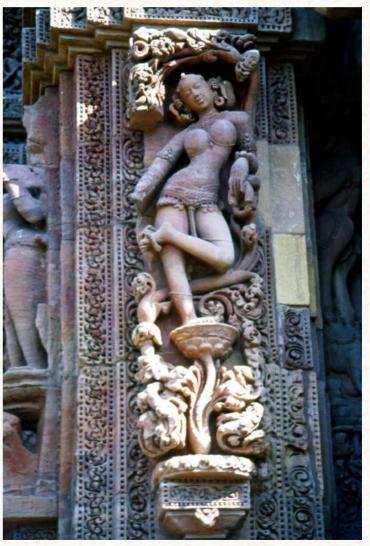
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Symbol of Entwining tusks

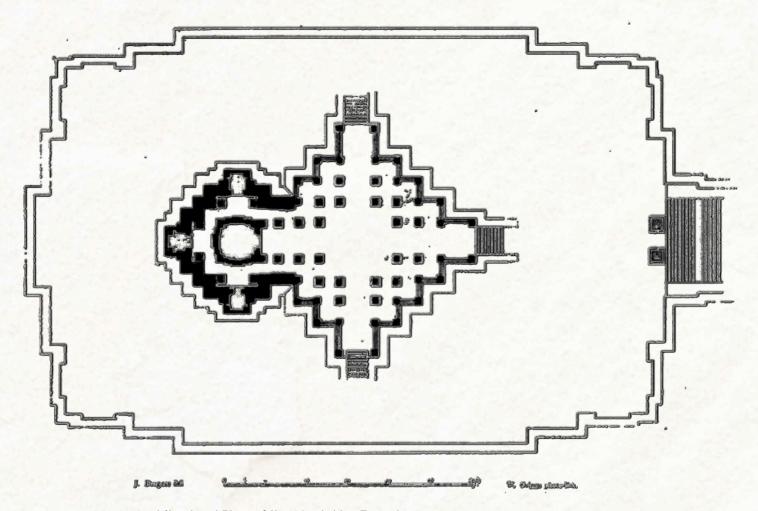
The Navlakha temple is distinguished by its carvings featuring entwining tusks of three elephants or two elephants and a makara (a Hindu mythological creature with the body of a crocodile and head of an antelope) on the exterior walls. These depictions of the elephants and makaras adorn each face of the temple's vimana's base, situated just below the windows. Additionally, on the rear wall, there is a relief carving depicting two elephants fighting with their trunks.



Navlakha Temple Complex



Carving on the exterior wall



Architectural Plan of the Navlakha Temple

According to legend, the name "Navlakha" was derived from the nine lakhs of wealth that was utilized to construct it.

Carvings on the exterior Wall



18 PARSURAMESWARA TEMPLE Bhubaneswar, Odisha



Parsurameswara Temple

## **Built in**7th-8th centuries CE

#### **Dynasty** Shailodbhava

# **Style**Nagara

# **Material** Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Parsurameswara temple, representing the Kalinga style of temple architecture from the 7th century, is renowned for its distinctive and well-preserved architectural features. It is one of the many historic temples in Bhubaneswar that honours various Hindu deities, and is dedicated primarily to Shiva. The temple was built in the 7th century, making it one of Bhubaneswar's older temples. It is common to refer to this period as the early stages of Odisha's temple construction. The Parsurameswara temple was constructed by the Shailodbhavas, a dynasty which revered Shiva as their family deity. They not only worshipped Lord Shiva but also held the Shakta deities in high regard. The Parsurameswara temple is renowned for its wall murals depicting numerous Shakta deities.

The architecture of the temple is in the pancharatha style. In contrast to the earlier deul temples, it is the first temple to contain a jagmohana. The vimana, also known as the sanctum, has a shivalinga and is square in shape with rathas and pagas on the walls. The bada, a curved tower that resembles a pyramid made of horizontal planes, is part of the temple's vimana. The temple's outer dimensions are 19.75 by 21 feet (6.0 by 6.4 metres) and its towering height is 40.25 feet (12.3 metres), while its inner sanctum is 9.88 by 9.75 feet (3.0 by 3.0 metres). An amalaka, a stone disc with ridges along its rim, adorns the top of the bada. The temple was built using a technique in which completed sections were buried within sloping layers of earth and heavy stone components were then hoisted along these layers.

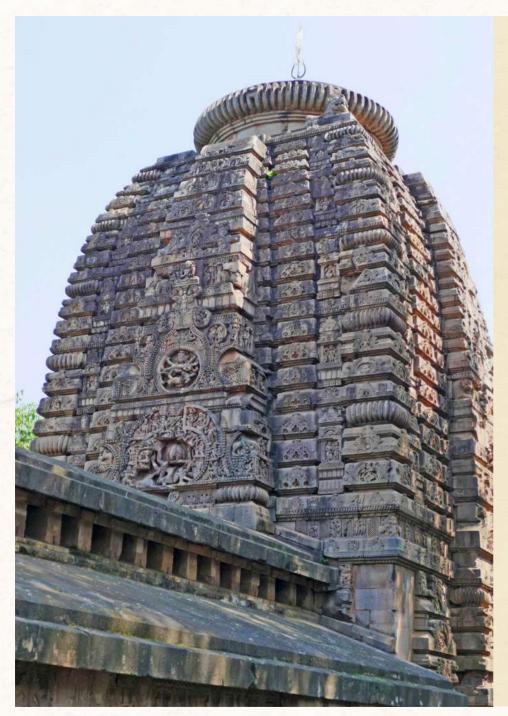
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Six-armed Mahishasurmardini

The depiction of a six-armed Mahishasurmardini is one of the most significant aspects of the temple's iconography. In this gavaksha-framed image, her upper torso is adorned with a headdress, karna kundala (ear ornament), mala (garland), and kankana (anklet). The persona is depicted wielding a sword in her upper left hand and controlling the buffalo's face with her upper right hand. Her lower left hand is holding a pointed object, and her middle-left hand is using a trishula to pierce the demon's neck. Her lower right hand is holding a bow while her right middle hand is holding a khetaka. The temple is also the first in Bhubaneswar to feature images belonging to Saptamatrika.



Six-armed Mahishasurmardini



Temple Shikhara

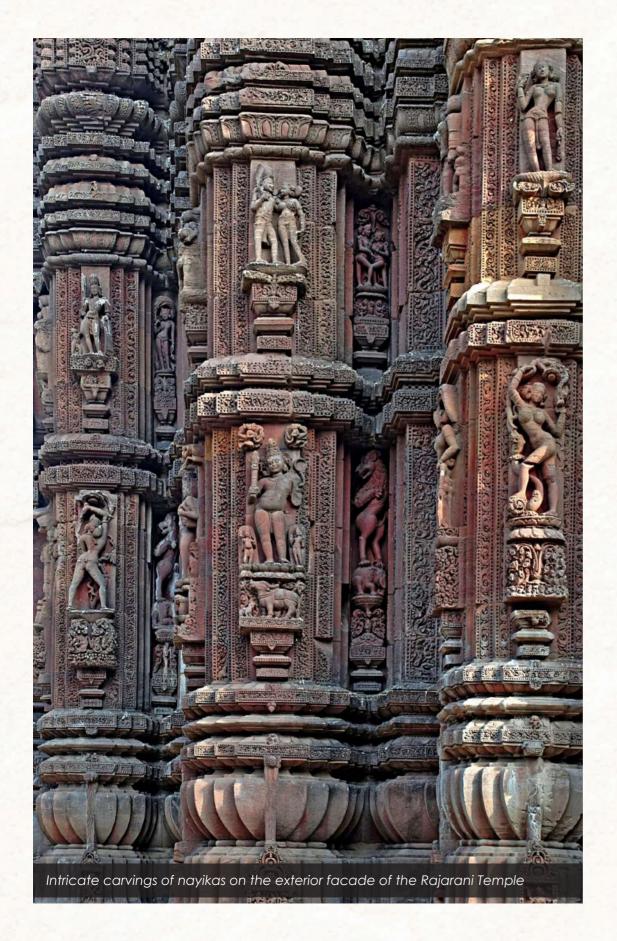
It has been speculated that the porch might have been added at a significantly later date because of the architectural feature that displays a lack of seamless construction at the point where the vimana and the jagamohana connect. Despite this, it is commonly believed that the construction method used in the building's original design is what gives the connection its apparent simplicity.



Sahashra Linga

# 19 RAJARANI TEMPLE

Bhubaneswar, Odisha HANNANDRO



**Built in** 11th century CE

**Dynasty** Somavamshi

**Style**Nagara

**Material**Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Rajarani temple is an ornately carved historical structure that is shrouded in mystery. Since the garbagriha of the temple is devoid of an idol, it is challenging to determine to which deity it was dedicated. One theory suggests that the temple was originally known as Indresvara and served as a Saiva shrine. The presence of Lakulisa and Saiva dwarpalas attests to this. On the other hand, the presence of nayikas in numerous captivating poses indicates a strong influence of Devi worship or Shakti traditions.

The Rajarani temple is east-facing and consists of a deula and a jagmohana. The latter is a pidha and consists of two balustraded windows. The main entrance is flanked by two pillars on top of which are naga carvings. A barrel-shaped roof rises above this with a lion on the top. The plain exterior of the jagmohana is in sharp contrast to the ornamented temple. The temple is divided into five sections, with the pabhaga being the first one, adorned with five decorative mouldings. The gandi is composed of multiple angshikharas or miniature turrets, which gives the temple a circular appearance.

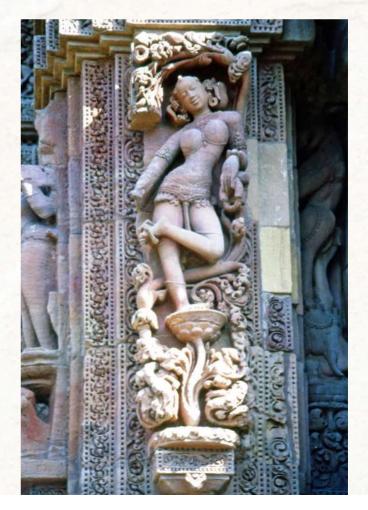


#### Iconography

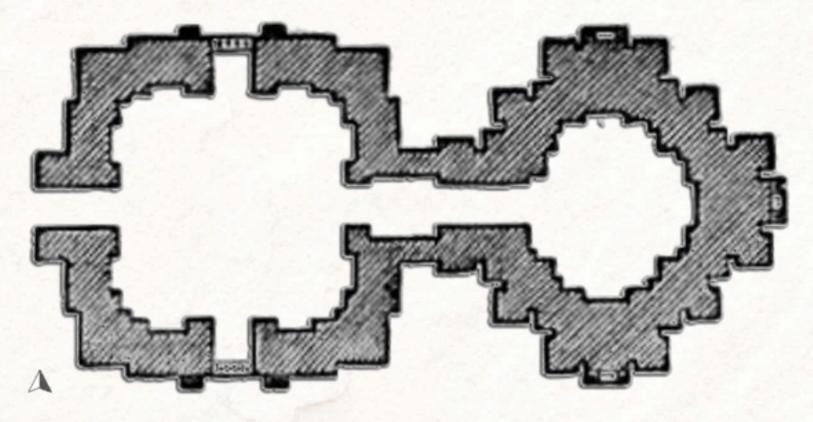
The iconography at the Rajarani temple is a sight to behold. Along the temple's perimeter, numerous nayikas can be seen going about their daily activities while oblivious to any outsiders. Among their various activities, the nayikas can be observed holding their children, peering into mirrors, or caressing branches. These intricate carvings are proof of the exceptional craftsmanship that went into making some of the temple's most animated statues.



Architecture of the Rajarani Temple



Carved sculpture of nayika on the exterior wall



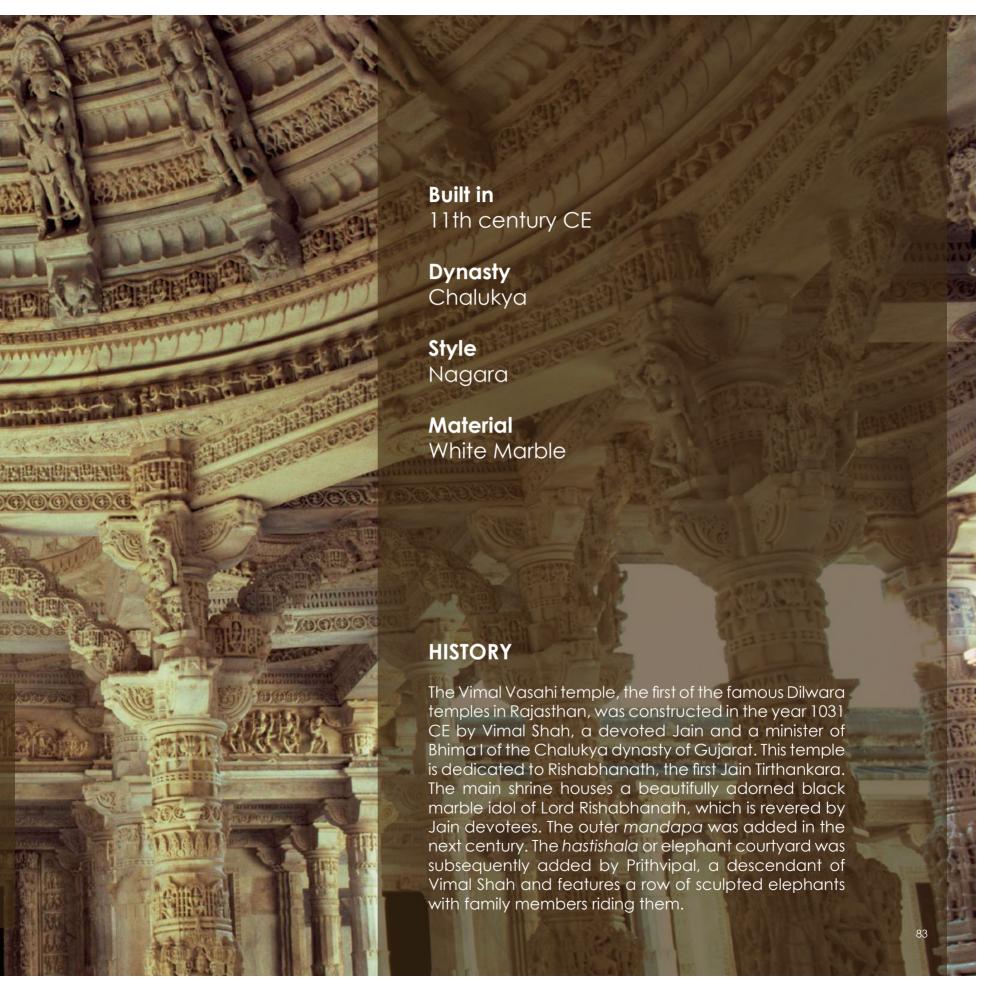
Architectural Plan of the Rajarani Temple

The origin of the temple's name is a subject of numerous speculative theories. One theory suggests that the yellow sandstone, locally kown as rajrania, is thought to have given the temple its name. Conversely, it is also possible that the stone was named after the temple. Another theory links the name to the worship of the Goddess Sri from the Srividya tradition, leading her to be known as Rajarajesvari, an alternate name for Sri. A third theory suggests that the name of the mukhasala temple is linked to the naga and nagini carvings, which are believed to represent a king and queen, respectively.



Carved figures on the exterior walls



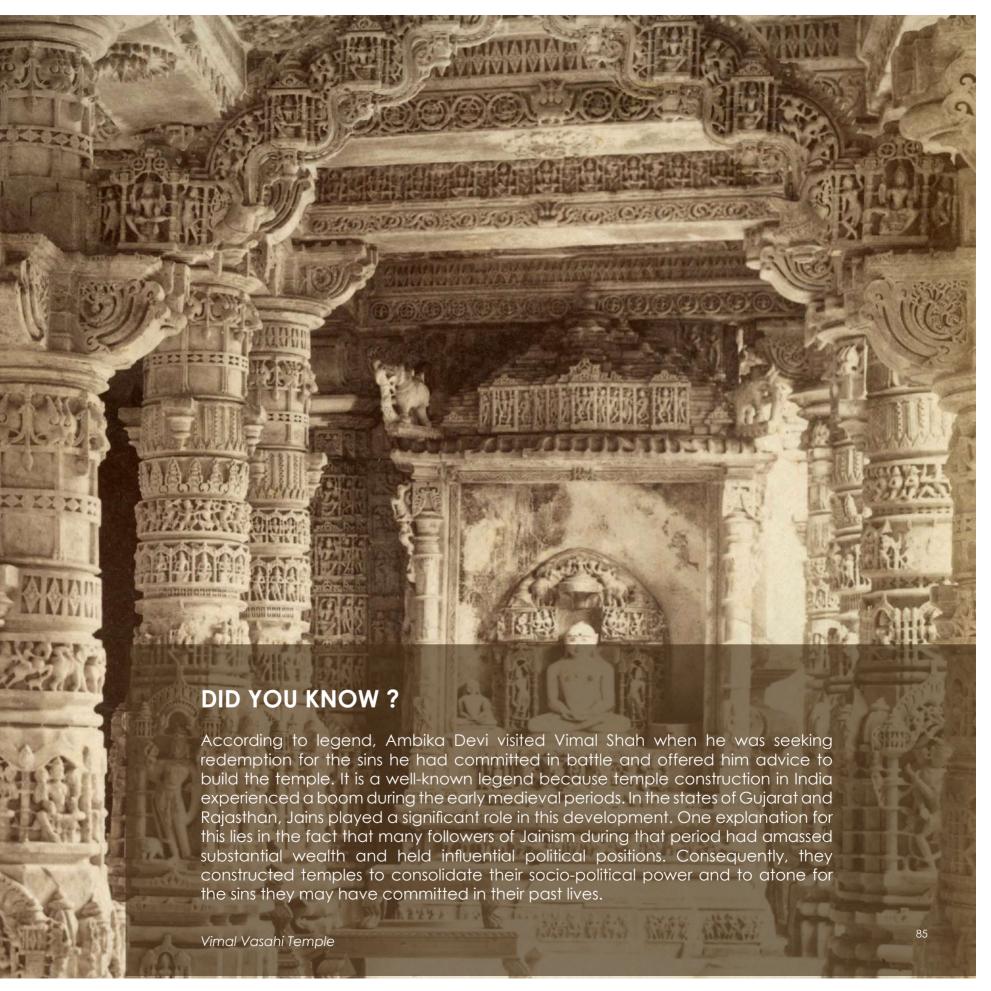


The temple proudly stands within an expansive courtyard, enclosed by a elegant corridor adorned with numerous cells, each sheltering smaller idols of *tirthankaras*. Interestingly, the plain exterior exudes an air of subtlety, providing a stark contrast to the opulent interior. Inside the grand hall, the pillars reach skyward, their summits adorned with elaborate figures, notably musicians, whose presence serves as a poignant reminder of the hall's purpose. Among the temple's treasures are its exquisitely carved ceilings, with the most grandiose one gracing the center of the pillared hall just before the sanctum. This ceiling, spanning 25 feet in diameter and suspended three feet above the floor, showcases sixteen *vidyadevis*, each uniquely distinguished by posture and attributes. The spaces between them are filled with a rich tapestry of motifs, layered in concentric patterns, depicting dancers, musicians, equestrians, lotus blooms, and an array of captivating visual elements.

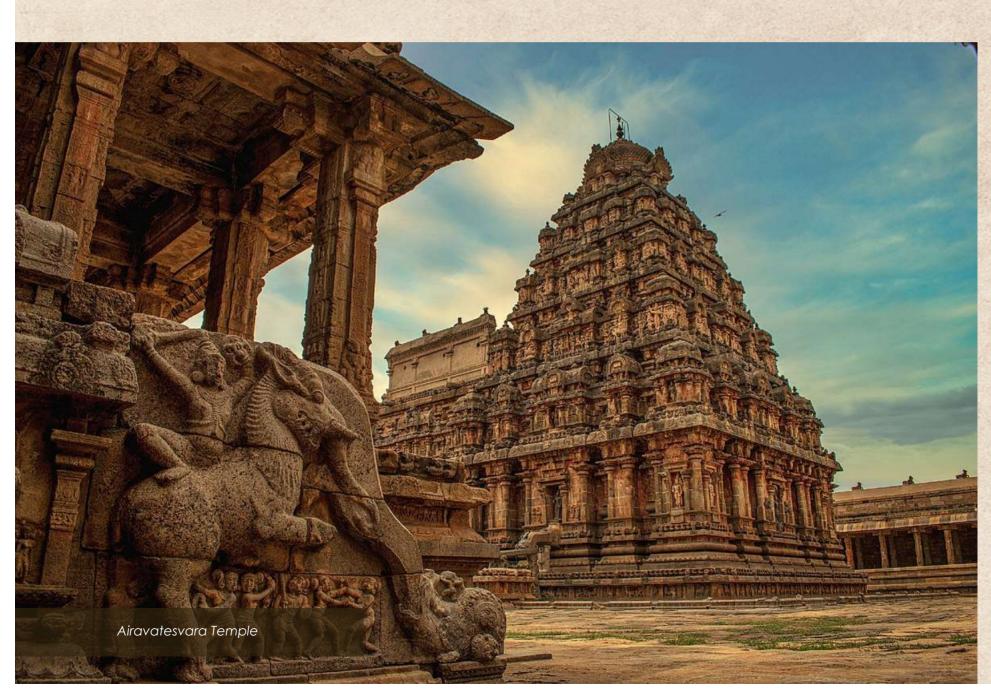
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

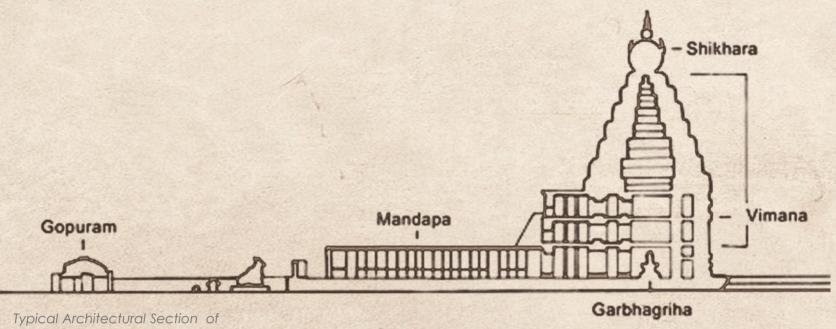
#### Panel of Ambika

The central domed ceiling is gracefully encircled by four triangular panels that are extravagantly decorated. One of these panels is dedicated to Ambika, a revered yakshi of significant religious importance in both Hinduism and Jainism. Her name, signifying "mother," has profound symbolism. In this exquisite portrayal, Ambika is seated on a majestic lion, cradling a young child in her arms, while another child stands beside her. The presence of children and the numerous mangoes she holds in three of her four hands, mirrored by those that adorn the entire relief, further highlights her role as the symbol of fertility. Ambika is accompanied by her attendants, adorned in exquisite attire and accessorized with priceless jewellery, captivating all with the aura of her divine grace.

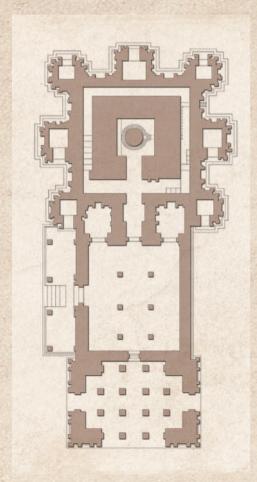


# DRAVIDIAN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE





a Dravidian Temple



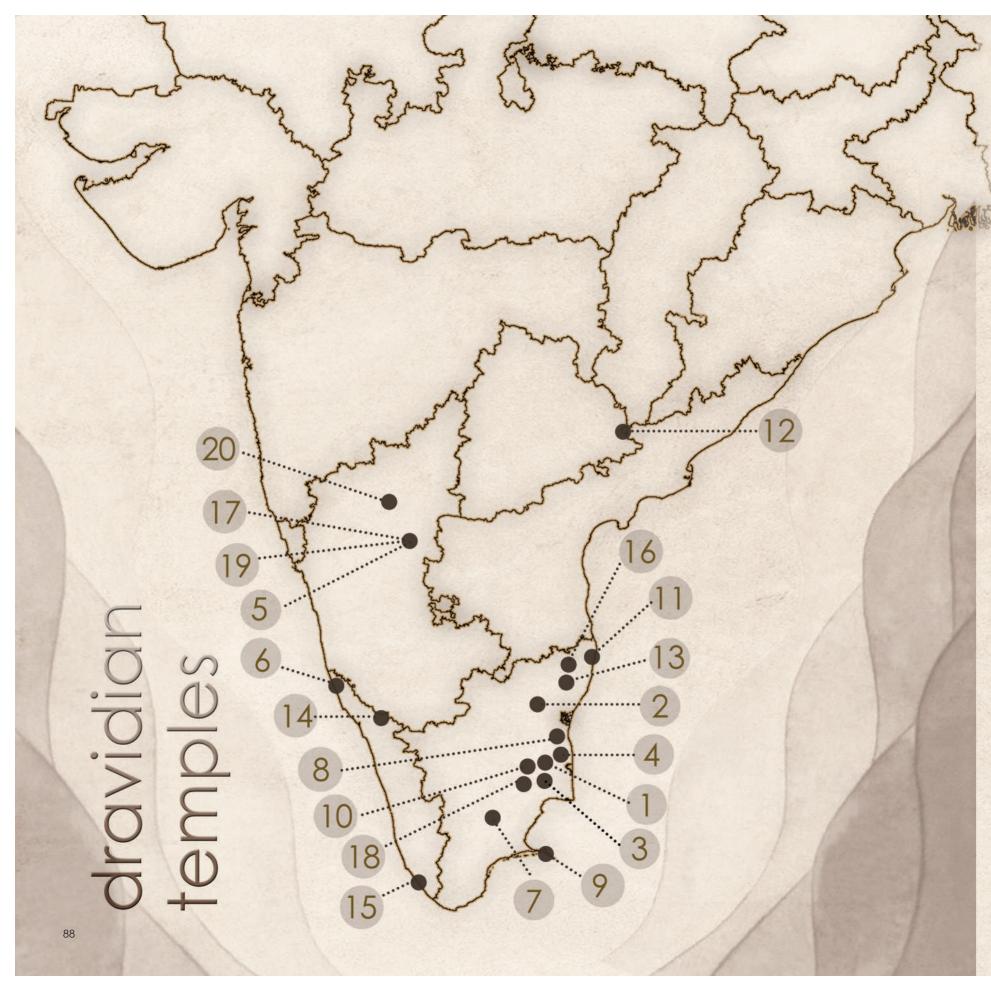
Plan of a Dravida Temple

The Dravida style of temple architecture in India finds its roots in the innovative designs of the Pallava dynasty around the 6th to 8th Century AD. This style is primarily associated with the southern regions of India and is characterized by a set of remarkable features that distinguish it from its North Indian counterparts.

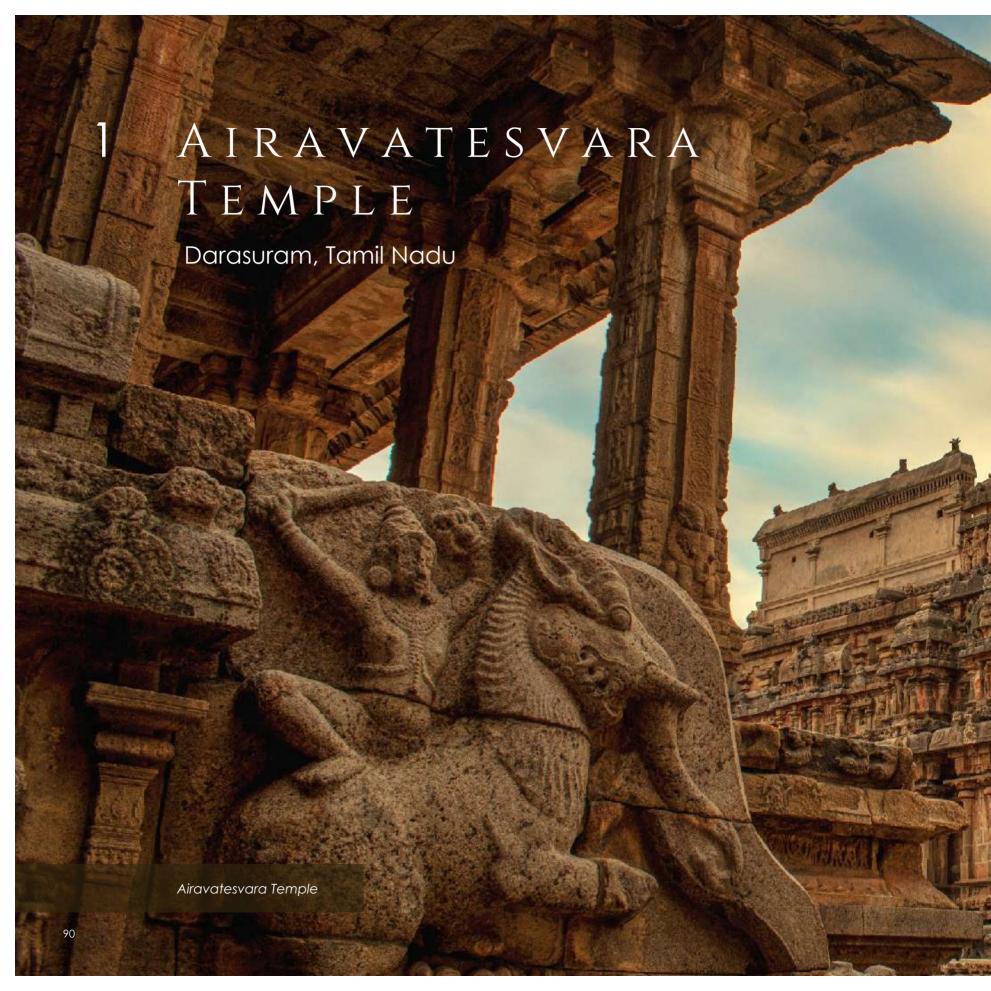
Dravidian temples are typically enclosed within a compound wall, and their entrance is marked by an ornate and towering gateway known as a Gopuram. The sanctum sanctorum (Garbhagriha) located in the center is the most sacred part of the temple and houses the image of the deity. The statues of fierce dwarapalas guard the entrance. The central element of these temples, the Vimana, soaring above the Garbhagriha, boasts a unique stepped pyramid shape, in contrast to the curving shikhara found in North Indian architecture.

The pillared halls of the Dravidian temples are adorned with intricate carvings. These temples also commonly feature water bodies, such as tanks and ponds, signifying purity and serving ritualistic purposes like ceremonial bathing.

Within the Dravidian architectural style, temples exhibit a diversity of shapes and sizes, with variations that are often specific to distinct locations in South India. This architectural style is a testament to the artistic and religious legacy of South India.



- 1. Airavatesvara Temple Darasuram, Tamil Nadu
- 2. Annamalaiyar Temple Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu
- 3. Brihadeeswara Temple Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu
- 4. Gangaikondacholisvarar Temple Gangaikondacholapuram, Tamil Nadu
- 5. Hazara Rama Temple Hampi, Karnataka
- 6. Kailasanathar Temple Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu
- 7. Meenakshi Temple Madurai, Tamil Nadu
- 8. Nataraja Temple Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu
- 9. Ramanathaswamy Temple Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu
- 10. Ranganthaswamy Temple Srirangam, Tamil Nadu
- 11. Shore Temple Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu
- 12. Sita Ramachandra Swamy Temple Bhadrachalam, Telangana
- 13. Sree Madanatheswara Siddhivinayaka Temple Kasargode, Kerala
- 14. Sree Mahavishnu Temple Thirunelly, Kerala
- 15. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Thiruvananthapuram, Tamil Nadu
- 16. Vaikunta Perumal Temple Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu
- 17. Vijaya Vitthala Temple Hampi, Karnataka
- 18. Vijayalaya Choleeswaram Narthamalai, Tamil Nadu
- 19. Virupaksha Temple Hampi, Karnataka
- 20. Virupaksha Temple Pattadakal, Karnataka





The entire temple is built to resemble a chariot wrapped in a lotus. The main garbhagriha is square in shape with a pyramidal superstructure. The vimana has five talas and is crowned by a griva and kalasa. The ardha mandapa connects the sanctum with the mukha mandapa and the subsequent mahamandapa. A hall called the tirumandapa, an agra-mandapa, and a bali peetha, all of which are intricately carved, can also be seen on the temple premises. The Nandi mandapa, an essential component of all Shiva temples, is located outside the main temple complex here.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

## The Singing Steps of Airavatesvara Temple

The Singing Steps of Airavatesvara Temple
The seven balustraded stone steps leading to
the temple's agra mandapa are known to be
the 'singing steps.' When one walks on these
steps, the seven different swaras of music are
produced. It is fascinating how these outlandish
stone wonders were built a thousand years ago.



Architecture of the Airavatesvara Temple



The Singing Steps of Airavatesvara Temple

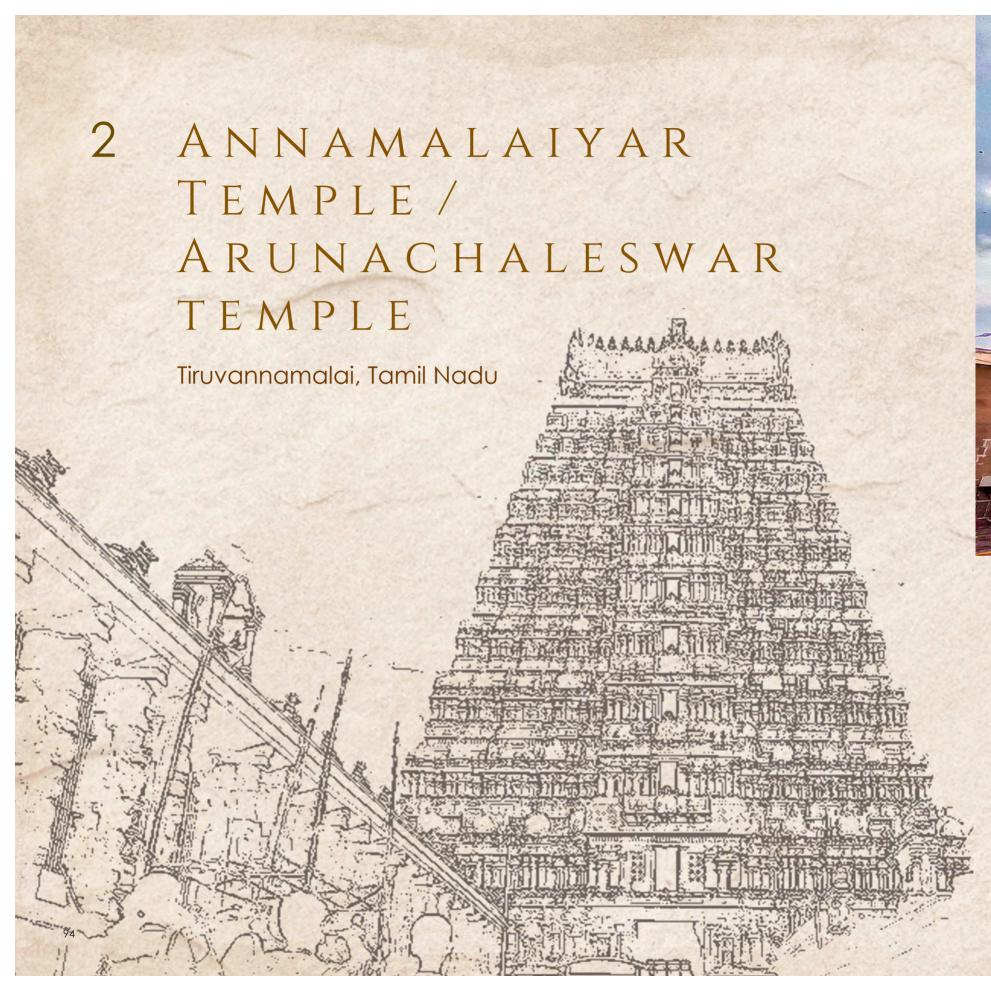


Airavatesvara Temple Complex

According to legend, Airavata, Lord Indra's vehicle, lost its white colour due to a curse from Sage Durvasa. Airavata prayed to Lord Shiva in Darasuram, who advised him to take a dip in the temple tank, after which he regained his colour. As a result, the temple was named Airavatesvara Temple.



Sculpture of Airavata, Lord Indra's Vehicle at Airavatesvara Temple





Annamalaiyar Temple, also known as the Arunachaleswar Temple

# **Built in** 9th century

#### **Dynasty**

Chola-Vijayanagara-Nayaka

#### Style

Dravida (Multiple styles)

# **Material** Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Annamalaiyar temple, also known as the Arunachaleswar temple, is one of the Panchabhuta Sthalas, where the Lord manifested himself as Agni, according to Shaivite beliefs. The Cholas are widely credited with being the first to construct a temple over the ancient sacred Swayambhoo Linga. The temple has been patronised by various royal powers over the years, including the Hoysalas, Banas, Vijayanagara kings, Nayakas, and others.

The temple complex has five prakaras, nine gopurams, multiple mandapas, and theerthas, and is a perfect blend of different South Indian styles like Chola, Pandya, Hoysala, Vijayanagara and Nayaka. Among the nine towers, four are gateways, of which the Rajagopuram on the eastern side is the tallest. The complex has an intricately sculpted thousand-pillared mandapa built under the patronage of King Krishna Deva Raya. Apart from the central sanctum, other mandapas, such as the Deepa Darshana mandapa, the Kalyana mandapa, and the Arunagirinathar mandapa, are visual feasts.



Architecture of the Annamalaivar Temple

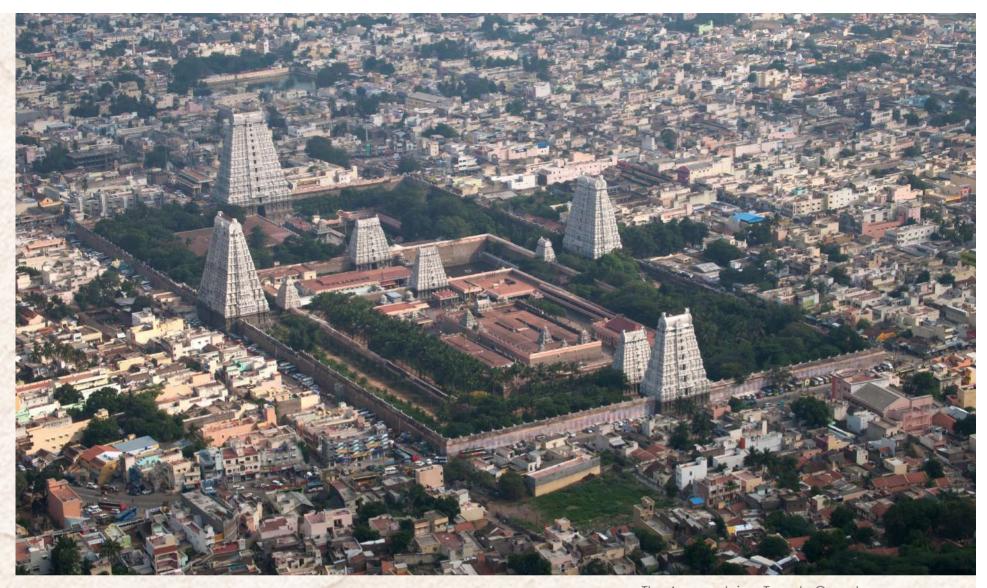
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Majestic Rajagopuram of Arunachaleswara

The Rajagopuram, the temple's eastern gateway tower, is one of the tallest temple towers in South India. It stands approximately 217 feet tall and has 11 stories. When Raja Krishna Deva Raya began construction in 1516, he envisioned a tower taller than the legendary Brihadeeswara temple in Thanjavur, which was 216 feet tall. However, it was later completed by Raja Sevappa Nayak, a Vijayanagara feudatory of Thanjavur.



The Majestic Rajagopuram of Arunachaleswara



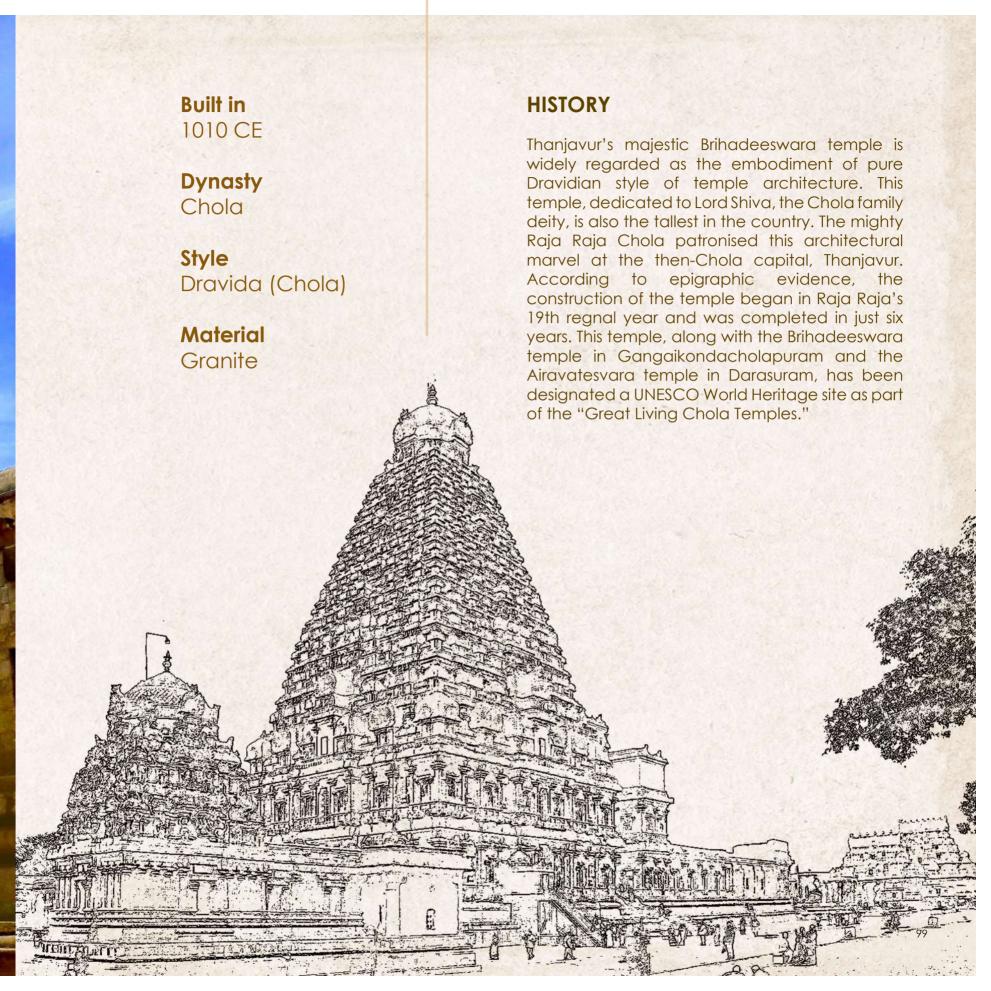
The Annamalaiyar Temple Complex



Sculptural Carving at the Annamalaiyar Temple

According to Hindu mythology, when Goddess Parvati playfully closed Lord Shiva's eye, all the light in the universe vanished. To dispel the darkness, Parvati performed a penance, after which Shiva manifested himself as agni (light) on the hill where the temple now stands. The Arunachaleswara temple is also believed to be the location where Shiva and Parvati merged to form the Ardhanariswara, and Shiva took the form of Lingodbhava Murty to outwit Vishnu and Brahma, who were in dispute over the title of the 'Supreme God.'





The temple features three gopurams: two dating from the Chola period and one from the Thanjavur-Maratha era. The main appuram on the eastern side is intricately carved and has a barrel-vaulted structure. The main shrine and the imposing superstructure above it exemplify the finest Dravidian architecture. A Nandimandapa, a mukha mandapam, a maha mandapam, and an antarala are also part of the complex. The halls are adorned with murals and sculptures from the Chola and Nayaka periods, depicting themes related to Shaktism, Vaishnavism, and Shaivism. Additionally, there are numerous subsidiary shrines dedicated to deities such as Ganesha, Subrahmanya, and Chandikeshwara, among others.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The lofty Vimana of Brihadeeswara

The vimana, also known as Dakshina Meru, which stands atop Brihadeeswara's sanctum, is one of the tallest in India, standing 200 feet (approximately) and 13 stories high. It is built using an interlocking technique with stone blocks strategically placed to evenly distribute pressure. On top of the Vimana, there is a stupika, which is a heavy monolith that resembles a dome. How such a heavy stone was hoisted to such a height is still a mystery!



Architecture of the Brihadeeswara Temple



The vimana of Brihadeeswara Temple



A View of the Great Pagoda at Tanjore," an aquatint by William Hodges, 1787

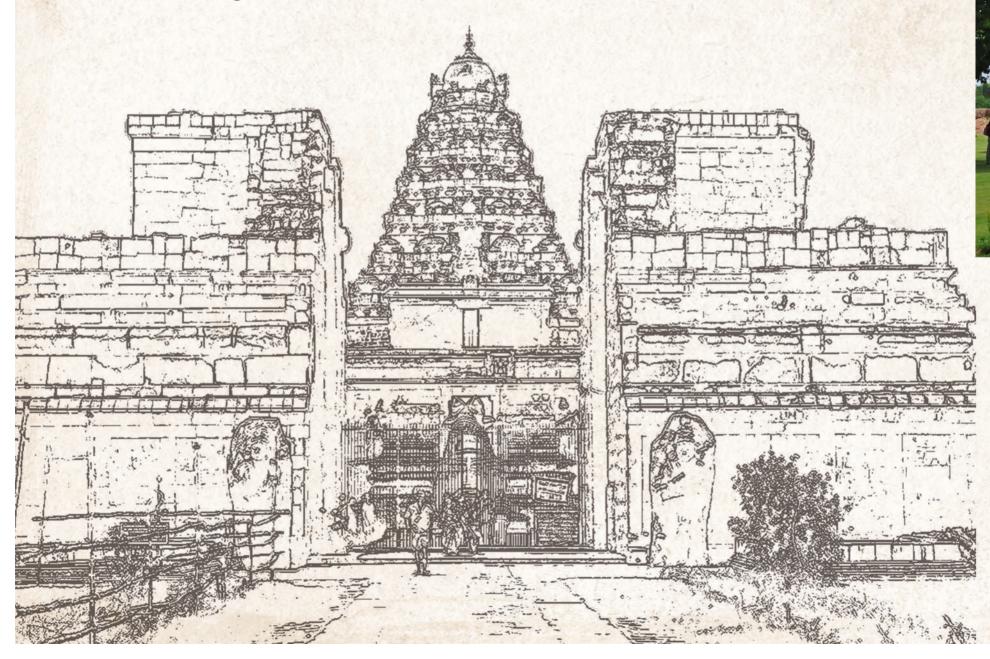
Four human figures carved in a straight line can be seen on the Vimana's northern wall. Interestingly, the last figure is seen wearing a headgear resembling a hat. The sculptor who carved these images is said to have predicted Thanjavur's future rulers and thus created these sculptures representing Chola, Nayaka, Maratha, and European powers. Other theories identify 'the man with the hat' as Marco Polo, who wanted his face to be carved in the tallest temple in India.



Sculptures on the entrance building of the Brihadeeswara Temple

# 4 GANGAIKONDA CHOLISVARAR TEMPLE

Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tamil Nadu





Gangaikonda Cholisvarar Temple

Built in 1035 CE

**Dynasty** Chola

**Style**Dravida (Chola)

**Material** Granite

#### **HISTORY**

The Gangaikonda Cholisvarar temple, a magnificent stone marvel, is one of three "Great Living Chola Temples" on the UNESCO World Heritage list. After his successful northern campaign, Rajendra Chola built the temple. He established a new capital city in present-day Jayankondam, and named it Gangaikonda Cholapuram (the Land of the Chola who conquered Ganga). According to inscriptions, the temple was consecrated in 1035 CE, and it remains an active temple with daily offerings and pujas to this day.

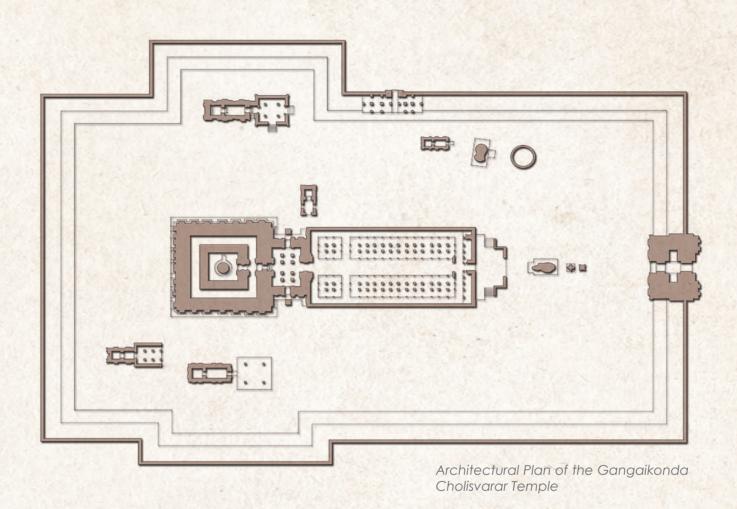
The Gangaikonda Cholisvarar Temple, a remarkable representation of Dravidian architectural style, encompasses towering enclosure walls (prakara), halls (mandapas), majestic gateway towers (gopurams), and the central shrine. The primary gopuram grants access to the inner courtyard, which houses the Nandi-mandapa that features a finely sculpted Nandiidol. Elaborately sculpted pillars grace the mahamandapa and ardhamandapa, guiding the way to the garbhagriha. Inside, the garbhagriha boasts 50 exquisitely carved sculptural reliefs, a true visual delight. Numerous smaller shrines dedicated to deities like Ganesha, Amman, Chandikeswara, and Mahishamardini further enhance the grandeur of this architectural marvel.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

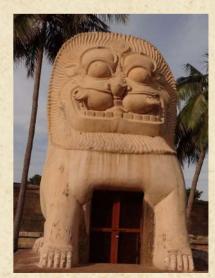
The vimana is one of the most captivating structures in the Gangaikonda Cholisvarar temple complex. It stands 180 feet tall and has nine stories. The vimana resembles the superstructure of Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur. However, it is smaller and slightly concave at the top. It is said that Rajendra Chola purposefully kept the vimana small because he believed that his father's creation at Thanjavur was superior. A kalasha and a lotus bud adorn the vimana's roof. Puranic and mythical accounts of Shaivism, Shaktism, and Vaishnavism are chiseled into perfection in the superstructure.



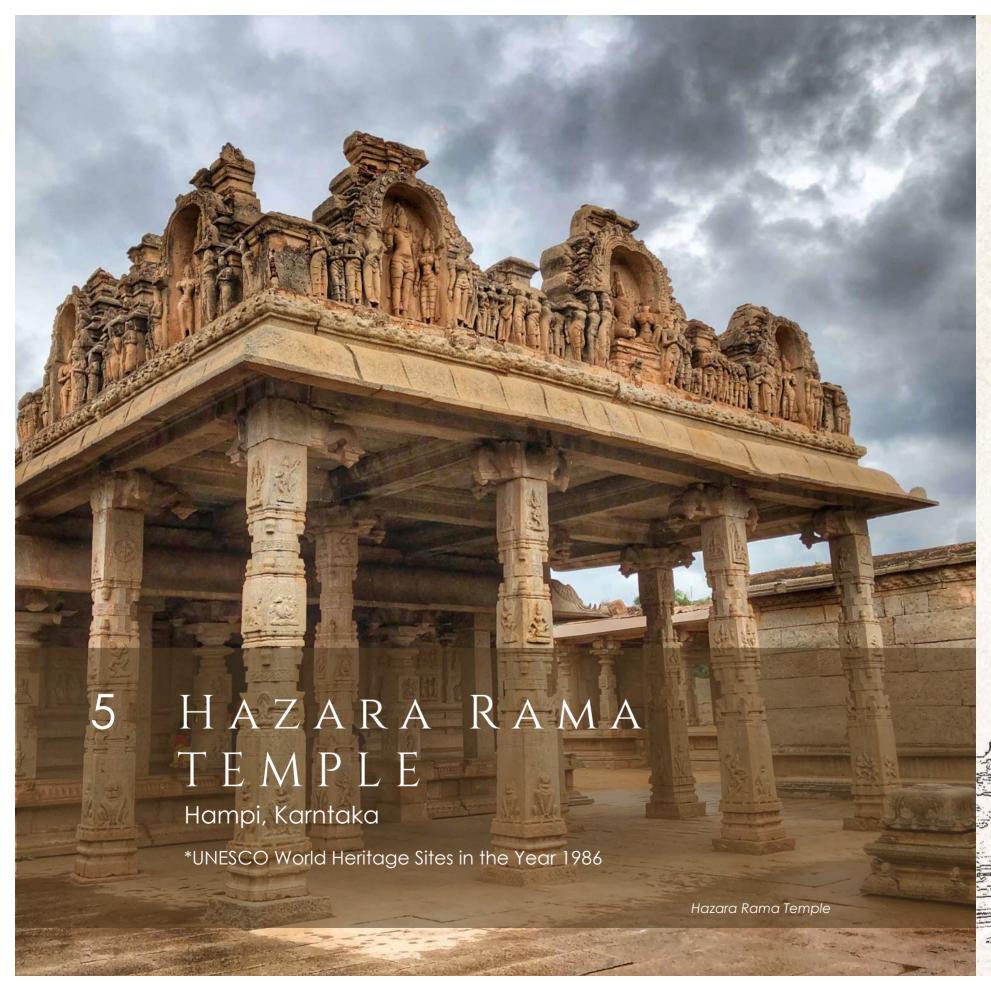




The Gangaikonda Cholisvarar temple is the sole surviving structure in Gangaikonda Cholapuram attributed to Rajendra Chola. It is said that during the temple's construction, the king directed his northern feudatories to bring a single pot of holy Ganga water to fill the temple well, known as Simhakeni, situated northeast of the sanctum.



The Gangaikonda Cholisvarar Temple well entrance



#### **Built in** 15th century

#### **Dynasty** Sangama

#### Style

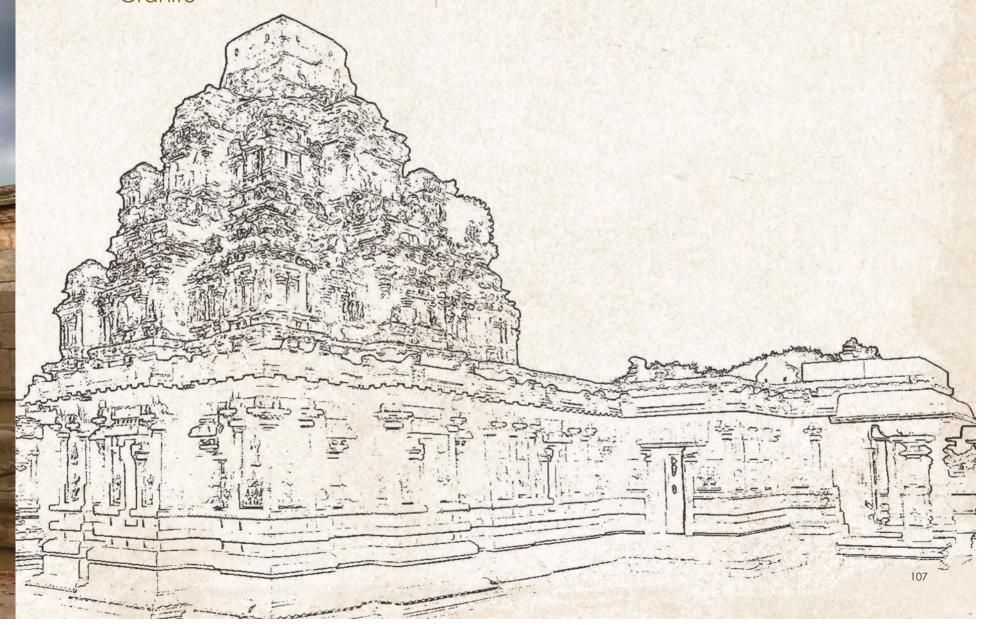
Dravida (Vijayanagara)

#### **Material**

Granite

#### HISTORY

The Hazara Rama temple, formerly known as the Ramachandra temple, is one of the most popular attractions in Hampi, the former capital of the Vijayanagara empire. Despite its dilapidated state, the temple is renowned for its wall carvings. Historians contend that the Hazara Rama temple served as a private temple for the royalty due to its central location within the city. It dates from the early 15th century, during the reign of Sangama King Deva Raya I.

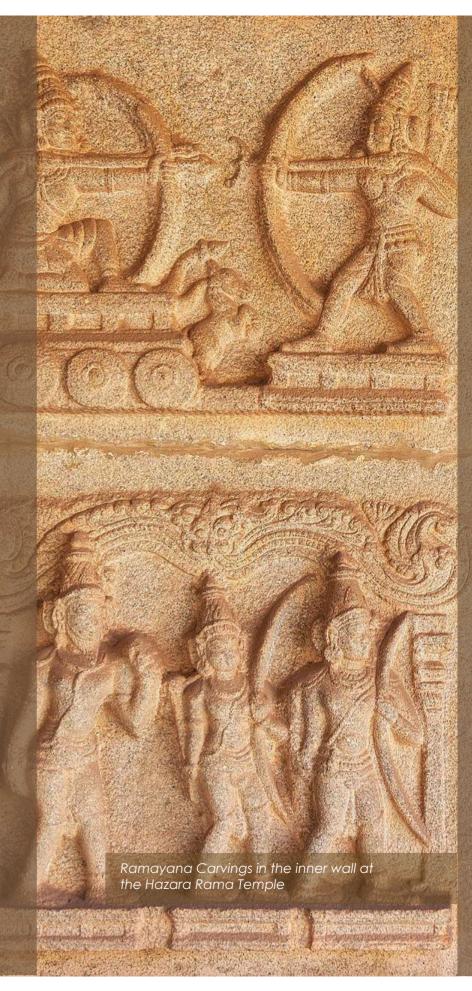


The temple is one of the most beautiful specimens of early Vijayanagara architecture. It is a modest structure comprising walls, a mahamandapa, an ardhamandapa, and the sanctum sanctorum. A simple vimana crowns the garbhagriha that tapers towards the top. The complex also includes a shrine for the Goddess (amman) and a Kalyana mandapa. The four intricately carved black marble pillars in the mahamandapa are a major attraction of the Hazara Rama temple. The carvings depict diverse divine themes covering Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Shakti aspects. The outer walls display the vibrant observance of the Vasantotsav (spring festival), while the inner walls depict finely carved reliefs from the Ramayana.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Ramayana carvings in the inner wall

Undoubtedly, the most captivating aspect of the Hazara Rama temple is its wall carvings. Within the temple's inner wall you will find 108 reliefs depicting episodes from the epic Ramayana. These carvings follow the sequence of Sage Valmiki's narration of the Ramayana to a king. The narrative continues with Ahilya Uddhar, Lord Parsurama's breaking of the bow, Vanvas, Ram pursuing Mareech, Sita Apaharan, Ram killing Vali, Hanuman's encounter with Sita in Lanka, and culminating with Ram's coronation in Ayodhya.





Intricately carved black marble pillars in the mahamandapa at the Hazara Rama Temple

The outer surface of the Hazara Rama temple's compound walls vividly depicts an elaborate procession during the spring festivities. Elephants, horses, attendants, soldiers, and women can be seen playing musical instruments, dancing, and participating in water sports as they make their way towards the seated king. The carvings are remarkably realistic, with each animal being distinctly unique.



A compound wall at the Hazara Rama Temple

# 6 KAILASANATHAR TEMPLE

Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu





Kailasanathar Temple

### Built in

8th century

### Dynasty

Pallava

#### Style

Dravida (Pallava)

#### **Material**

Sandstone and Granite

#### HISTORY

The Kailasanathar temple was commissioned by the Pallava dynasty, who ruled from the 3rd to the 9th centuries CE, with Kanchipuram as their capital. It was constructed in the early 8th century under the patronage of Narasihavarman II, also known as Rajamalla and Rajasimha. He was the patron of Mahabalipuram's iconic Shore Temple and Kanchipuram's Vaikunta Perumal Temple. According to local folklore, the temple's secret tunnel was used as an escape route for royals during times of emergency.

The temple features a prakara (high compound wall) adorned with the archetypal Pallava lion capitals. On the western side, a beautiful gopuram warmly welcomes pilgrims. Within the prakara, the inner court houses 58 devakulikas, which are sub-shrines dedicated to various manifestations of Shiva. The mahamandapam and the garbhagriha, which were detached earlier, are now connected by the later addition of an ardhamandapam. The sanctum's walls have an exquisitely carved Somaskanda relief, and the sculptures inside are executed with meticulous detail. The vimana crowning the garbhagriha is pyramidal in shape, with intricate detailing of various aspects of Shiva.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Sculpted Reliefs of the Vimana

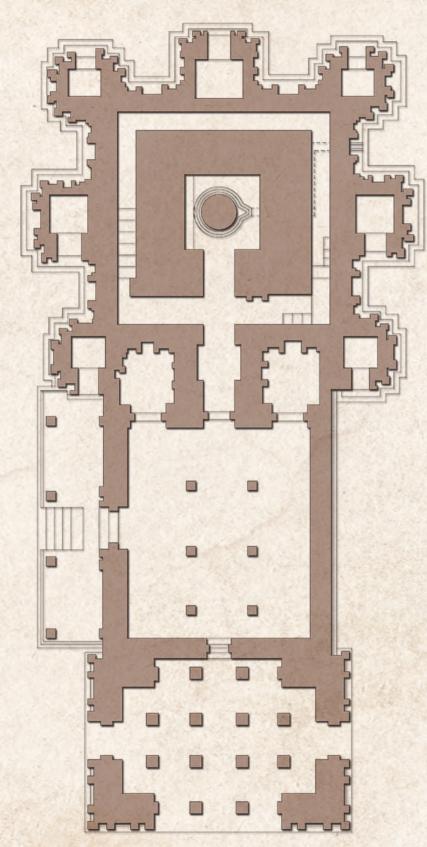
The Kailasanathar temple's vimana has a square plan and rises in a pyramidal shape, crowned by a small dome. It is undeniably a Pallava sculptural marvel, intricately depicting mythological stories. In the southwest corner, the depiction of the pine forest myth is carved in perfection, featuring Shiva's manifestations as Lingodhbhava Murty and Natesha. On the north wall one can find eloquent goddess reliefs from Devi Mahatmyam, which mark the continuity of the tradition of devi reliefs from Mamallapuram.



Architecture of Kailasanathar Temple



Sculpted Reliefs of the Vimana of Kailasanathar Temple

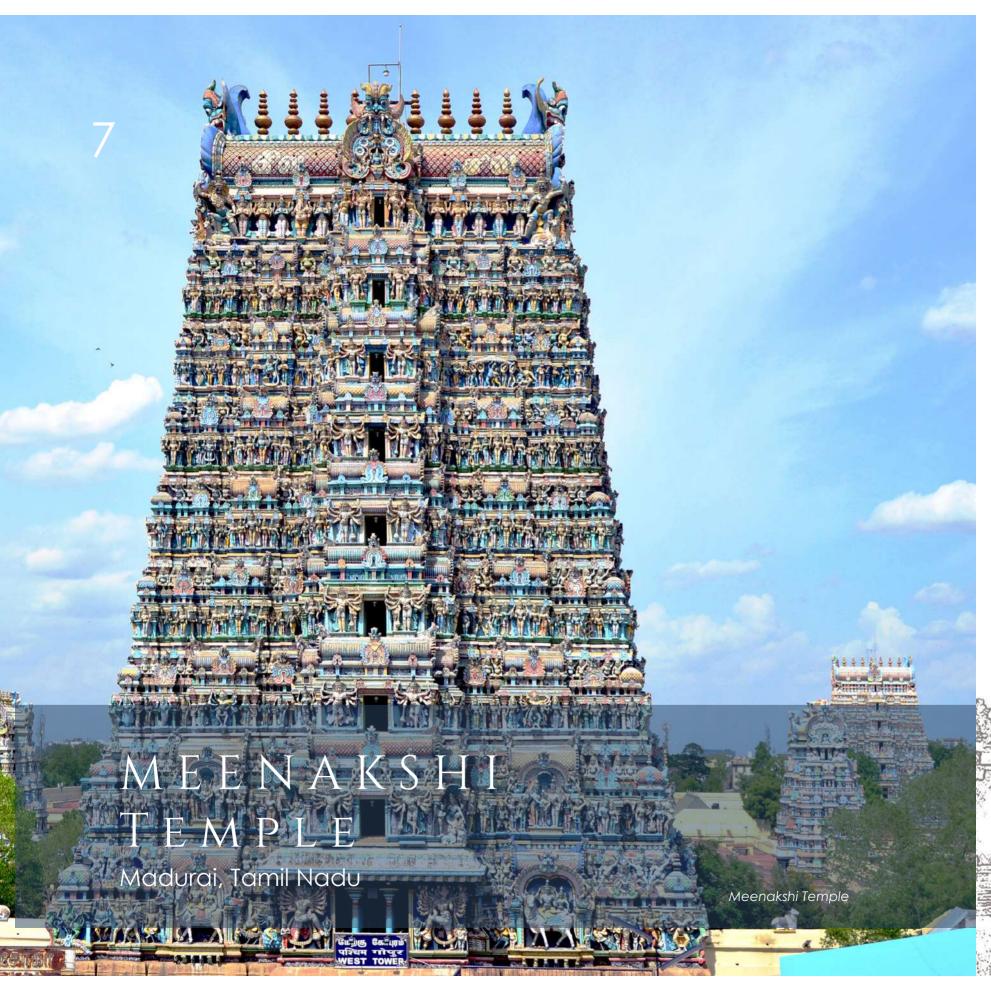


Architectural Plan of the Kailasanathar Temple



Sculptures and Carvings at the Kailasanathar Temple

The temple has an unusual circumambulatory passage that is symbolic of the life cycle. To begin the pradakshina, devotees must crawl through a narrow passage known as Irappu Vasal (the Gate of Death). Upon completing the circumambulation, they exit through another narrow gate known as Pirappu Vasal (the Gate of Birth), which represents emerging from the womb, signifying the Hindu belief in rebirth.



#### **Built in**

10th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Pandya & Nayaka Dynasties

#### **Style**

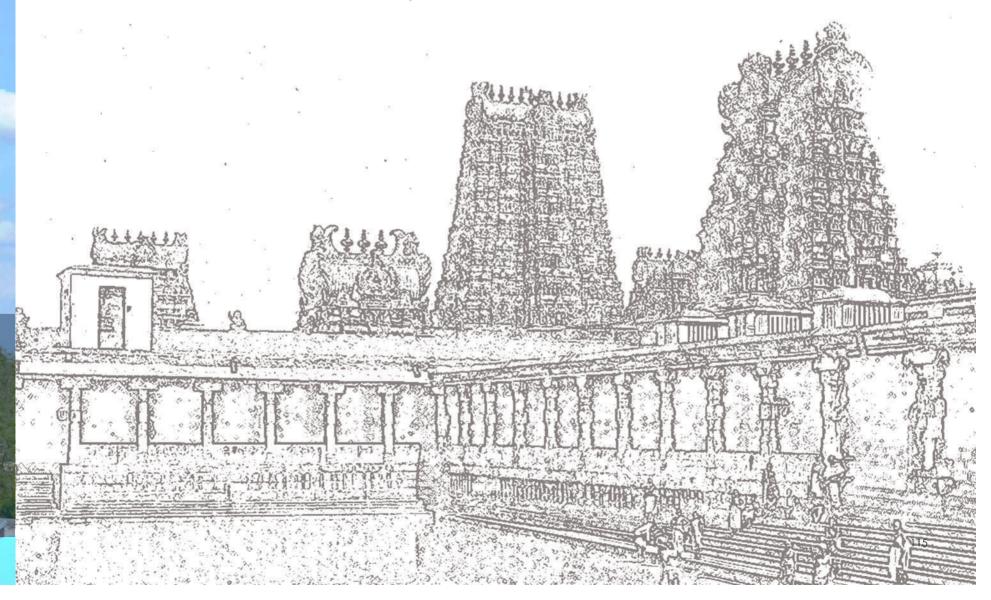
Dravida (Pandya)

#### **Material**

Granite and Limestone

#### **HISTORY**

The Madurai Meenakshi temple is one of the most prominent Indian temples dedicated to Goddess Parvati, who is venerated as Meenakshi, and her consort Sundareswarar, a form of Lord Shiva. Following a divine dream, Kulasekhara Pandya built the temple in the 10th century CE. After suffering invasions by the Delhi Sultanate during the 14th century, the temple was rebuilt by the Vijayanagara rulers. Further expansion and renovation work tool place following the principle of *Shilpa Shastras* during the reigns of Viswanatha Nayak and Thirumalai Nayak from the Nayaka dynasty in the 17th and 18th centuries.



Given the temple's history of invasions, the Meenakshi temple has massive outer walls. When viewed from the highest vantage point, the entire complex is shaped like a mandala structure. The garbhagriha of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar's prominent shrines are adorned with gold-plated vimanas. Throughout the complex, there are numerous minor shrines dedicated to various deities. The ornately carved entrances, known as gopurams, lead to mandapas—ornate pillared halls adorned with intricate sculptural work—and from there to the sanctum. Within the Meenakshi Kovil complex, a ritually significant temple tank known as Ponthamarai Kulam (Pond with Golden Lotus), can be found at the south end.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Gopurams of Madurai Meenakshi Temple

The most captivating structures in the 14-acre temple complex are the fourteen gopurams, which serve as entry gates to the shrines. Four of these, the outer gopurams, have nine stories each. The tallest gopuram reaches 170 feet in the south. These gopurams are covered with stucco images depicting pan-Indian and local mythological stories. Every 12 years, the rich sculptural corpus of the gopurams is repainted in vibrant colours. Notably, the illustrious western gopuram of the Meenakshi Amman Thirukkovil is the most elegant temple gopuram featured in the state emblem of Tamil Nadu.

Sculptures and details of the Gopurams of Meenakshi Temple

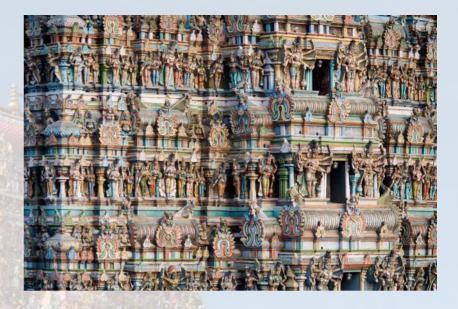




Vishnu presiding over the marriage of Shiva and Parvati (Meenakshi), Meenakshi Temple, Madurai

Kilikkoondu Mandapam (the Birdcage Hall), situated next to the Meenakshi shrine, is a fascinating structure that has depictions from the Mahabharata, richly carved in its pillars. A specific sculpture of a yali in the hall has a freely rotating stone ball inside its mouth. The name Kilikkoondu Mandapa is derived from the cages where parrots were once kept, and these parrots were trained to say 'Meenakshi.' In contemporary times, it is also called the Sangili mandapam, named after the ritual dance performed here during festive occasions.

Images (Top to Bottom): Architecture and Details of the Meenakshi Temple

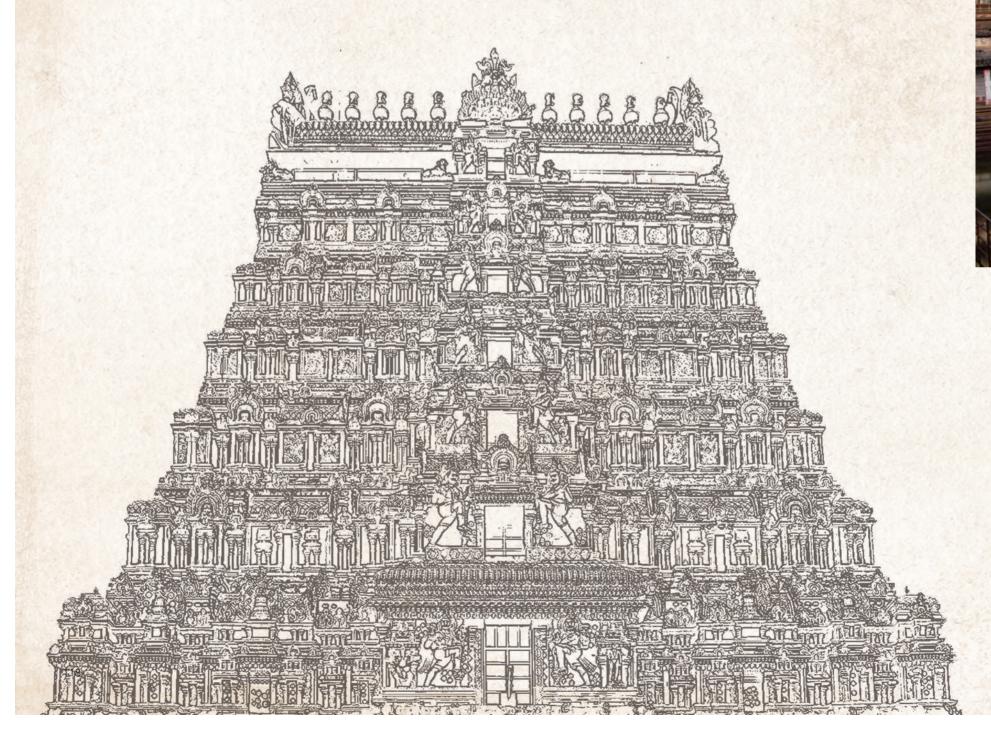


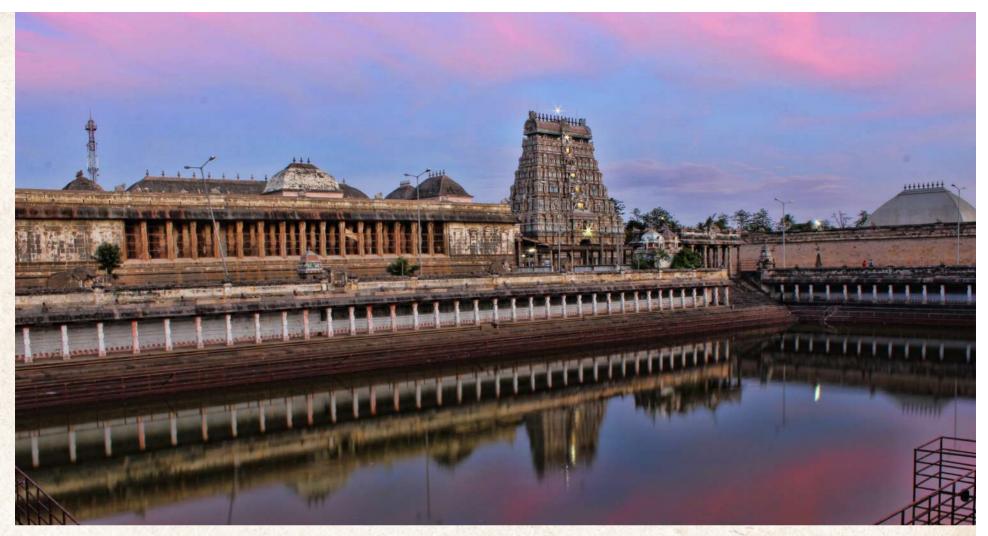




# 8 NATARAJA TEMPLE

Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu





Nataraja Temple Complex

#### **Built** in

10th-13th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Chola

#### Style

Dravida (Chola, Pandya, Kerala)

#### **Material**

Granite

#### HISTORY

Appar and Sambadar's works (6th-7th century CE) contain the earliest known references to the worship of Nataraja Shiva in Chidambaram. Though the temple is said to be older, the current structure dates from the early Chola period. The Chola family's deity was Nataraja Shiva and Chidambaram served as their capital. The temple prospered under the patronage of Aditya I, Parantaka I, and Raja Raja Chola. According to inscriptions, King Angkor of Cambodia presented the temple with a valuable jewel in 1114 CE. Though Sultanate invasions in the 1300s severely damaged the temple and town, they were restored and repaired over the centuries with the support of Vijayanagara and Nayaka rulers.

The temple has nine entrances, symbolising the nine openings of the human body. The sanctum sanctorum of Nataraja Shiva follows the Kerala style, with the roof plated with 21,600 gold sheets, representing the 21,600 breaths a human takes in a day. It is supported by 28 pillars, denoting the 28 agamas, or ways to worship Shiva. A number of halls and temple tanks can also be found on the premises. The complex also houses the 63 shrines dedicated to the 63 Nayanar saints. The Shakti and Vaishnava shrines in the complex are heavily carved with depictions of mythological and puranic narratives.



#### The Nritta Sabha

According to legend, there is a narrative about Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati entering a dance competition with Lord Mahavishnu serving as the judge in Tillaivanam (present-day Chidambaram). The Nritta Sabha within the temple is believed to be the very spot where the deities danced. Inscriptional evidence points out that it was a 56-pillared hall, of which only 50 survive now. The pillars are intricately carved with dancers depicting postures from the Natya Shastra. The hall's platform is carved to resemble a chariot, with faded wheel and horse sculptures still visible. The open square ceiling of the sabha is decorated with an ornate lotus sculpture.



Sculptures at the Nataraja Temple



Open square ceiling of the Nritta Sabha decorated with an ornate Lotus sculpture





Carvings and Sculptures at the Nataraja Temple



#### The Chidambara Ragasiyam

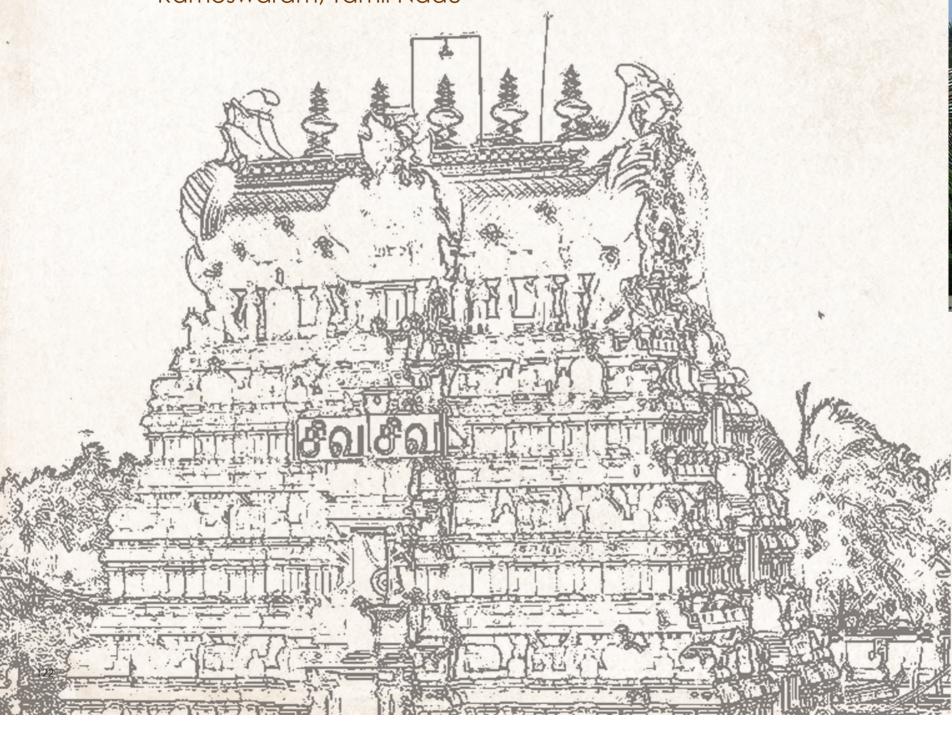
Chidambara ragasiyam or the secret of Chidambaram is a unique myth associated with the Nataraja temple. According to this legend, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are believed to be present in close proximity to the main shrine through an embossed figure. This sacred image is hidden behind a curtain that symbolises maya or illusion. During special pujas, the curtain is drawn aside, revealing golden Vilva leaves, representing the divine couple. Saints and yogis are said to possess the ability to see them in their physical form.

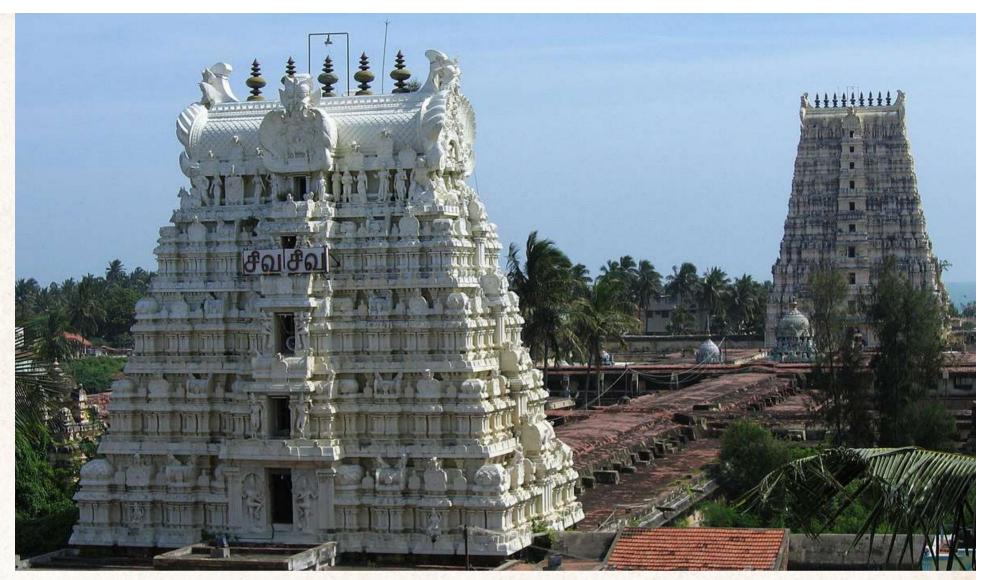


Embossed Figures and Sculptures at the Nataraja Temple

# 9 RAMANATHASWAMY TEMPLE

Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu





Ramanathaswamy Temple

#### **Built** in

17th century (Current structure)

#### **Dynasty**

Pandya, Maravar, Aryachakravarti, Polonnaruwa

#### Style

Dravida (Multiple styles)

#### **Material**

Limestone and Granite

#### **HISTORY**

Standing on the shore of the Bay of Bengal, the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram has a history that can be traced back to the epic Ramayana. The temple, which began as a thatched hut, grew into a magnificent structure under the patronage of the Polonnaruwas of Lanka by the 11th and 12th centuries. The temple flourished in the subsequent centuries as the Aryachakravarti Pandyas of Jaffna extended their patronage. The temple reached its zenith in the 17th century, under the aegis of the Sethupatis of Ramnad. They are credited with the current structure as well as the world-famous corridors.

Massive compound walls, known as Thirumathil, surround the temple, with two gopurams on the east and west sides. According to legend, the sanctum houses two lingas, Ramalingam and Viswalingam, one constructed by Sita and the other brought by Hanuman. The vimana atop the garbhagriha is reminiscent of the Pallava-era superstructures. Kashi Vishwanath and Somaskanda are two shrines on either side of the main sanctum. The temple's long corridors, three in number, are well known. The complex also includes several sub-shrines and theerthas.

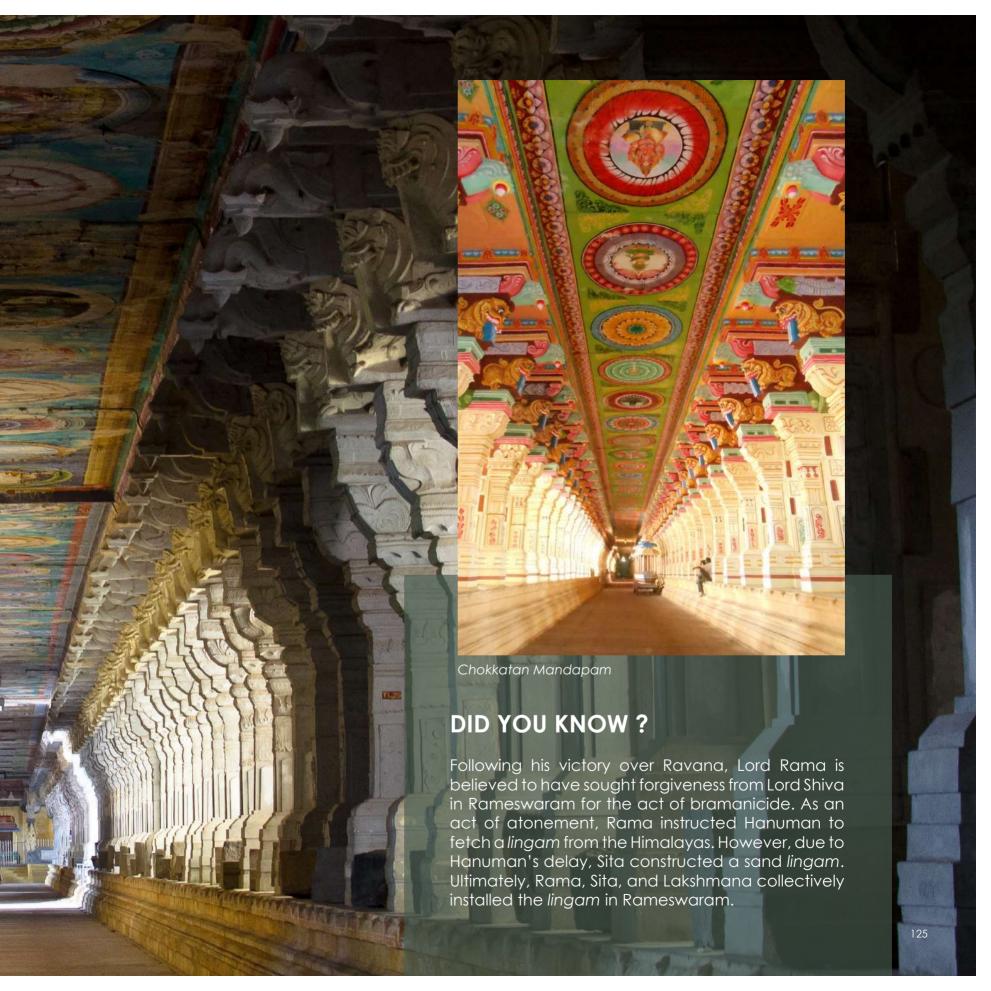
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

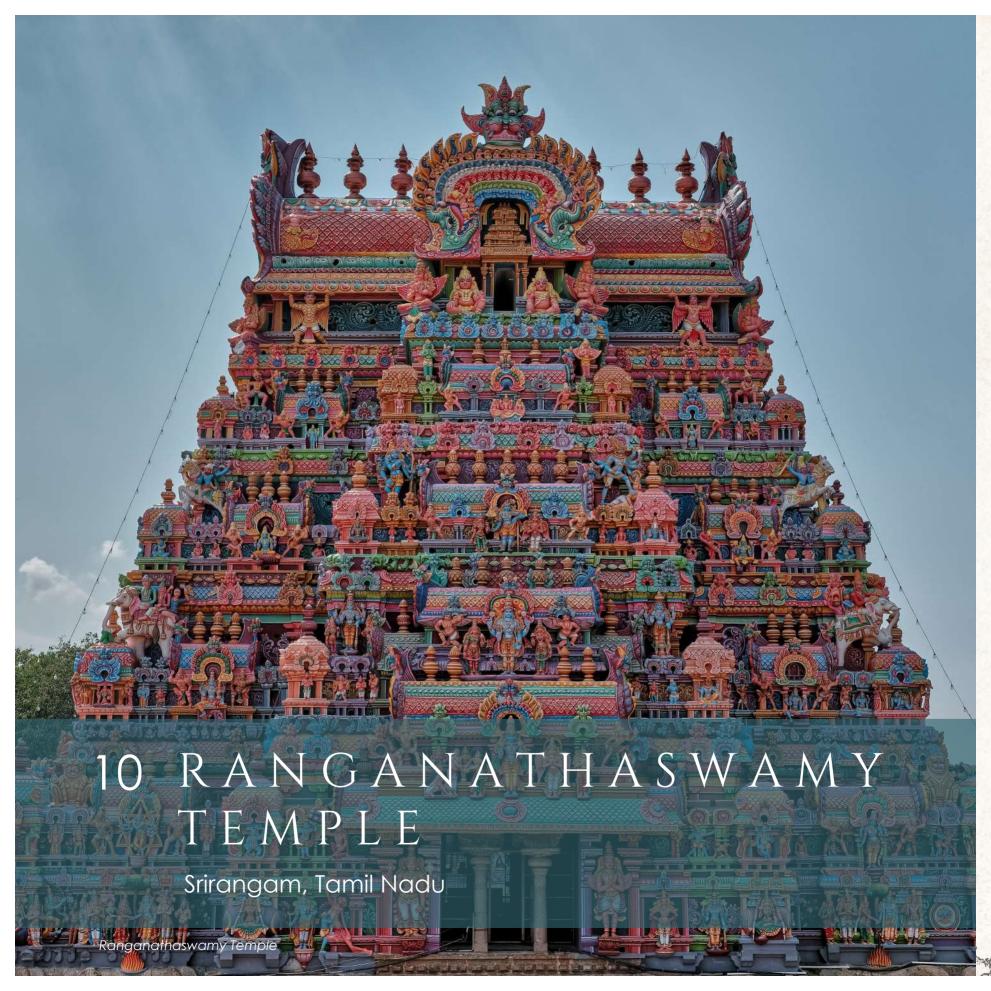
#### The Chokkatan Mandapam

The Chokkatan Mandapam is the third and outer corridor of the Ramanathaswamy temple and is reputed to be the longest of its kind in Asia. The corridor was built by Muthuramalinga Sethupathi of the Maravar dynasty in the 18th century. The mandapam is built on a raised platform with carved granite pillars supporting it. The statues of Sethupathi and two of his ministers flank the western entrance.

Chokkatan Mandapam







#### Built in 100 BCE-100 CE

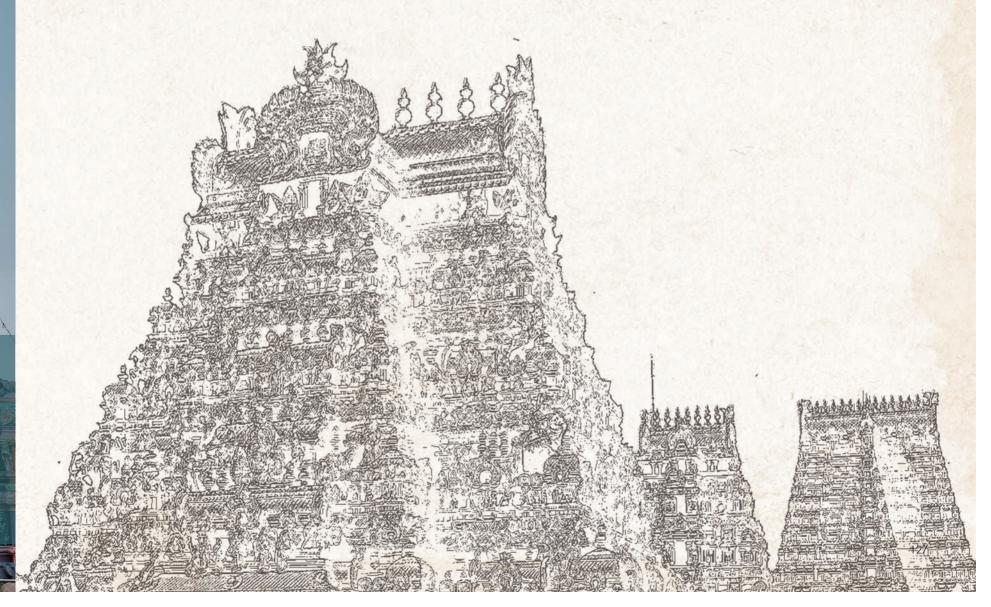
**Dynasty** Chola, Pandya, Hoysala, Vijayanagara

**Style**Multiple styles

**Material** Granite

#### **HISTORY**

The Ranganathaswamy temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, dates back to the early centuries of the common era. The temple and the presiding deity are mentioned in the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Sangam literature. According to epigraphic evidence, the temple was founded by Dharmavarma Chola. Over time, the Pandyas, Vijayanagara kings, Thanjavur-Marathas, and Hoysalas extended their patronage. During the Sultanate invasion in 1327, the Ranganath idol was discreetly removed and remained with the priest until the temple was rebuilt in 1371. The temple experienced a golden age after the Sangamas overthrew the Madurai Sultanate in 1378.



The Ranganathaswamy temple is an architectural wonder with seven prakaras, 24 gopurams, 39 pavilions, 50 shrines, nine theerthams, and over 800 inscriptions. It is constructed on the lines of the Agama texts. The garbhagriha in the innermost courtyard has a Tamil-Omkara-shaped vimana. The numerous mandapas in the temple testify to the fine craftsmanship that has evolved over the centuries. The main tower, Rajagopuram, is the tallest temple tower in Asia. The construction of the gopuram began during the reign of Achuta Deva Raya and continued for a span of 400 years.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

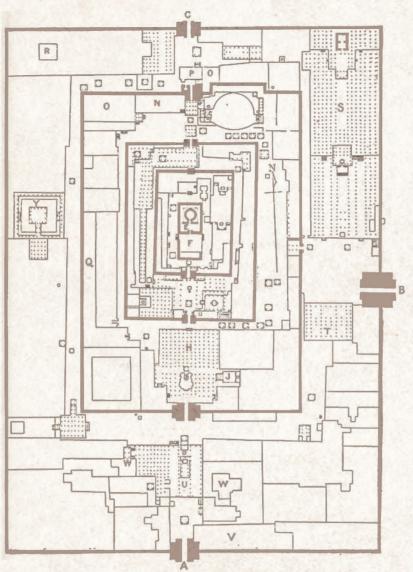
#### The Sesharaya Mandapam

The Sesharaya mandapam, located on the eastern side of the fourth prakara within the temple is an intricately carved hall constructed during the reign of the Madurai Nayakas. The mandapam contains one-of-a-kind monolithic sculptures, the most notable of which are the forty leaping horses with horsemen on their backs. Interestingly, these horses have their hooves up on the heads of tigers, which goes against natural power equations.

Monolithic sculptures of leaping horses with horsemen on their backs at the Ranganathaswamy Temple







Architectural Plan of the Ranganathaswamy Temple

According to legends, the vimana of Ranganatha emerged as a result of the severe austerities performed by Lord Brahma during the Samudra Manthan. Vibhishana obtained the vimana through Lord Rama. While travelling to Lanka with the vimana, Vibhishana halted at Srirangam, but could not proceed further. Subsequently, he gave the vimana to Dharmavarma, the local king, who went on to construct a temple at the site.



Sculputural Carving at the Ranganathaswamy Temple





Shore Temple

#### **Built in** 8th century

## **Dynasty** Pallava

# **Style**Dravida (Pallava)

## **Material** Granite

#### HISTORY

The Shore Temple, an epitome of sculptural beauty and a marvellous piece of Pallava architecture is a UNESCO World Heritage site standing on the pristine shore of the Bay of Bengal in the majestic city of Mamallapuram. The temple complex was built in the royal city of Mamallapuram, a major port on the eastern coastline, by 'Rajasimha' Narasimhavarman II in the 8th century. Mamallapuram is a splendid culmination of the architectural marvels commissioned by Narasimhavarman, ranging from rock-cut caves to stone rathas. The Shore Temple complex has three temples: two of which are dedicated to Lord Shiva, and the remaining one has an idol of the reclining Lord Vishnu.

The complex has three shrines: two major Shiva shrines and a small Vishnu shrine in the middle, all placed on the same platform. The Shiva temples are orthogonal in configuration with the majestic multi-tiered pyramidal shikhara. The shikhara resembles pagodas, a prime reason why the temple is regarded as one of the seven mythical **pagodas** mentioned by the early European explorers. They are remarkably similar to the iconic Dharmaraja Ratha. The walls of the temple are rich with sculptures of rearing lions and Nandis. In 1990, a miniature structural temple also dedicated to Shiva was unearthed by the ASI from the complex.

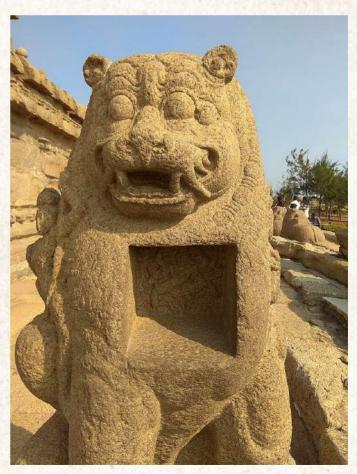


#### The Lion Monolith

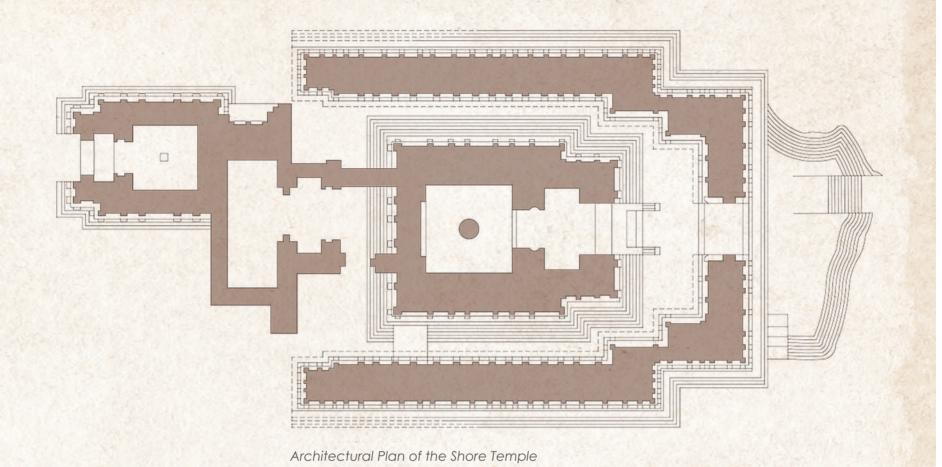
The temple complex features a one-of-a-kind monolithic structure depicting alion as the vehicle of Goddess Durga. The mahishasuramardini form of Durga, a recurring theme in Pallava art, is carved to perfection in the monolith. As the royal emblem, lions play an important role in the Pallava sculptural tradition, and the monolith in the Shore complex is no exception.



Shikhara of the Shore Temple



Lion Monolith at Shore Temple



#### The Seven Pagodas of Mamallapuram

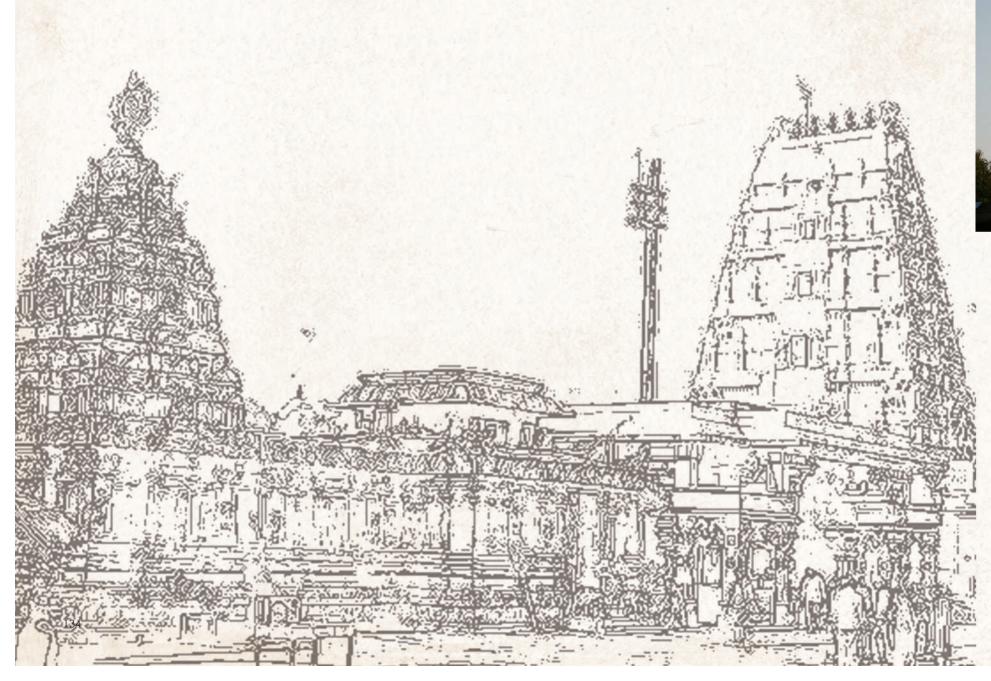
According to legend, Mamallapuram once housed seven magnificent temples known as "the seven pagodas" by foreign explorers. The gods eventually became envious of the city's splendour and magnificence, and Lord Indra summoned great floods to wreak havoc on the structures. Only the Shore Temple was spared from his wrath. The remainder of the six temples were destroyed and believed to have submerged in the sea.



Shore Temple Complex

# 12 SITA RAMASWAMY TEMPLE

Bhadrachalam, Telangana





Sita Ramaswamy Temple

**Built** in 1674

## **Dynasty**

Qutub Shahi

#### Style

Dravida (Vijayanagara)

#### **Material**

Stone

#### HISTORY

The Bhadrachalam Sita Ramaswamy temple was constructed in the 17th century by Kancherla Gopanna, popularly known as Bhakta Ramdas. Gopanna served as a tahsildar under the Qutub Shahis of Golconda. During the reign of Sultan Abul Hasan, when the Jizyah tax was imposed on non-Muslims, it faced widespread resentment. The local community also rejected Gopanna, who was a Sultanate official. Disheartened by the backlash, Gopanna used a part of the tax revenue to build the temple in Bhadrachalam. The Sultan was furious with Gopanna for misusing the official income and had him imprisoned. Though there are multiple local narratives about this incident, what happened to him after his incarceration remains unknown.

The Sitaramaswamy temple has four entrances, with the main entrance requiring a 50-step climb. The temple is divided into three sections: Bhadra Shrine, Garbhagriha, and the main tower. A rock shrine is dedicated to Bhadra. The sanctum, which is believed to be situated at Bhadra's heart, houses the central deity, Lord Vishnu, in the form of Rama seated in Padmasana, with Goddess Sita on his lap. Lord Ram is depicted holding a conch, disc, bow, and arrow in each of his four hands. The Rajagopuram is considered as Bhadra's feet. Additionally, the temple grounds feature Ranganatha and Lakshmi shrines, inspired by the Srirangam temple in Tamil Nadu.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Vimana of the Central Sanctum

The central shrine of the Sitaramaswamy temple symbolically stands at the 'heart of Bhadra.' The superstructure above the central sanctum is square at the base and has a pyramidal shape. At the top of the vimana there is an eight-faced sudarshana chakra with a thousand corners. According to temple legend, Kancherla Gopanna discovered it in the sacred waters of the Godavari River. The vimana also houses a golden miniature of the temple deity.



Sita Ramaswamy Temple Complex



Vimana of the Sita Ramaswamy Temple



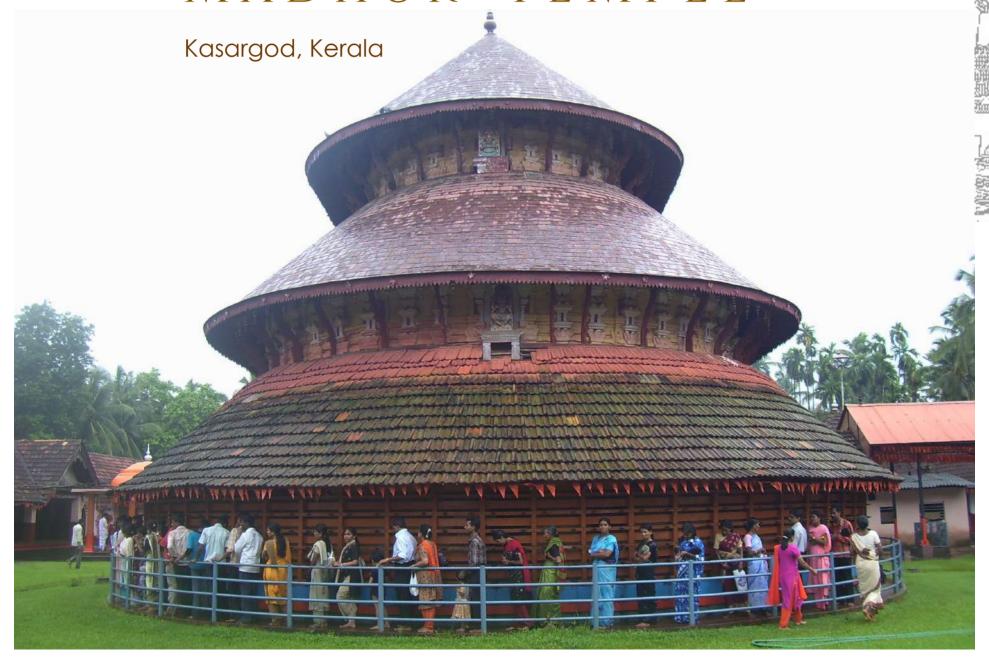
View of the Sita Ramaswamy Temple at Night

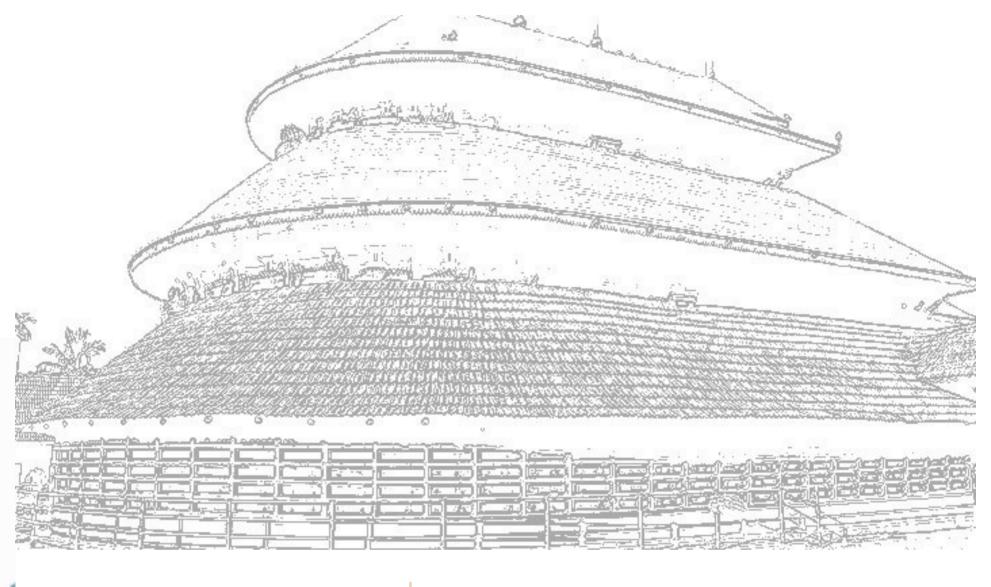
According to the temple legend, Ram made a promise to Bhadra, a man he created out of stone, that he would visit him upon returning from Lanka with his wife, Sita. However, since Ram was unable to fulfil his promise, Lord Vishnu appeared in front of Bhadra in the form of Lord Ram but in an immortal form. The presiding deity of this temple is the embodiment of the Lord who granted darshan to Bhadra.



Sita Ramaswamy Temple Entrance

# 13 SREE MADANATHESWARA SIDDHIVINAYAKA / MADHUR TEMPLE





#### **Built in** 10th Century

## **Dynasty**Mypadis of Kumbla

#### **Style** Gaja Prushtaka

## **Material**Multitudinous Materials

#### **HISTORY**

Sree Madanatheswara Siddhivinayaka Temple is a unique temple dedicated to Lord Shiva as Madanatheswara, the slayer of Manmatha. Though Lord Shiva is the presiding deity, the temple is renowned for its Ganapati mural within the main sanctum. In this temple, Lord Ganapati is worshipped as "Bodda Ganesha" (Fat Ganesha). The temple was built by the Mypadi rulers of Kumbla in the 10th century. According to local folklore, during his invasion of Kumbla in the 18th century, Tipu Sultan initially intended to plunder the temple. However, after drinking water from the temple well, he had a change of heart and left without causing harm to the temple premises. It is said that he made a cut in the temple walls to satisfy his soldiers, a mark that remains visible even to this today.

The temple complex has a sreekovil where devotees worship the swayambhu Shiva linga and a mural of Lord Ganesha. Above the sanctum is a three-tiered dome in the Gaja-Prushtaka style. These Gaja-Prushtaka style temples are unique masterpieces of the Malabar and Tulunadu temple architecture. In front of the sreekovil, the namaskara mandapa is adorned with exquisite wooden carvings depicting stories from the Puranas and the Ramayana. The temple complex also includes temple corridors, subsidiary shrines in the Keralastyle architecture, and a prominent flag post.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Three-tiered Sreekovil

The most captivating feature of the Madhur temple complex is undoubtedly its sreekovil (garbhagriha), characterized by three-tiered domes as the superstructure. Constructed in the distinctive Gaja Prushtaka architectural style, it bears a resemblance to the rear side of an elephant. These domes are adorned with wooden carvings, with copper roofing on the top two tiers, and tile roofing on the bottom one.



## DID YOU KNOW? The centerpiece of the Madhur temple is the Ganapathy picture inside the sreekovil, which was originally drawn by a young boy. According to folklore, the picture kept growing larger day by day, because of which the boy affectionately called it "Bodda Ganesha" or "Boddajja." Madhur Temple





**Built in** 8-9th century

**Dynasty** Chera

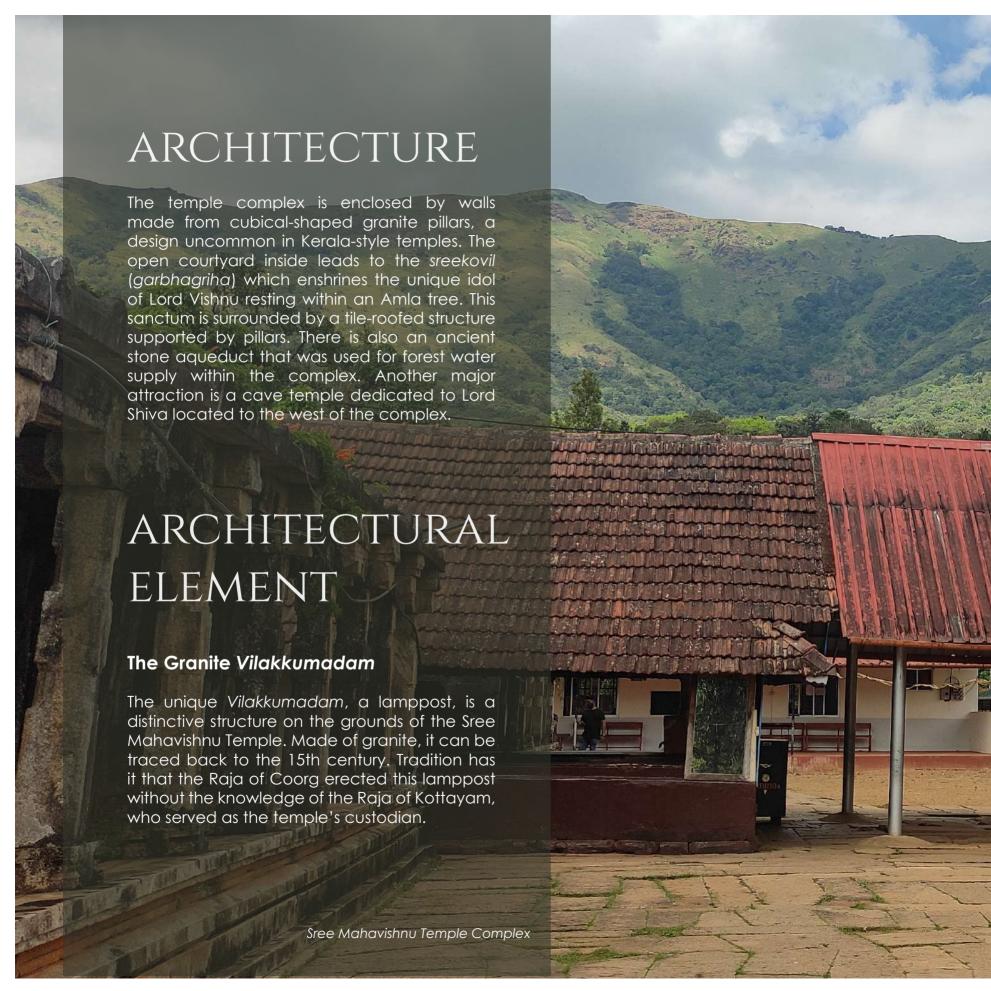
**Style**Dravida (Kerala)

**Material**Granite

#### HISTORY

The Sree Mahavishnu Temple in Thirunelli is one of the major pilgrimage sites in Kerala, famous for carrying out ancestral rituals. Historically referred to as the "Sahyamalaka Kshetra," the temple is situated amidst the lush Sahyadri greenery. According to the Puranas, it is the place where Lord Brahma installed an idol of Vishnu while circumnavigating the globe. Also known as the "Kashi of the South," the Thirunelli temple is attributed to the Cheras. It is believed that the temple was constructed by Kulashekhara Varma Chera (767-834 CE), who later abandoned the throne to become a Vaishnava missionary. Inscriptions dating back to the reign of Bhaskara Ravi Varman (962-1019 CE) have been discovered within the temple premises, which shed light on its illustrious history.

Sree Mahavishnu Temple







#### **Built** in

18th century (Current structure)

#### **Dynasty**

Travancore Royal Family

#### Style

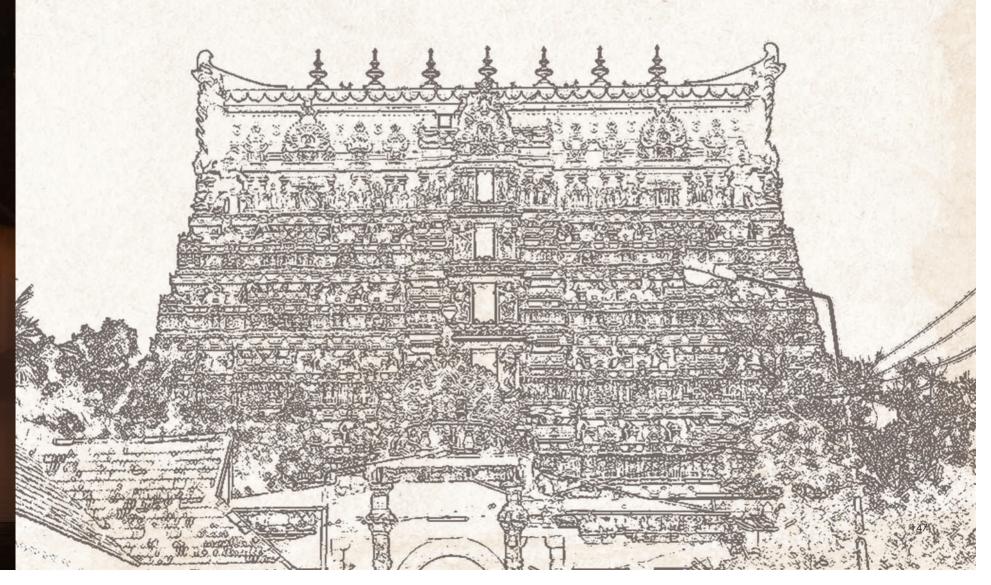
Dravida (Kerala)

#### **Material**

Granite

#### **HISTORY**

The Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple, renowned for its vast treasures, is one of 108 Divya Desams according to the Vaishnava tradition. References to Lord Padmanabha of Thiruvananthapuram can be found in various Puranas and Sangam texts. Though the temple dates back to the 8th century, the present structure was constructed by King Marthanda Varma of Travancore in the 18th century. In 1750, the king pledged the royal family as "Padamanabha dasa" (Servant of the Lord) through Thrippadi danam, establishing Lord Padmanabha as the patron deity of the Travancore royal family.



The Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple is one of the best examples of Kerala-style architecture. The temple has nine openings, including the magnificent main gopuram, symbolising the nine openings of the human body. The garbhagriha houses the unique idol of Lord Vishnu reclining on a five-hooded Adishesha. In front of the sanctum there is a unique monolithic platform called Ottakkal Mandapam. To the east of the sanctum, an expansive hall made of 365 and one-quarter rock columns adds to the uniqueness of the temple. Additionally, the temple complex boasts of various mandapas, sub shrines, theerthas, temple corridors, and a dwaja sthamba.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Gopuram of Padmanabhaswamy

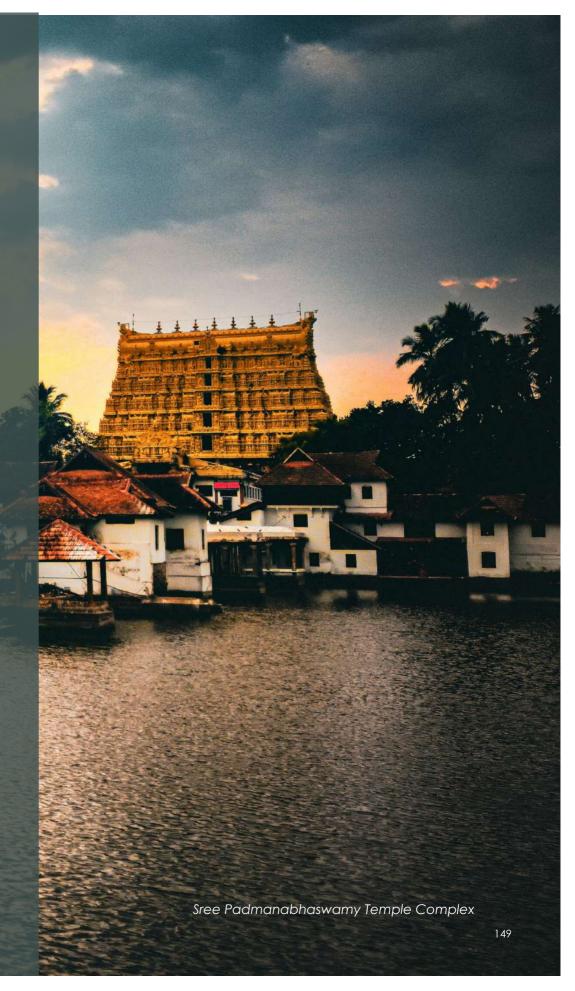
The main gopuram of the temple is often regarded as the cultural symbol of the city of Thiruvananthapuram. Its construction commenced in 1566 and was completed in the 18th century. The 100-foot gopuram, constructed in the Pandyan style, features seven storeys, each with window-like openings in the middle. On top, seven kalashas are placed at equal distance. On the days of the equinox, it is a surreal sight as the sun passes through all the window openings at approximately five-minute intervals.





Sculpture of Hindu God Hanuman at Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple Complex

A lore recounts the tale of a woman who found a crying baby boy in Anantha Kadu, a jungle, which is now the location of the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. She fed the crying child and then placed him in the shade of a tree. When she returned, she found a five-headed cobra shielding the baby from the sun. The woman offered the infant milk and *kanji* (rice soup) in a coconut shell, recognising him as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This heartwarming incident prompted the king to order the construction of a temple at this sacred site.





#### **Built in** 8th century CE

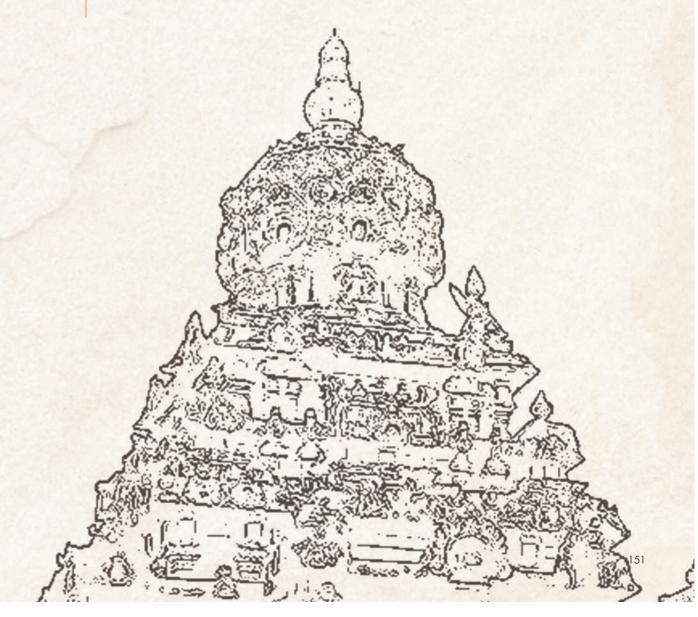
**Dynasty** Pallava

**Style**Dravida (Pallava)

**Material** Sandstone

#### HISTORY

The Vaikunta Perumal temple, also known as Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram, is the second-biggest temple in Kanchipuram after the renowned Kailasanathar temple. Here, Lord Vishnu is worshipped as Vaikunta Perumal, with his consort Vaikuntavalli Thayar. The temple's reliefs, patronised by the imperial Pallavas, mark a significant shift from the prevailing theory of kingship in the region (where the king was seen as the performer of sacrifices) to a concept of divine kingship. In the 8th century, Nandivarman II initiated the construction of the temple and it was later expanded with the support of the medieval Cholas and the Vijayanagara kings.



The Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram is one of the earliest examples of Dravidian architecture. The prakara (enclosure) of the temple is intricately sculpted on both sides with scenes from Pallava history. These reliefs on the walls depict their 'divine' lineage, images of Pallava kings, coronations, battle scenes, etc., with fine detailing. The entrance to the complex is marked by a flat gopuram and the square vimana and adjoining ardha mandapa are particularly noteworthy.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Pallava Reliefs in the Prakara

The most captivating aspect of the Vaikunta Perumal temple is undoubtedly in its royal relief carvings adorning the walls. These carvings are accompanied by royal prashastis, vividly narrating the accomplishments of each king. Notably, the western walls are dominated by scenes of coronations, sacrifices, processions, and battle scenes featuring kings. Nandivarman's court and his biography are intricately sculpted in the north and south-southeast prakaras. Additionally, there is a finely detailed panel depicting the construction of the temple itself.

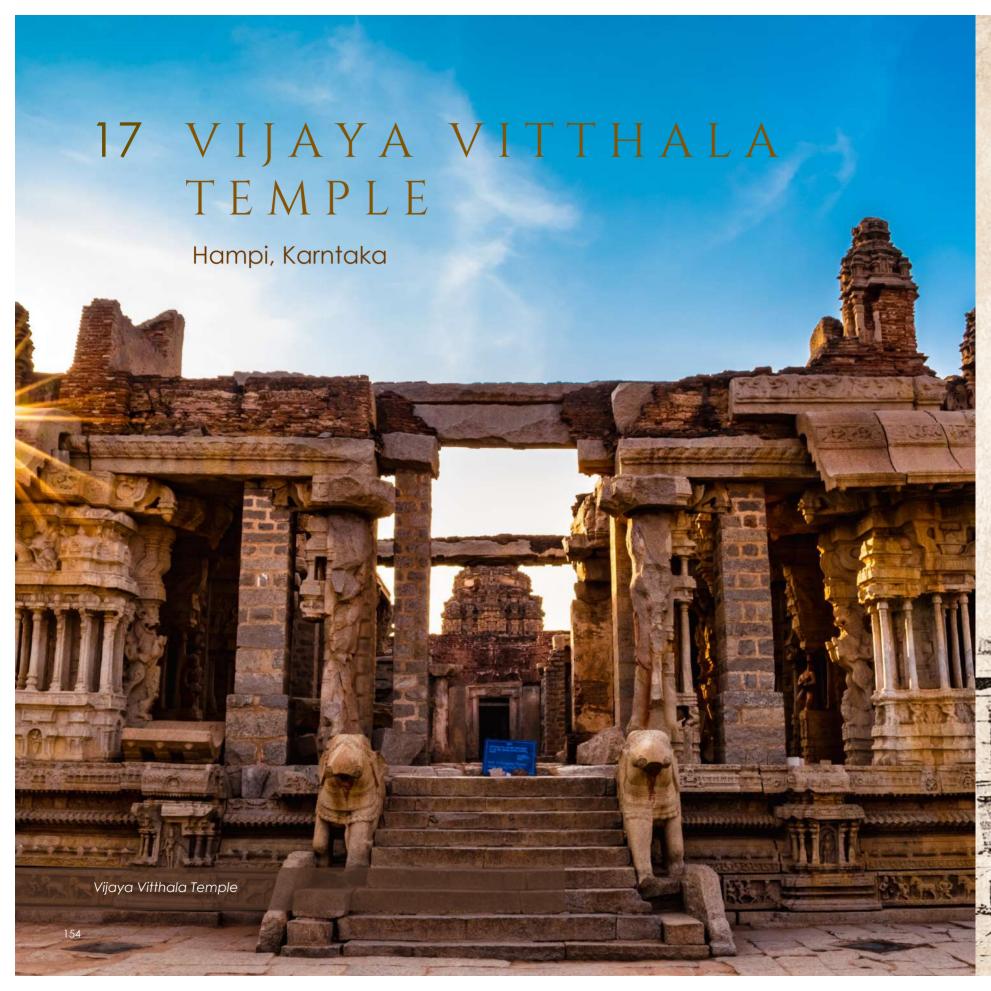
Royal relief carvings on a wall at the Vaikunta Perumal Temple





Sculptures at Vaikunta Perumal Temple

According to legend, the temple town was once ruled by a king named Viroacha, who was heirless due to sins committed in his past life. He fervently prayed to Lord Kailasanatha, who granted him a boon that the dwarapalakas (gatekeepers) of Lord Vishnu would be born as his sons. These princes, thus born, became devotees of Lord Vishnu, and performed a yagna. Pleased by their devotion, Lord Vishnu, manifested himself as Vaikunta Perumal in this sacred land.



## **Built in** 16th century

## Dynasty

Tuluva

#### Style

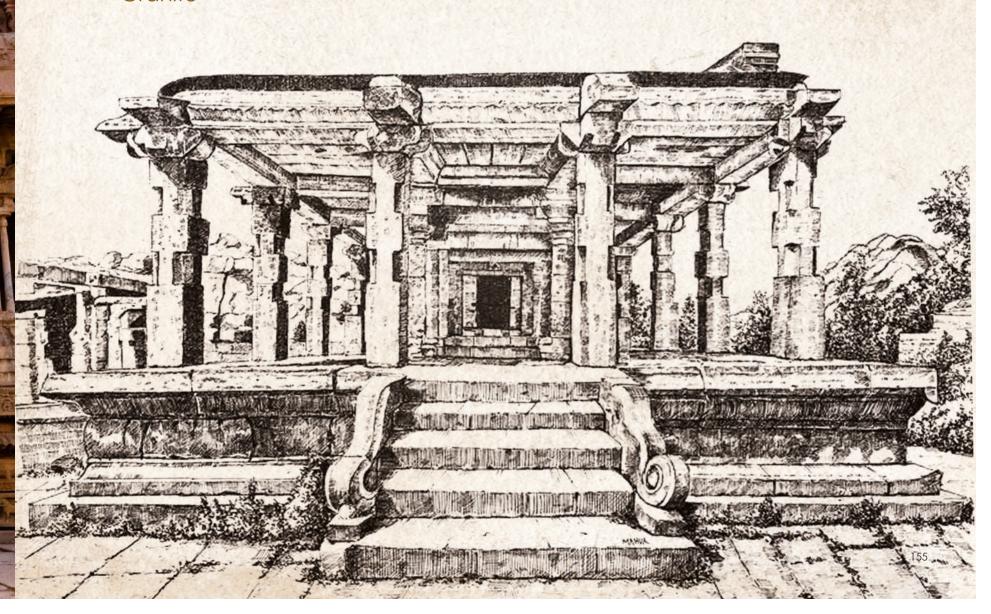
Dravida (Vijayanagara)

#### **Material**

Granite

#### HISTORY

The Vijaya Vittala temple, a unique temple in the city of Hampi, is one of the rare temples in India dedicated to Lord Vishnu in the form of Vittala or Vithoba. While it is unclear who built the temple, it is widely attributed to the Tuluva dynasty and believed to have been constructed in the first half of the 16th century. The temple inscriptions provide evidence of the donations made by the queens of Krishna Deva Raya for the construction of gates. Krishna Deva Raya's successors, Achyuta Deva Raya and Sadashiva Raya, also bestowed precious gifts upon Vittalaswami, as documented in the donative epigraphs.



The Vitthala temple complex is enclosed by high walls and features three magnificent gopuras. The lavishly sculpted garbhagriha is a structure with a flat roof supported by monolithic pillars. The ardha mandapa and the mahamandapa lead to the Garuda shrine, designed in the form of a stone chariot. Other structures within the complex include a goddess shrine, an utsava mandapa, and a kalyana mandapa. The Kalyana Mandapa has exquisite carvings that depict the society and economy of Vijayanagar. The temple's stellar rangamandapa is renowned for its 56 musical pillars, which produce music notes when tapped.



#### The Iconic Stone Chariot

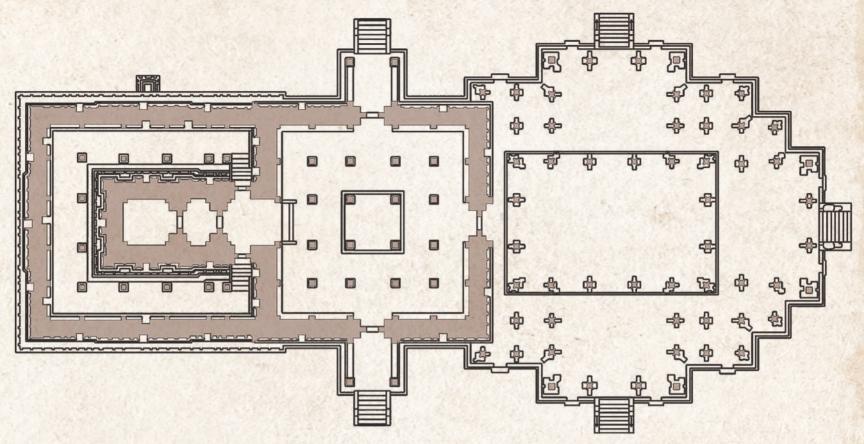
The stone chariot that stands in the courtyard of the Vitthala temple is widely regarded as the icon of Hampi. This architectural wonder can also be seen on the Rupees 50 Indian currency notes. The chariot was meant to carry the idol of Garuda, the divine vehicle of Lord Vishnu. King Krisha Devaraya built this marvel in the 16th century. The vehicle has four monolithic wheels that can be rotated around its axis. Originally, there was a brick tower atop the chariot, but it was removed in the late 19th century.



Architecture of the Vijaya Vitthala Temple



Stone Chariot in the courtyard of the Vijaya Vitthala Temple



Architectural Plan of the Vijaya Vitthala Temple

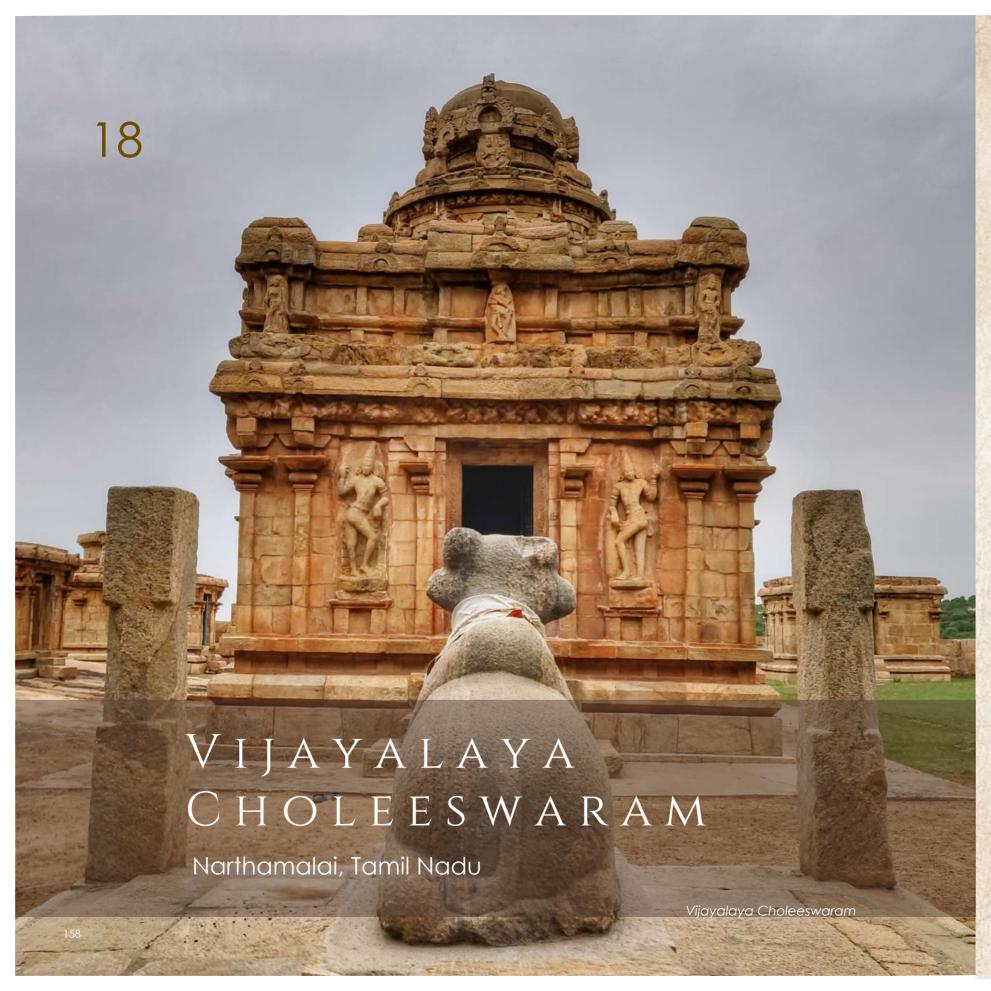


Musical pillars at Vijaya Vitthala Temple

According to legend, the temple was built for Vithoba of Pandharpur. But when the deity, Vithoba, visited the temple, he chose to remain in his humble abode in Pandharpur and refused to move to the new temple and. This belief is often cited as the reason why there is no idol in the sanctum of the temple.



Carving at Vijaya Vitthala Temple



#### **Built** in

9th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Mutharaiyar dynasty (later expanded by Cholas)

#### Style

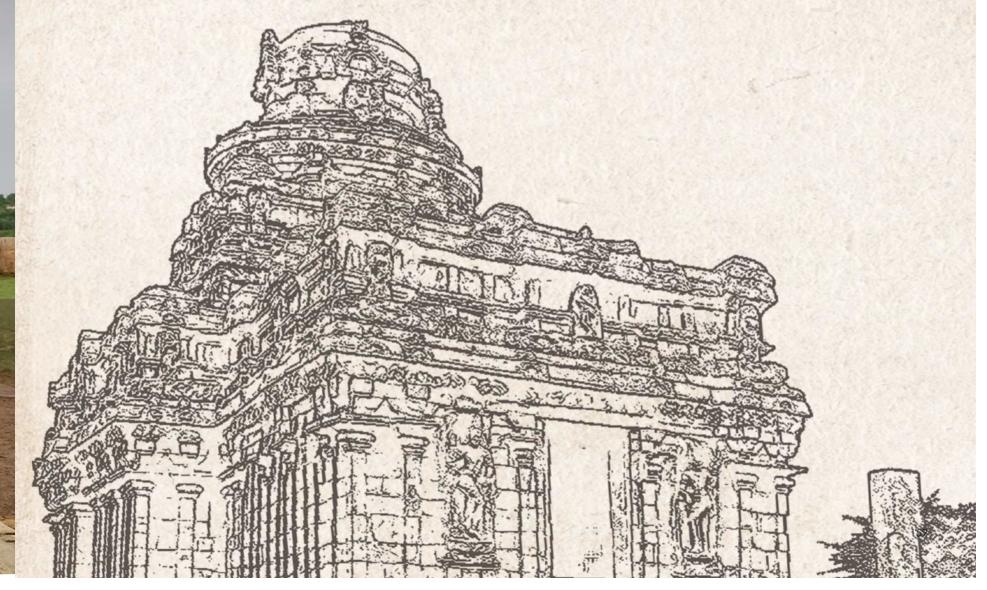
Dravida (Chola)

#### **Material**

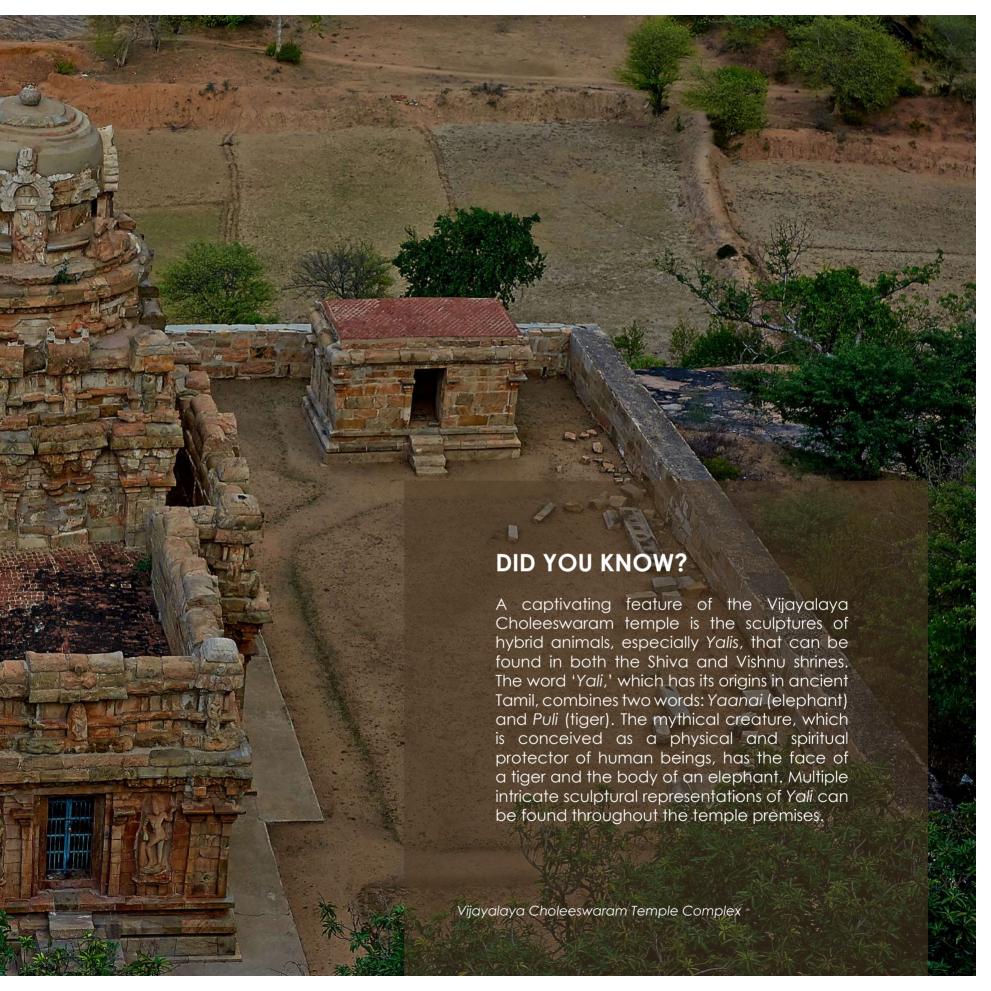
Stone-Granite

#### HISTORY

The Narthamalai temple, named after the erstwhile Chola emperor Vijayalaya Chola, is one of the oldest stone temples in South India. Despite being associated with the Cholas, who were the later patrons of the temple, it was actually constructed by Sattan Paliyili from the Mutharaiyar dynasty. The Mutharaiyars were feudatories of the Pallavas who ruled Narthamalai during the 7th–9th centuries. Dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Visnu, Vijayalaya Choleeswaram is an excellent example of early rock-cut Chola art. This temple is believed to be the inspiration behind the later Chola masterpiece, the Gangaikondacholapuram temple.

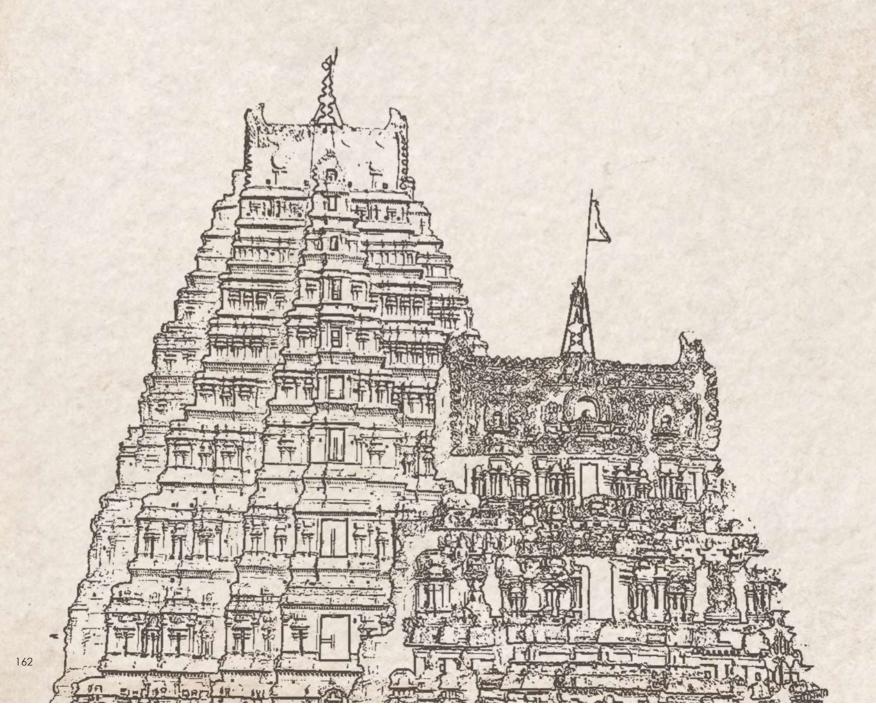






## 19 VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE HAMPI

Hampi, Karntaka





Virupaksha Temple, Hampi

#### **Built in**

15th century (Current structure)

#### **Dynasty**

Sangama

#### Style

Dravida (Vijayanagara)

#### **Material**

Granite and Limestone

#### **HISTORY**

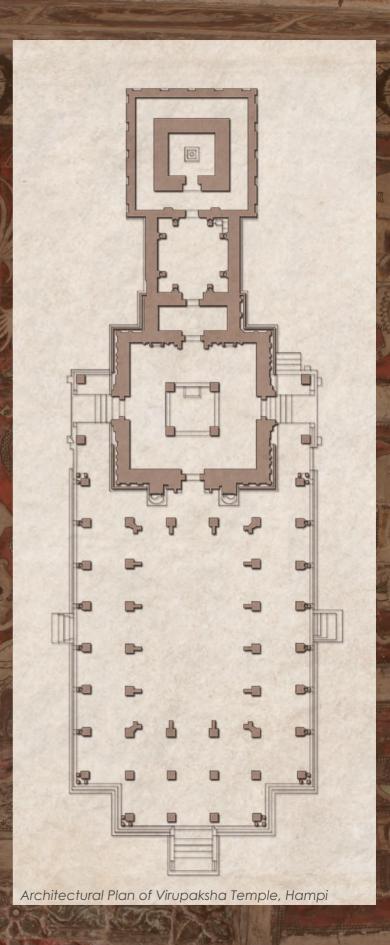
The Virupaksha temple, or the Pampapathi temple, the oldest amongst the temples in Hampi, has an antiquity that predates the Vijayanagara empire. Here, Lord Shiva is worshipped as Virupaksha, the divine consort of Goddess Pampa (Tungabhadra). Inscriptions provide evidence of the existence of the Virupaksha-Pampa sanctuary as early as the 7th century. The present structure was built in the 15th century by Lakkana Dandesha, a chieftain under King Deva Raya II. Remarkably, even after the fall of the empire, the Shiva-Shakti tradition at the Virupaksha temple thrived, and active worship in the temple continues to this day. It stands as the best-preserved and most well-maintained structure in Hampi.

Within the complex, enclosed by high walls and a magnificent gopura, there are two large courtyards, one leading into another. A hundred-column hall and the pillared kalyana mandapa are the prominent structures in the first courtyard. The entrance to the second courtyard is graced by a three-headed Nandi sculpture, while a lamppost and bali peethas can also be seen here. There, the rangamadapa with a painted ceiling leads to the sanctum, where Virupaksa and Pampa are worshipped. The legendary Manmatha Pushkarani and a community kitchen in the north and south, respectively, are also part of the temple. The temple also has a remarkable underground shrine dedicated to Pataleshwara.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

The main gopura of the Virupaksha temple is truly one of the most striking features in the Hampi monument complex. The east-facing, nine-story superstructure is made of brick and mortar. The topmost portion of the tower is decorated with cow-horn-like projections placed at an equal distance. Exquisitely decorated stone work adorns the first two levels of the tower, while the stucco figures sculpted to perfection in the subsequent levels are a sight to behold.

Ceiling paintings depicting scenes from Hindu mythology at the Virupaksha temple in Hampi









Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal

Built in 740 CE

Dynasty

Western Chalukya

Style

Dravida (Western Chalukya)

**Material**Sandstone

#### HISTORY

The Virupaksha temple is an exquisite Chalukya sculptural marvel dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in the city of Pattadakal. During the early Chalukya dynasty, Pattadakal served as the site for royal coronations. The temple was patronised by Lokamahadevi, the Queen of Vikramaditya II, as a token of gratitude for the lord following the successful Chalukya campaigns against the Pallavas. As per temple inscriptions, a person named Gunda Anivaritacharya was the chief architect of the shrine, which was commissioned in the mid-8th century. Among the monuments within the Pattadakkal complex, this temple stands out as the largest and has inscriptions beneath the panels which give credit to the contributing artists.

The temple complex encompasses a square garbhagriha, an antarala, two small shrines dedicated to Ganesha and Mahishasuramardini, a sabha-mandapa, a pradakshinapatha and a Nandi-mandapa. The high prakara walls surround the magnificent complex and are adorned with ornate gates. The temple's exterior features niches containing deities from both the Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions, along with perforated windows, and architectural elements like kutas, panjaras, and salas. The three-storey Dravidavimana over the sanctum vaunts a beautifully shaped square shikhara with a kalasa finial.



Architecture of the Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakkal

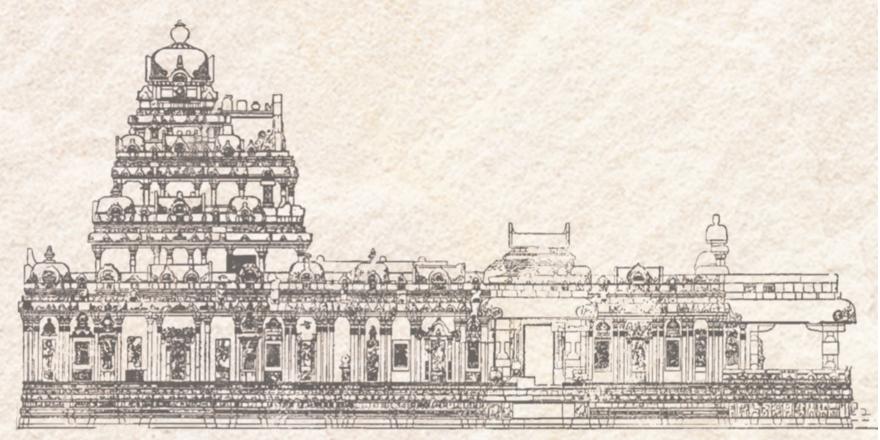
## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Nandi-Mandapa

The Nandi-mandapa is a square structure situated to the east of the garbhagriha. This pavilion, open on all four sides, enshrines a large figure of Nandi, the vehicle of Virupaksha (Shiva). The Nandi sculpture is placed on an elevated platform. The mandapa has a flat roof, supported by four pillars and short length walls. The outer surfaces are intricately carved with the figures of kinnara-mithunas.



Nandi-Mandapa at the Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakkal



Architectural Section of the Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakkal



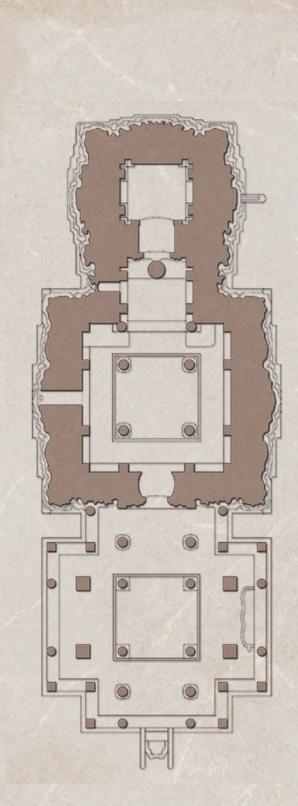
The Virupaksha Temple boasts an array of captivating friezes that weave a rich tapestry of themes. Among them are depictions of wrestling matches, encounters between rishis and deities, and the poignant scene of Vishnu rescuing Gajendra. Adorning the temple walls are narratives from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, along with stories from the Bhagavata Purana, Harivamsa, Panchatantra, and various Hindu texts, creating a visual chronicle of Indian mythology and culture.



Carvings at the Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakkal

## VESARA TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE





Architectural Plan of the Brahma Jinalaya Temple



Ceiling Carvings at the Chennakeshava Temple

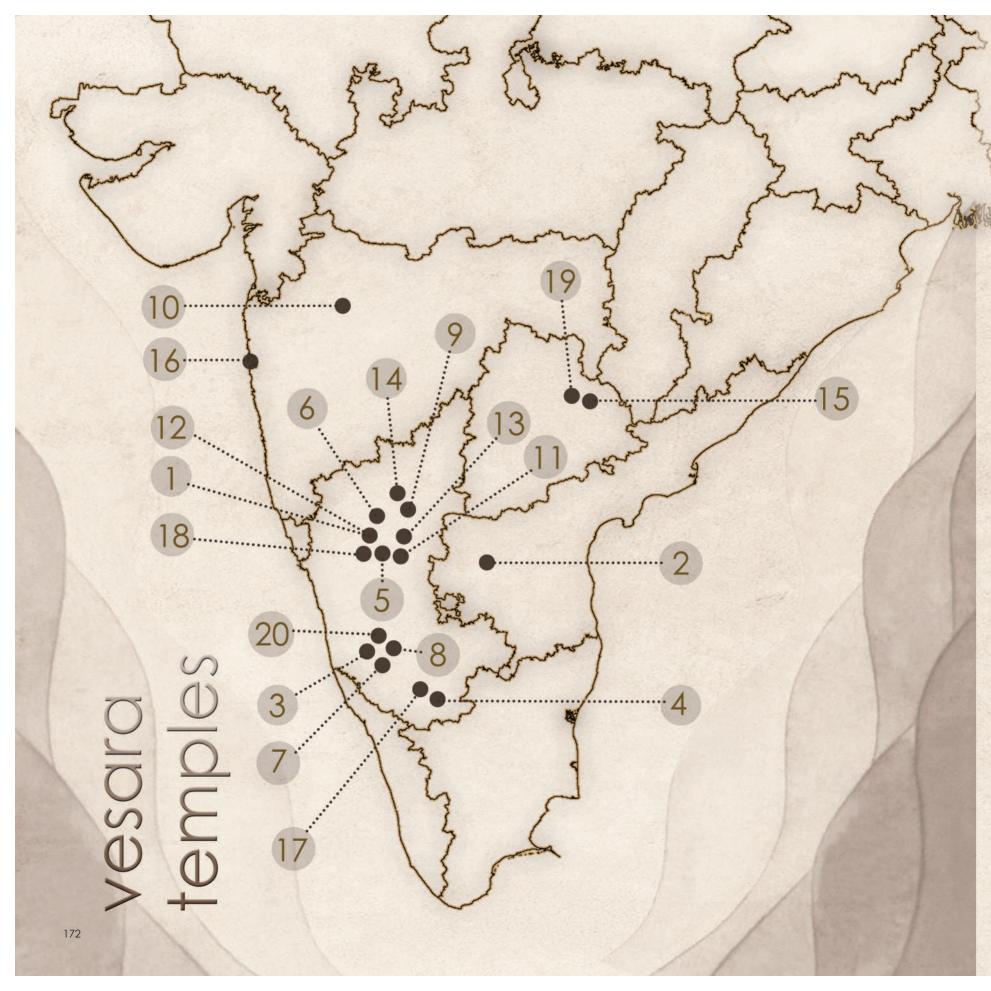
Vesara temple architecture is a fusion of both the Nagara and Dravidian architectural traditions, combining elements from both in a unique and harmonious style. Historically, the Vesara style is believed to have originated in the region of present-day Karnataka, with its development attributed to the Chalukyas of Badami (500–753 AD). Over time, it evolved and was refined by various dynasties, including the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta, the Chalukyas of Kalyani in places like Lakkundi, Dambal, Gadag, and ultimately exemplified under the Hoysalas.

A defining characteristic of *Vesara* architecture is the integration of both the *Nagara*-style *Shikara* (tower) and the *Dravida*-style *Mandapa* (main shrine) elements. The Shikara forms the temple's pinnacle, while the *Mandapa* constitutes the primary shrine, with the *Antarala* connecting the two. This distinctive combination means that *Vesara* temples lack the customary ambulatory passageways encircling the Sanctum Sanctorum.

The most distinctive features of Vesara temple architecture include the vertical shape of its towers, a departure from the sloping levels seen in *Dravida* temples. This unique design involves reducing the height of each storey while placing them in a descending sequence of height, with each level adorned with significant embellishments.

The decorative elements on the temple walls and the miniature towers intricately blend *Dravida* and *Nagara* architectural elements, creating a visually captivating *Vesara* style of temple architecture.





- 1. Brahma Jinalaya Lakkundi, Karnataka
- 2. Bugga Ramalingeswara Temple Tadipatri, Andhra Pradesh
- 3. Chennakeshava Temple Belur, Karnataka
- 4. Chennakeshava Temple Somnathpura, Karnataka
- 5. Dodda Basappa Temple Dambal, Karnataka
- 6. Durga Temple Aihole, Karnataka
- 7. Hoysaleswara Temple Halebidu, Karnataka
- 8. Ishwara Temple Complex Arsikere, Karnataka
- 9. Jodu-Kalasha Temple Sudi, Karnataka
- 10. Kailasa Temple Ellora, Maharashtra
- 11. Kalleswara Temple Hire Hadagali, Karnataka
- 12. Kasivisvesara Temple Lakkundi, Karnataka
- 13. Mahadeva Temple Itagi, Karnataka
- 14. Papanatha Temple Pattadakal, Karnataka
- 15. Ramappa Temple Palampet, Telangana
- 16. Shiva Temple Elephanta Islands, Maharashtra
- 17. Shravanabelagola Odegal Basadi Shravanabelagola, Karnataka
- 18. Someshwara Temple Lakshmaneswara, Karnataka
- 19. Thousand Pillar/ Rudreswara Swamy Temple Hanamkonda, Telangana
- 20. Veeranarayana Temple Belavadi, Karnataka



### **Built in** 11th century CE

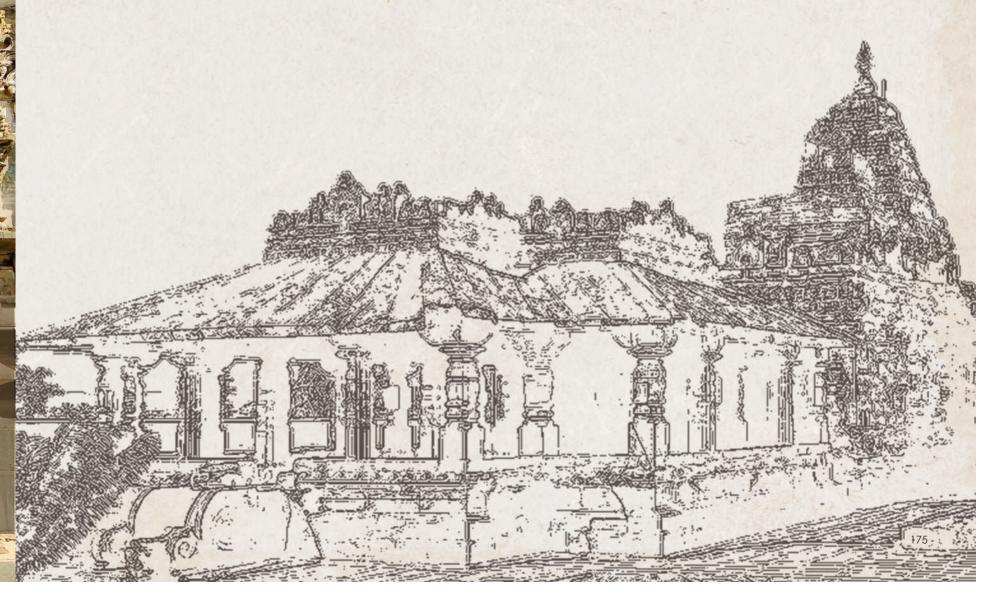
**Dynasty**Western Chalukya

**Style** Vesara

**Material** Soapstone

### **HISTORY**

Lakkundi, previously known as Lokkigundi or Lokkugundi, is documented in numerous inscriptions unearthed in the region. Historical records reveal that during the reign of the Western Chalukyas, Lakkundi was the site of a royal mint. In 1007 CE, Attimabbe, the spouse of Nagadeva, built the Brahma Jinalaya, also called the Greater Jain Temple of Lakkundi. Nagadeva had served as a general under the leadership of both Taila II and Satyashraya Irivabedanga (997-1008 AD). This temple stands as a representative example of the second phase of Kalyani Chalukyan art. It is believed that the temple once housed an image of Mahavira. This image has since been damaged and is currently located outside the temple's boundaries.



The temple, in typical Vesara style, has a single shrine or ekakuta connected to a mandapa through an antartala or vestibule. Its architectural elements includes the garbhagriha, antarala, closed navaranga, and an open pillared mandapa featuring a sloped roof. Above the garbhagriha, there ia a five-story nirandhara vimana with a square griva and sikhara. The exterior walls of the temple are adorned with pilasters and niches, and seated Jaina figures are placed at regular intervals above the cornice. The temple also features kirtimukha motifs and numerous gargoyle plagues. The bell-shaped pillars within the temple exhibit remarkable craftsmanship and a brilliant polish. Inside the sanctum, the temple houses a black stone-built image of Neminatha in the kayotsarga posture, flanked by a yaksha and yakshi on either side. A total of 32 pillars and pilasters support the open mandapa.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### Transitional Styles

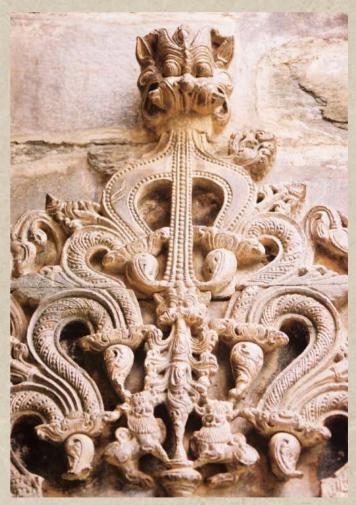
The Brahma Jinalaya temple represents a transitional period that bridges the early Chalukya and late Chalukya architectural traditions. This architectural style is strikingly similar to the ancient Shiva temple situated in Kukkanur. The elegantly curved character of the tower is attributed to the elaborate motifs adorning each tier, a characteristic of Vesara architecture. The overall design of the superstructure gives a feeling of grandeur, which is distinguished by carefully balanced tiers that culminate in the amalaka and kalasha finial.

Architecture of the Brahma Jinalaya Temple

# Plan of the Brahma Jinalaya Temple

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

A beheaded Mahavira statue, about 4 feet tall and carved from finely-carved black stone, sits outside the temple, on top of a lion's throne or simhasana. Outside the temple's entrance, there's a door-lintel called a *lalita bimba*, adorned with the image of Mahavira. In Indian tradition, such an arrangement typically indicates the temple's primary dedication. It is reasonable to assume that this idol originally served as the main deity housed within the sanctum.



Carving at the Brahma Jinalaya Temple



### **Built** in

Late 15th to early 16th centuries CE

### **Dynasty**

Saluva

### Style

Vesara

### **Material**

Granite and Stone

### **HISTORY**

Located in Tadipatri, near the Penna River, stands the Shavite shrine known as Bugga Ramalingeshwara. It was constructed between 1490 and 1509 by Pemmasami Ramalinga Nayadu I, a chieftain of the Gutti-Gandikota region under the Saluva dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire. The legend and historical details surrounding the temple's construction are recounted in the Tadipatri Kaifiyat. Historical documents also show that Yellanchari, a sculptor, was brought from Benaras to work on the temple's construction. The primary deity of the temple is Shiva, depicted as a lingam that is supposedly swayambyu, or naturally occurring. In the 19th century, Thomas Munroe played a role in the restoration of the temple and resumption of worship there.



The imposing temple complex is spread over several acres at the eastern end of the Tadapatri town. The temple has a sanctum, an ardhamandapa, and a mukhamandapa in an axial line. The temple contains bas relief structures that narrate events from the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The main entrance to the temple is on the southern side and is marked by an unfinished gopuram. The mukhamandapa is supported by four plain pillars. The temple houses various forms of Shiva including Kevalamurti, Sukhasanamurti, Dakshinamurthi, Uma Maheswaramurti, Vrishabarudramurti, Nataraiamurti and Ardhanarimurti. The Hariyardha murti, represents Shiva and Vishnu as inseparable parts of the same body, symbolising the transition of the patronage from Saivism to Vaishnavism. Notably, the seven pillars in front of this shrine produce saptaswara or musical notes when struck.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Shiva Shrine

The Shiva shrine within the temple is located in a western direction, in contrast to the usual practice of having the shrine facing east in South Indian temples. This is also the reason why the intricately carved *gopurams* in the temples, which are also usually located in the east, can be found in the north, west, and south of the temple complex. Though these *gopurams* have remained incomplete, they have been marked as "wonders" by the renowned art historian James Fergusson.



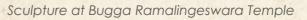
Intricate Carving Details at Bugga Ramalingeswara Temple





Vertical Decorative Elements on the exterior facade of the Bugga Ramalingeswara Temple

Although the Penna River is located 17 to 18 feet above the *shivalinga*, a perennial underground water spring known as the "bugga" in Telugu still flows beneath it, even though the river is dry for most of the year. The temple's name was influenced by this spring.

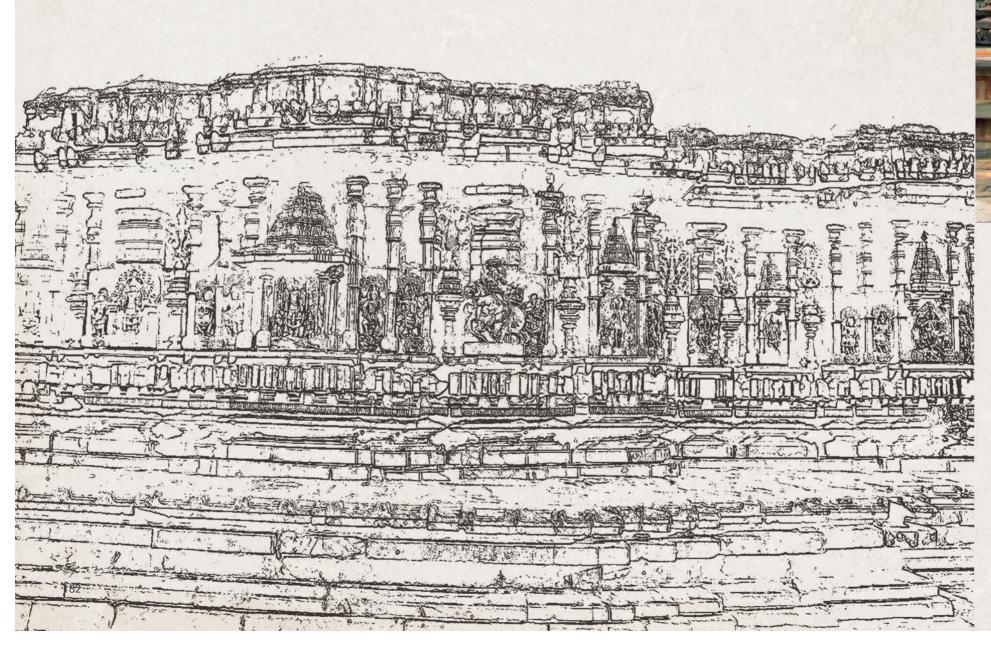




# 3 CHENNAKESHAVA TEMPLE

Belur, Karnataka

\*UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Year 2023





Chennakeshava Temple, Belur

### **Built in** 12th century CE

### **Dynasty** Hoysala

**Style**Vesara (Hoysala)

**Material** Soapstone

### **HISTORY**

Belur, known as Velapura or Velur in inscriptions, was the early capital of the Hoysalas before Dorasamudra and was referred to as "Dakshina Varanasi" and "Earthly Vaikunta." In this sacred city, the Chennakeshava temple was constructed by the Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana in the twelfth century, dedicated to Lord Vishnu as Chennakeshava. Within the temple complex, there is Kappe Chennigaraya, a miniature shrine that is almost a replica of the main temple and was constructed by Queen Santala Devi. The Chennakeshava temple withstood the Sultanate invasions in the 14th century and was later repaired with the support of the Vijayanagara dynasty. The Wodeyars of Mysore also played a significant role in the restoration of the temple.

Adorned by a gopuram from the Vijayanagara period, the entrance leads to the ekakuta temple, and its entrance is decorated with four miniature latina vimanas. The mandapa, which was once open, now bears richly sculpted, perforated stone windows. The whole temple is situated on an elevated platform that allows one to view the 22 panels depicting the Mahabharata carved on the exterior walls. A sukhanasika leads to the garbhagriha, although the superstructure is absent. Though the sanctum is squareshaped, triangular offsets provide it with a stellate appearance. Within the complex, various structures can be found, including the Kalyana Mandapam to the southeast, Kappe Chennigaraya and Somanayaki Shrine to the southwest, the Virangrayana Shrine to the west, the granary and Andal shrines to the northwest, and the temple tank to the northeast.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Pillars of the Navaranga Mandapa

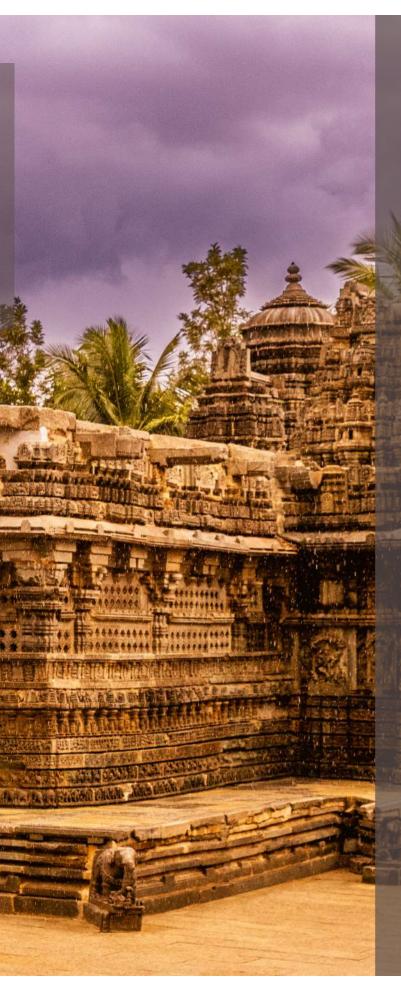
The temple has a triratha diamond-shaped central navaranga mandapa, supported by 48 pillars. All these pillars are unique and intricately carved. Among the 44 pillars situated towards the outer part of the hall, the Narasimha pillar and Mohini pillar are well known for their exclusive and fine detailing. The four pillars placed towards the center of the mandapa were added during the Vijayanagara period. They are distinguished by the beautiful salabhanjika capitals.

Sculptures at the Chennakeshava Temple, Belur









**Built in** 13th century CE

**Dynasty** Hoysala

**Style** Vesara

**Material** Soapstone

### HISTORY

The Chennakeshava temple is a Vaishnavite shrine located on the banks of the river Krishna. It was built in 1258 CE by Somanatha Dandanayaka, a general of the Hoysala king, Narasimha III. According to legend, Somnatha granted Brahmins an agrahara to establish a town and the Keshava temple was constructed directly in the centre of this settlement. He is also credited with building numerous other temples dedicated to various gods, including a Shaivite temple facing northeast. However, all these temples have either been destroyed or now lie in ruins. According to a 15th-century inscription, the Keshava temple was also severely damaged. The work and stone colour both attest to the restoration carried out during the Vijayanagara era. The temple endured further damage in the 19th century, and in the 20th century, the Mysore colonial government carried out a final phase of reconstruction.

Chennakeshava temple, Somnathpura

The temple is enclosed within a walled courtyard, with a gate and a porch. It is built on an elevated star-shaped platform guarded by seated lions. The actual temple base rises straight out of the platform and is composed of a series of bands that wind around the star-like structure of the building. The shrines are situated at the center of the courtyard and enclosed by a rectangular boundary of cloisters and subsidiary shrines. Every corner and angular projection on the central wall is adorned with familiar figures, bedecked with heavy jewellery, towering crowns, bangles on every arm, and chunky anklets on their feet. The sides of the raised platform are decorated with richly carved friezes, portraying rows of cavalry, elephants, and scenes from the epics. The rows above have sculptures of various Gods, mainly Vishnu in different forms. The temple has three shrines and sanctums with three intricately carved pinnacles and a common navranga. The idol of Venugopala is situated in the southern sanctum, while the idol of Janardhana is housed in the northern sanctum. The image of Keshava that was once kept in the main sanctum, is no longer present.



### The Sixteen Ceilings

In addition to the awe-inspiring Vaishnavaite images and the exquisite stellate pillars that grace the inner sanctum, the temple's interior holds a treasure trove of artistic marvels, chiefly embodied by a set of sixteen distinctive ceilings. Each ceiling is a masterpiece in its own right. Among them, certain ceilings have achieved fame for their uncanny resemblance to the stages of a banana flower's unfolding during its inflorescence. Others showcase concentric circles, intricately connected by stone ribs, while octagonal ceilings possess their own mesmerizing charm. Some of these architectural wonders are meticulously designed to emulate the graceful unfurling of a lotus, with layers of petals expanding outward from a central bud.

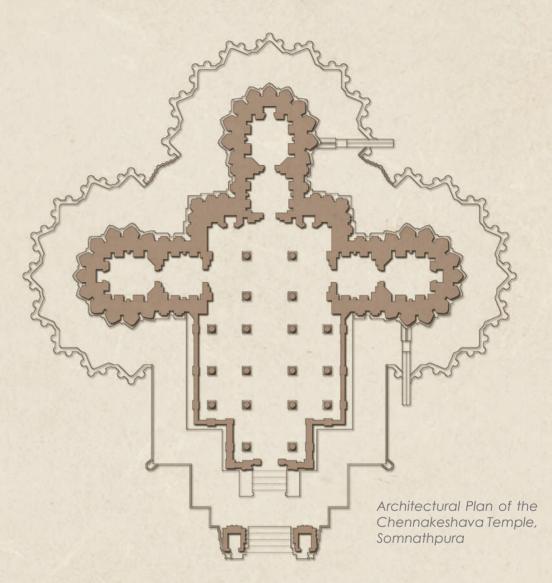


Chennakeshava Temple, Somnathpura



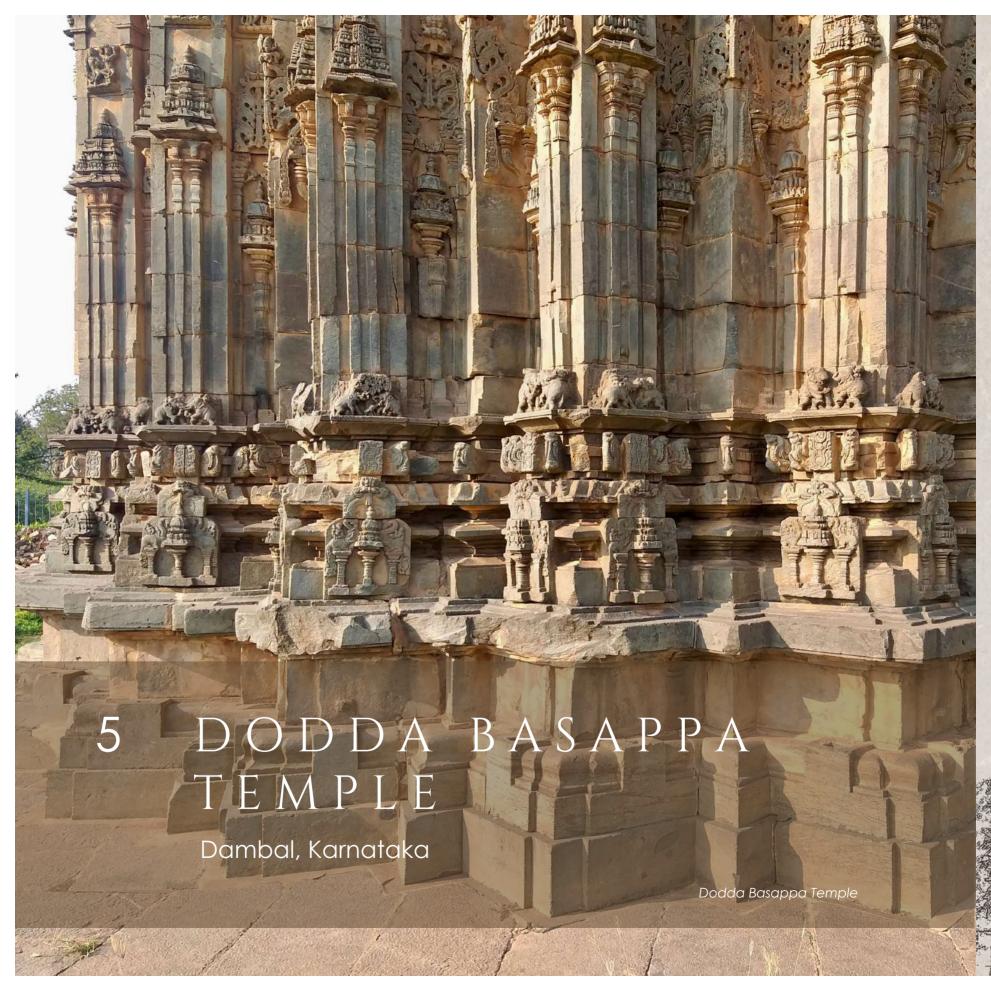


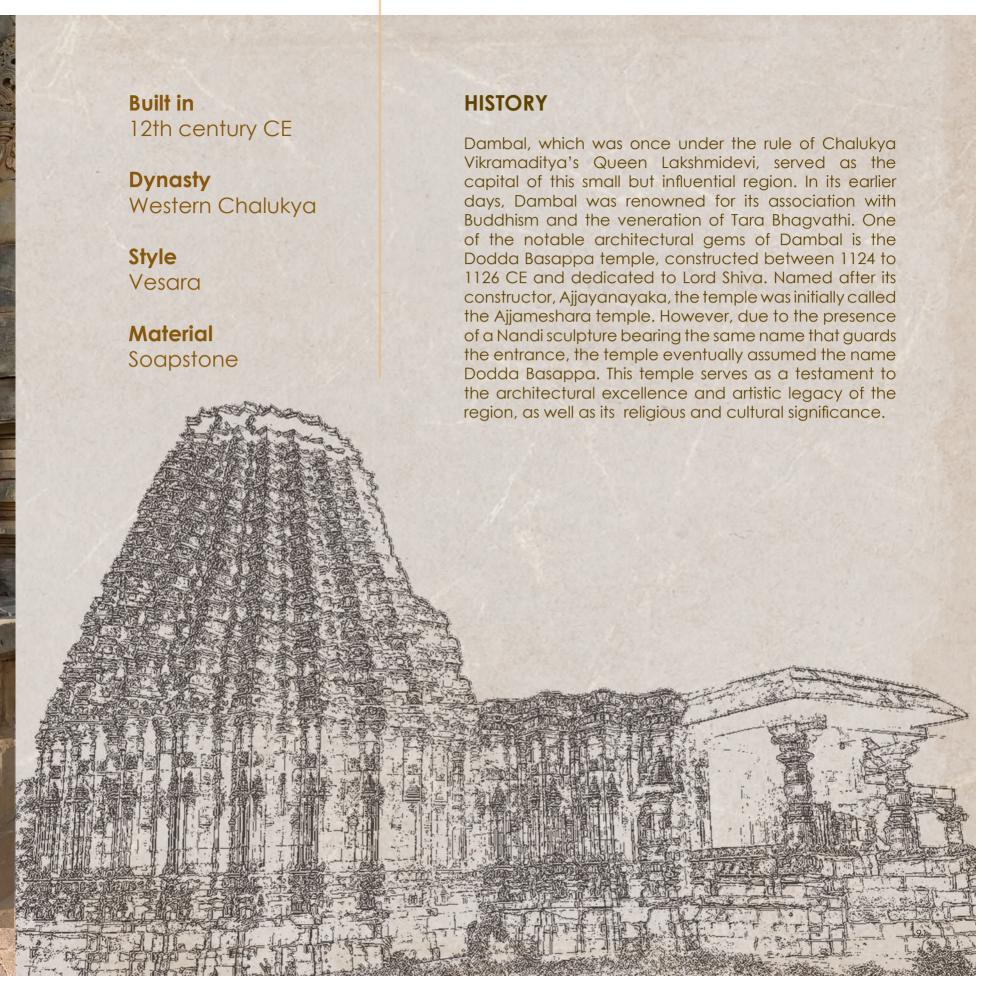




In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the names Keshava, Janardhana, and Venugopala are highly significant within the context of Krishna. Keshava refers to Krishna as the supreme being and Chennakeshava conveys the idea of a handsome Keshava. Janardhana signifies the one who bestows blessings and liberates souls. Venugopala celebrates Krishna's image as a playful and alluring cowherd. Therefore, Chennakeshava embodies some of the most significant facets of Krishna worship.

Domical bay ceiling in the mantapa of Chennakeshava Temple at Somanathapura





The interior of the temple follows the typical of Vesara temples layout, featuring a main mandapa, a vestibule (antarala), and a sanctum, all of which are joined by elaborately carved pillars. Above the shrine's entrance, there was once a architrave adorned with images of the deities like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, with Shiva or Vishnu occupying the central position according to the temple's dedication. Extensive floral designs flank the sanctum entrance, with small representations of musicians, dancers, and a mithuna couple. Three images can be found in the main mantapa: two images of Surya, the goose, and the five-headed Brahma with his vahana. The temple has two entrances- one facing east and the other facing south. A large reclining Nandi statue in an open hall facing the shrine and is supported by pillars at the east entrance, which also bears the remnants of decorative lintels.

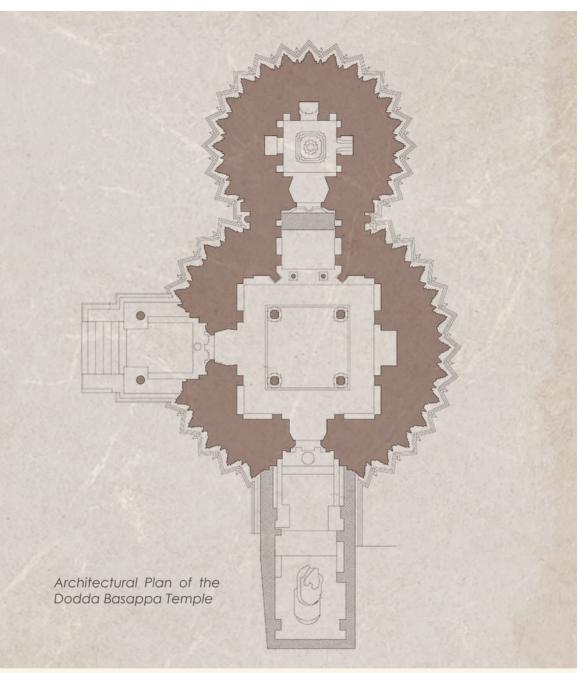
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### Bhumija Stellate Plan

Inspired by contemporary Bhumija shrines in central India, the Dodda Basappa temple features a unique 24-pointed uninterrupted stellate plan. This unique architectural design features an uninterrupted star-shaped outline, distinct from the 32-pointed interrupted types more commonly found in central India. This architectural feature is evident not only in the sanctuary but also in the elaborately adorned antechamber, known as the *navaranga*. Notably, in Karnataka and Maharashtra there are very few temples with 6, 12, or 24-pointed stellate plans, making the Dodda Basappa temple a unique architectural gem in the region. In "interrupted" stellate plans, orthogonal projections in cardinal directions disrupt the star outline, resulting in skipped star points.



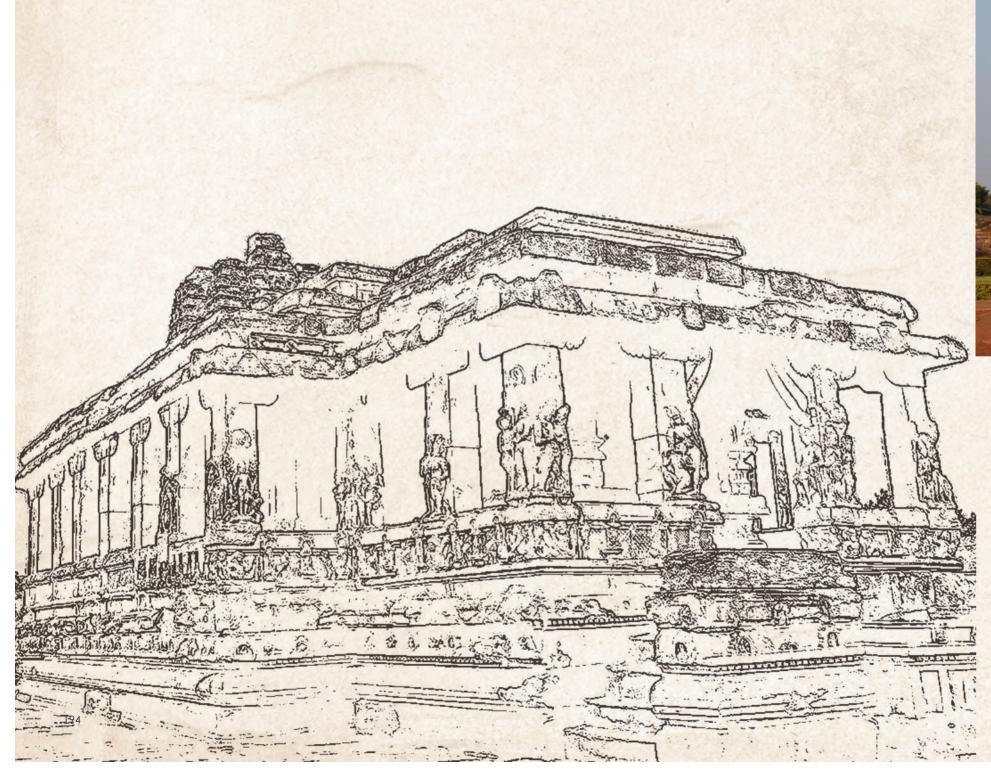




The Dodda Basappa temple is a prime example of the advanced evolution of Chalukyan art, which emerged from the fundamental Dravida architectural style of South India. Its departure from the conventional Dravida plan, as seen in the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, is so distinctive that any comparisons should be thoroughly scrutinised.

# 6 DURGATEMPLE

Aihole, Karnataka





Durga Temple

### **Built in** 8th century CE

# Dynasty Classification of D

Chalukyas of Badami

### Style

Vesara (Early Badami Chalukya)

**Material** Sandstone

### **HISTORY**

The Durga temple in Aihole is an exceptional example of early Chalukyan architecture. According to the dedicatory inscription, it was constructed around 700 CE by a ruler named Kumara. Though originally dedicated to Lord Surya, the temple is known as Durga Temple because of the 'durg' (fort) like structure built in the 14th century by the Marathas as a defense against Sultanate invasions. For a long time, the temple was a subject of historical discourses, as scholars debated whether the temple was a Shiva shrine or a Buddhist Vihara, until the discovery of the dedicatory inscription in the 1970s settled the matter.

The temple porch is accessed by two sets of steps that lead to the mukhamandapa. The Dravidastyle mukhachatuski (mukhamandapa) that adorns the entrance is a distinct pillared hall. The square-shaped sabhamandapa that follows is attached to the unique Gaja-Prishta-style apsidal garbhagriha. Encircling both the sabhamandapa and the garbhagriha is a closed Pradakshinapatha rich with sculptures. The garbhagriha, reminiscent of the grant chaitya of Karle, has a nagara-latina shikhara crowned by a kalasha. Notably, the halls feature perforated stone windows with designs such as squares, dharmachakras, and swastikas.



Architecture of the Durga Temple

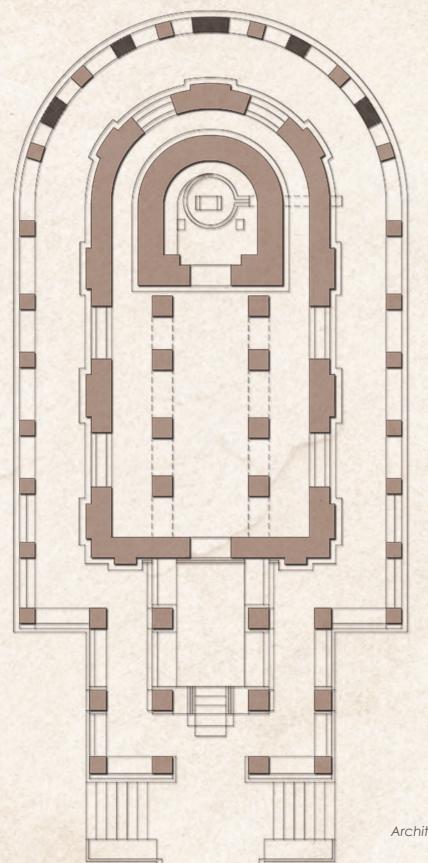
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Apsidal Pradakshinapatha

The distinctive apsidal architecture of the Durga temple sanctum is reminiscent of Buddhist viharas. Beginning on the left side of the mukhamandapa, the circumambulatory path encircles the sanctum and likewise follows the apsidal shape. The entire path is decorated with richly engraved panels. There are devakoshtas dedicated to Mithunas, Shiva and Nandi, Narasimha, Vishnu and Garuda, Varaha, Mahishamardini, and Harihara, with a few niches missing.



Sculptures at the Durga Temple





Naga Ceiling at the Durga Temple

The ceiling of the *mukhachatusti* of Durga Temple has a distinct Naga sculpture, depicting a Naga king whose body is coiled into a circle along with his female attendants. The king holds a garland in his right hand and has an offering of a fruit platter in his left. The Naga ceiling is one of the most impressive works of art within the temple.

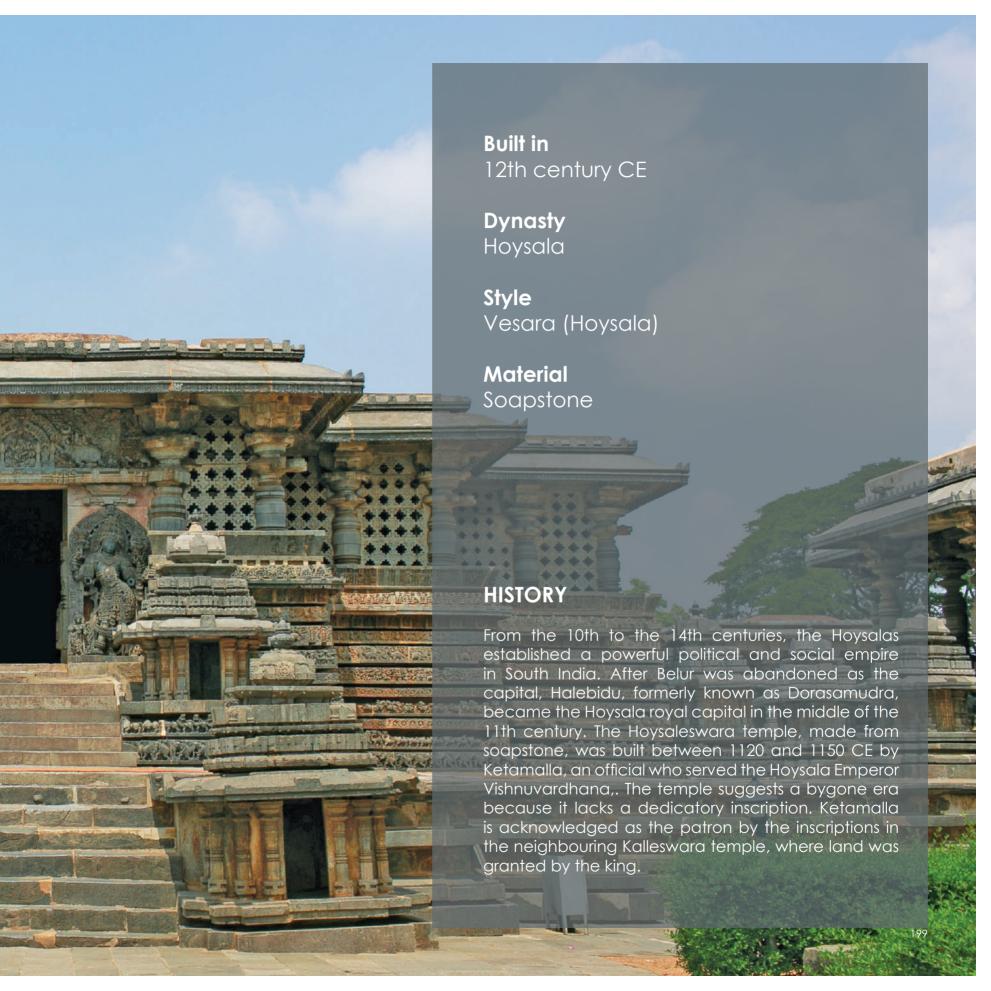
Architectural Plan of the Durga Temple



Halebidu, Karnataka

\*UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Year 2023



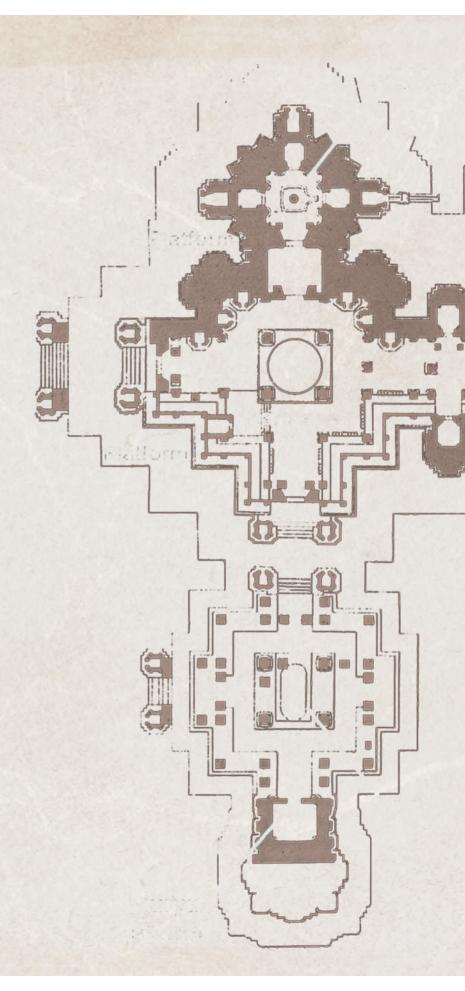


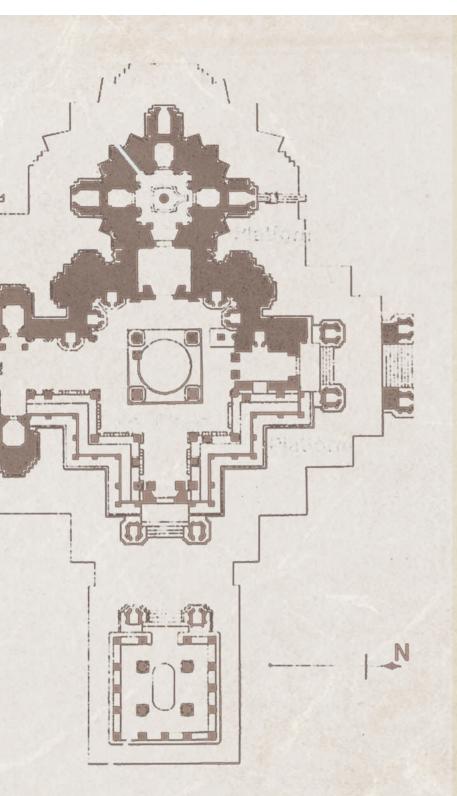
The temple is known as Dvikuta due to its two garbhagrihas. The garbhagrihas dedicated to Hoysaleswara (named after the king) and Santaleswara (queen), with both lingas being of equal size and square-shaped. The shikharas, now lost to history, had a stellate plan and were placed on an elevated platform called a jagati. The sukhanasikas flanked by dwarapalas can be seen in front of both sanctums. They lead to the detached open pavilions supported by lathe-turned pillars. These individual mandapas before the antarala are interconnected. Two separate Nandi shrines stand in front of each sanctum, and there is a small Surya shrine next to the Nandi, situated opposite the Shiva shrine.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Reliefs of the Outer Walls

The sculpture reliefs adorning the outer walls of the Hoysaleswara temple are arguably its most striking feature. These sculptures, like all of Hoysala's works, are renowned for their exquisite attention to detail. Elephants, lions, swans, mythical animals, human figures dancing and singing, and other images are carved into the walls from top to bottom. There are no two identical lions or elephants, thanks to the exquisite detailing. The reliefs primarily narrate episodes from the Ramayana, Bhagavata Puarana, and Mahabharata. Another important aspect of the outer walls are the elaborate friezes that depict musical instruments from the 12th century.





Architectural Plan of the Hoysaleswara Temple



Sculptural Reliefs on the outer wall at the Hoysaleswara Temple

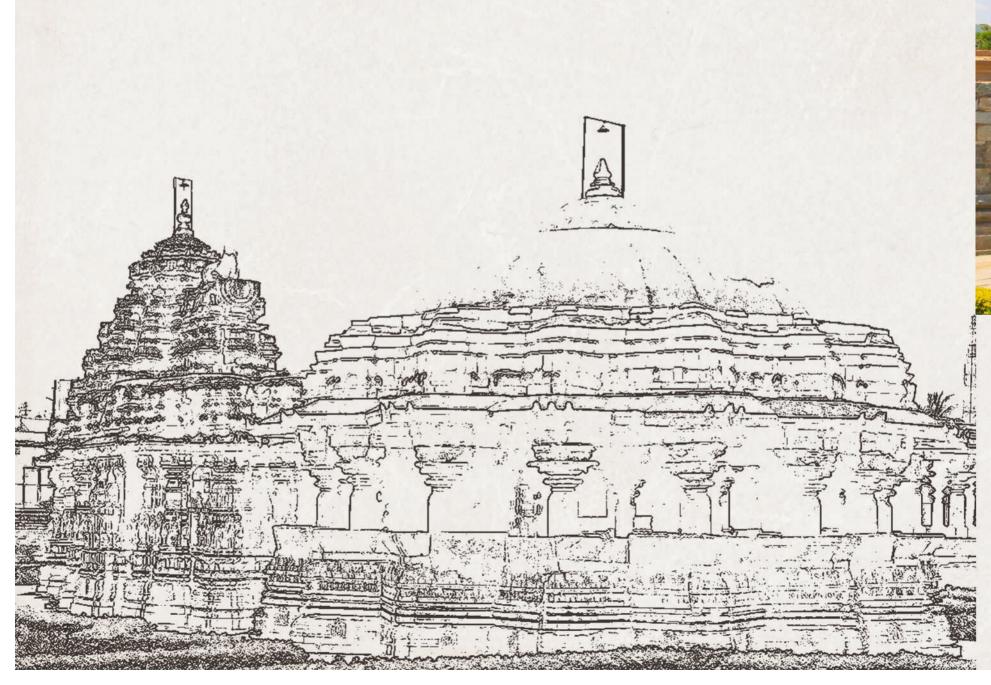
Throughout the centuries, the Hoysaleswara temple underwent numerous additions, repairs, and restoration work. Initially, the temple was an open structure, with later windows made from perforated stone. In the 14th century, external walls were added, but they were destroyed during an invasion. Furthermore, the graceful *shikhara* is absent from the contemporary temple layout.



Sculptural Reliefs on the outer wall at the Hoysaleswara Temple

# 8 ISHVARA TEMPLE

Arsikere, Karnataka





Ishvara Temple, Arsikere

### **Built in** 13th century CE

### **Dynasty** Hoysala

# **Style**Vesara (Hoysala)

**Material** Soapstone

### **HISTORY**

The Ishvara temple, located in Arsikere within the Hassan district of Karnataka, is dedicated to Lord Shiva. At the time of consecration, the temple was named after the Kattameswara form of Shiva. Though there are numerous temple inscriptions, concrete information regarding the temple's foundation is not available. The epigraphical evidence points out that the temple was constructed by King Vira Narasimha II in the 13th century. Narasimha was a remarkable king who expanded the Hoysala boundaries into the Tamil country.

The Ishvara temple in Arasikere is an ekakuta temple with two halls that follow a stellate plan typical of Hoysala temples. The structure consists of garbhagriha, antarala, mukhamandapa, and navaranga mandapa. The intricately carved sanctum is adorned with a shikhara with five talas. The sanctum has a stellate plan for its outer wall with non-uniform star points, an unusual feature in contemporary temples. A unique sukhanasi crowned with Nandi graces the antarala. The mukhamandapa is a closed hall, supported by four lathe-turned pillars, while the outer navaranga mandapa is an architectural marvel, featuring a dome-like roof and 21 pillars.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Navaranga Mandapa

The Navaranga mandapa of the Ishvara temple is a remarkable architectural marvel with a complicated design in a 16-point star shaped design. The mandapa is supported by 21 pillars. The central eight pillars towards the middle are decorated with well-defined bead work, while the outer 13 pillars have distinguishable elephant capitals. The mandapa is linked to a closed hall adjacent to the sanctum through a connecting bay, which also serves as the temple entrance.



View of the Ishvara Temple, Arsikere

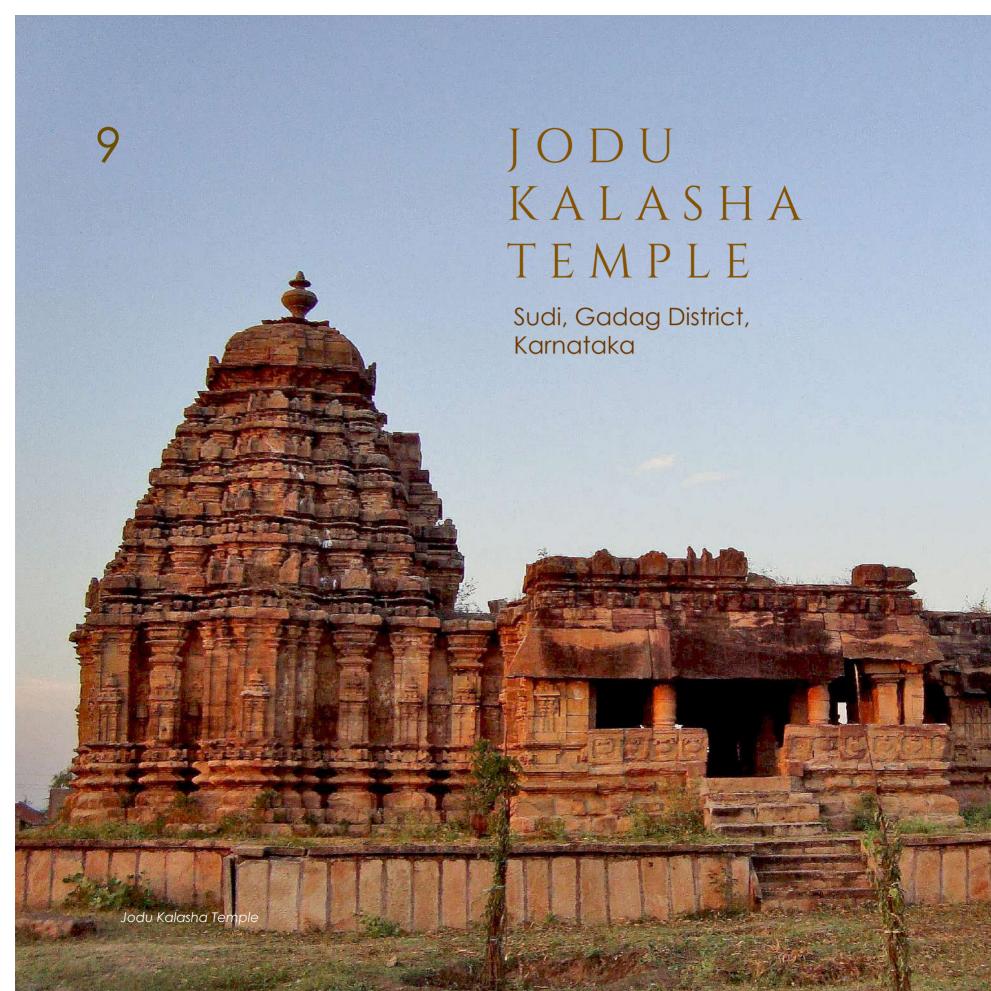




Wall carvings at Ishvara Temple, Arsikere

There are two surviving Shivalayas and a ruined Jain temple within the complex of the Ishvara temple. There are two garbhagrihas at the Shiva temple, but they share a mandapa. The Jain temple, known as Sahasra Jinalaya, is noteworthy for its distinctive mountain icon that has 1000 jinas carved.

Architecture of Ishvara Temple, Arsikere





### **Built in** 11th century CE

### **Dynasty**Western Chalukyas

### **Style** Vesara

### **Material**Sandstone

#### HISTORY

Sudi, a quaint town in Karnataka, is home to the unique temple known as "Jodu Kalasha" or "Twin Kalasha." Historically, it has ties to the Western Chalukya dynasty, as evident from inscriptions that referred to it as "Rajdhani Sundi." During the reign of the empire, Sudi served as a mint town. In 1069 CE, Nagadeva, a minister under King Someshvara II, orchestrated the construction of the Shaivite temple, which possibly led to it being named "Nageshvara." The primary deity of the temple is Lord Shiva, worshipped in the form of a shivalinga. Notably, Nagadeva's contributions extended to the construction of whiteplastered structures flanking the temple, reminiscent of divine abodes, and the establishment of public accommodations for women, illustrating the temple's multifaceted role in the history of the community.

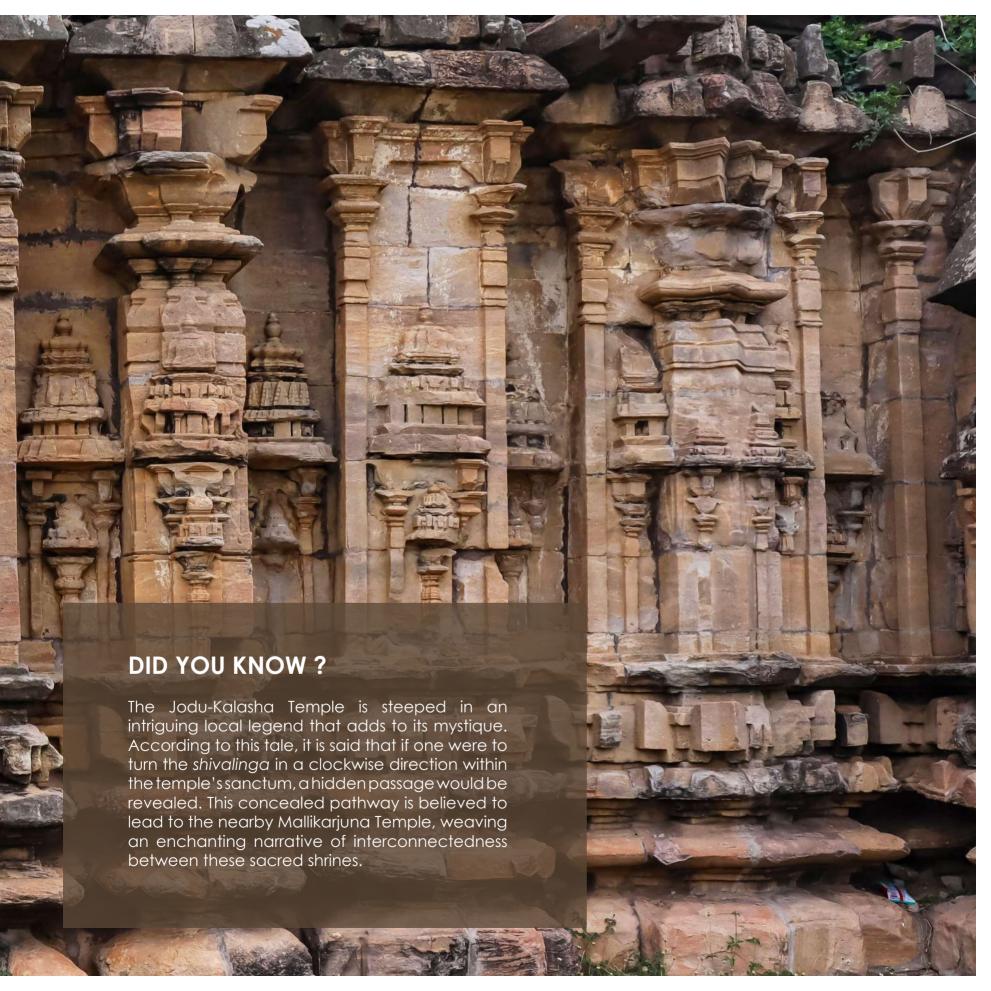
The temple's architectural style has led scholars to mark it as a unique Sudi architectural example. It was built using sandstone even when most temples in Karnataka had begun to use soapstone. There are two garbagrhas or sanctums, with both having intact shikharas or towers. They are connected to a common nandimandapa or gathering hall. The mandapa has entrances on both its northern and southern sides. The Shikharas on the eastern and western sides are intact, complete with kalasha and finial. The temple is built on a high-raised platform called jagati. While the eastern shrine has a shivalinga inside, the western temple lacks an idol, leaving questions of whether it remained incomplete or whether the image was removed at some point of time.

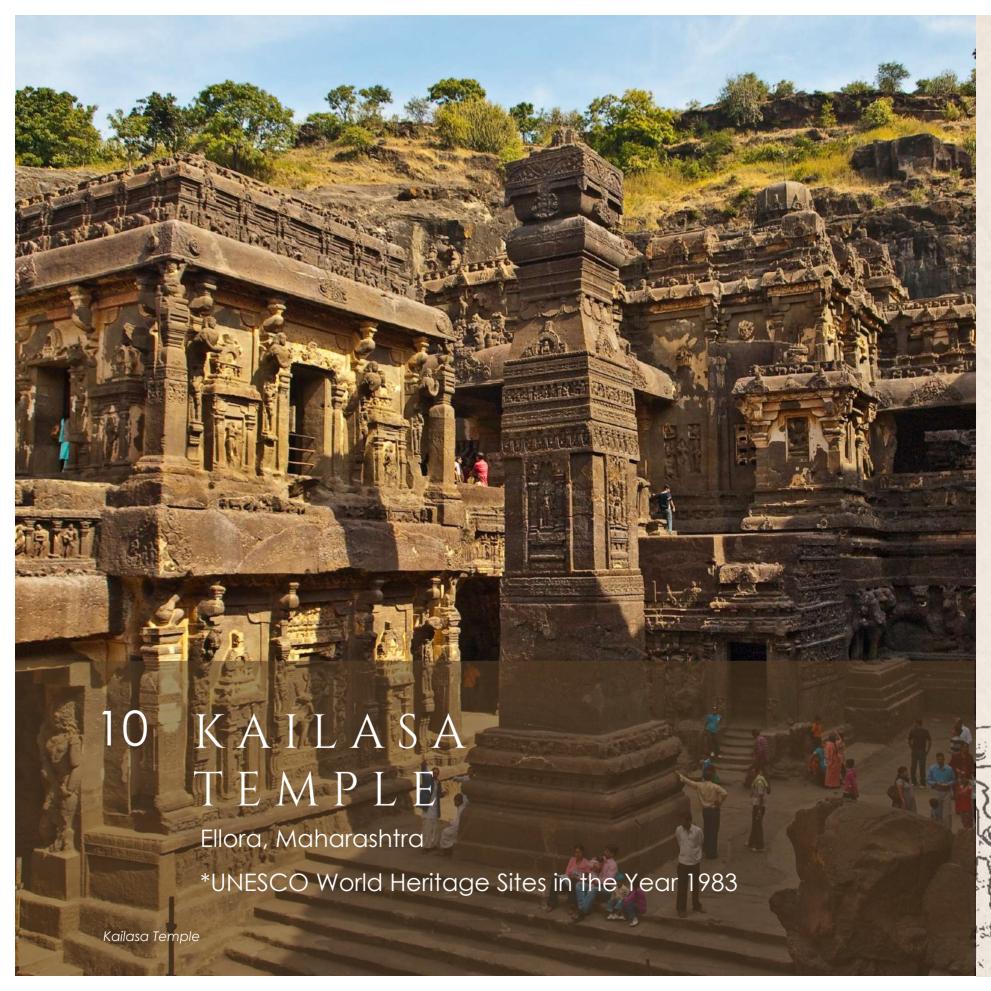
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Garbhagriha

Within the temple complex, one of the distinctive aspects of the garbhagrha is the presence of a captivating makara torana adorning the back wall. At the centre of the torana, a prominent figure, believed to represent Surya, the Sun God, imparts a celestial touch to the sanctum. A grand Nandi, the sacred bull and devotee of Shiva, stands majestically in the mandapa, facing the eastern shrine.

Exterior Wall Carvings at the Jodu Kalasha Temple





### **Built in** 8th century

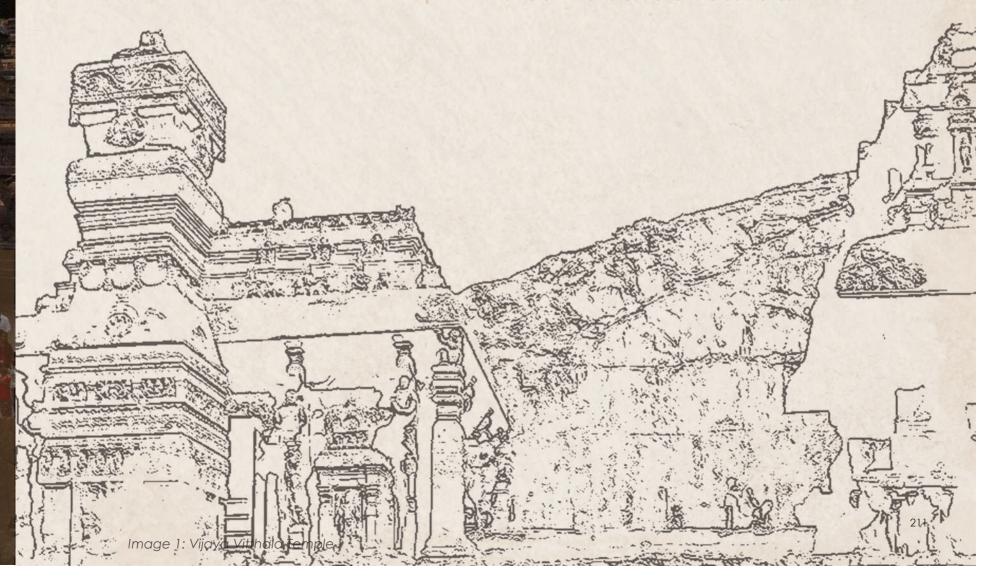
### **Dynasty** Rashtrakutas

# **Style**Vesara (Pallava, Chalukya, Rashtrakuta)

## Material Basalt (Rock-cut)

#### **HISTORY**

The Kailasa temple in Ellora is undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary architectural and sculptural achievements in the history of humankind. Carved entirely out of a monolithic basalt rock, it is often referred to as the "climax of the rock-cut phase of Indian architecture." The temple, which is a unique blend of Pallava, Chalukya, and other regional styles, was constructed by Rashtrakuta King Krishna I in the 8th century. According to the Vadodara Copper Plates of Karkaraja II, a feudatory of Krishna, this temple was so wondrous that it astonished even the gods. The presence of multiple styles within the temple indicates numerous additions made by different monarchs over the centuries.



The Kailasa temple is a poem in basalt, vertically excavated from a monolith. The entrance is adorned by a two-story gopuram. The Nandimandapa, featuring two 45-foot-high Kirti sthambas on each side, is seamlessly connected to the subsequent sabhamandapa through a rock bridge. The sabhamandapa is a 16-pillared structure with a flat roof with an agramandapa on the front and an ardhamandapa on the side. This sequence leads to the antarala and garbhagriha, the latter crowned with a majestic shikhara. Numerous lateral sub-shrines can be seen around the garbhagriha. A 17th-century Jain pilgrim, astonished by the creation, wrote "as though the creation of Viswakarama himself."

### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### Ravana Shaking Mount Kailash, Kailasa Temple, Ellora

According to some historians, the temple, which was called Krishneswara temple after its patron, came to be known as Kailasa temple after the remarkable discovery of the Ravana Shaking Mount Kailash relief. The relief depicts the Puranic episode in which Ravana attempted to carry Mount Kailash after being denied entry to the abode of Mahadeva. It features 3D imagery of human figures, with Shiva and Parvati seated in the centre, with attendants and ganas on the sides. Beneath the hollow space, Ravana can be seen, and the entire relief is a testament to perfection and grandeur.

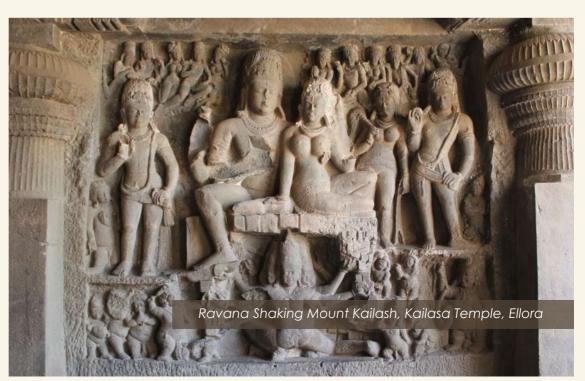


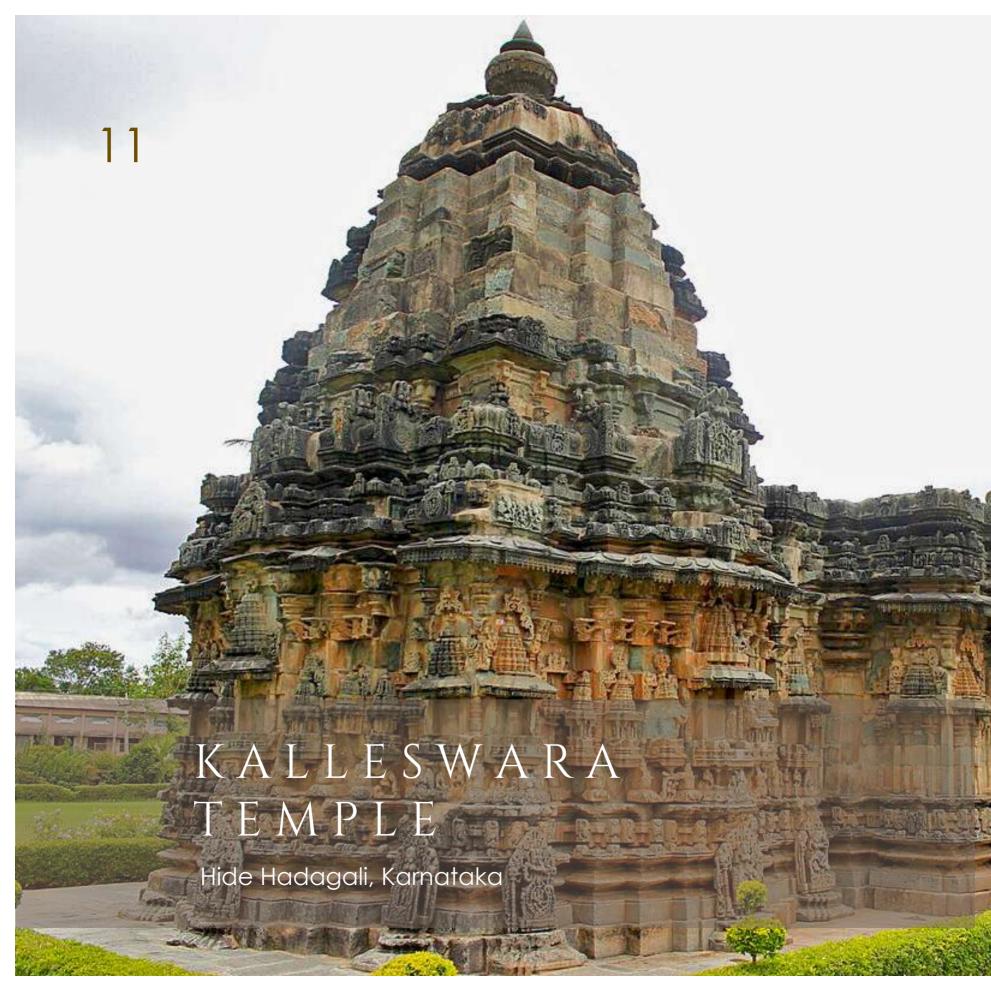




#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

According to medieval accounts, the temple was built by Queen Mankavati of Alajpura (modern Ellichpur) as a token of gratitude to Lord Shiva for saving her husband from an incurable illness. She vowed to fast until the temple's *shikhara* became visible. The architect Kokasa accepted the challenge of constructing the *shikhara* within a week, so as to enable the queen to break her fast.







### **Built in**

11th century CE

### **Dynasty**

Western Chalukyas

#### Style

Vesara

#### **Material**

Soapstone

#### **HISTORY**

The Kalleswara Temple was built during the reign of King Someshvara I from the Western Chalukyan dynasty, under the supervision of the Prime Minister, Demarasa. The temple is dedicated to Kalleswara, a manifestation of Shiva. An ancient Kannada inscription (1057 CE) refers to the temple as Bhimesvara-Demesvara. An additional inscription describes how Udyaditya constructed the temple on Demarasa's orders during the reign of Vikramaditya VI. Within the temple complex, there is a poetic inscription dating back to the 13th century, from the era of the Hoysala king, Veera Ballala II.

The temple is a dvikuta, featuring two shrines, but only one shrine has a shikhara. Each shrine has a garbagrha (sanctum) with an antartala (vestibule) connecting to a common four-pillared closed gathering hall known as the navranga or sabhamandapa. Originally, there seems to have been a mukhamandapa (main hall), connecting the closed hall to the exterior of the temple. Outside the main complex, there is an open hall called nandimandapa where the sculpture of Nandi, now a shrine, is located. On the door lintel (lalata), elephants are positioned on either side of the image of Gajalakshmi or Lakshmi. Additionally, the eaves above the door display a beautiful tapestry of Hindu deities, including Shiva, Brahma, Keshava, and a celestial form of Vishnu.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### Chalukyan Carvings

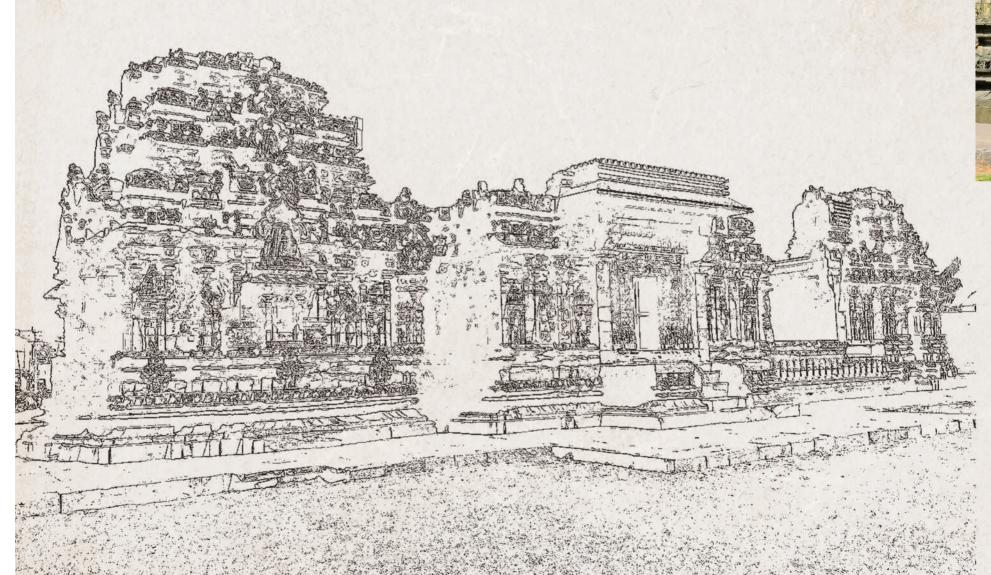
The intricate carvings and ornate embellishments adorning the primary shrine and the enclosed hall serve as exceptional representations of Chalukyan artistry. These architectural marvels feature an array of projections and recesses housing pilasters that skillfully incorporate niches. The niches, in turn, proudly display Hindu deities in exquisite relief, including revered gods like Indra and Shiva, along with his consort Parvati, the radiant Goddess Lakshmi, and various other celestial beings. The vestibule entrance is a true exhibition of exquisite artistry, the most notable of which are the majestic doorkeepers or dvarapalas, guarding the threshold. The doorway is adorned with the divine presence of the God and Goddess of love, Manmatha and Rati, respectively, evoking feelings of devotion and desire.

Carvings on the Exterior Wall at Kalleswara temple



# 12 KASIVISVESARA TEMPLE

Lakkundi, Karnataka





Kasivisvesara Temple

#### **Built in**

Early 11th to Mid-12th Centuries C.E.

### Dynasty

Western Chalukya

### Style

Vesara

#### **Material**

Soapstone

#### HISTORY

The Kasivisvesara temple marks the epitome of Vesara architecture. Scholars from the colonial era and later have suggested two phases of the temple's construction. An inscription discovered on the beam of the temple mandapa, dated to 1087 C.E., lends credence to the theory that the earliest phase began in the early 11th century. This theory states that partial damage from the Cholas occurred after the temple's original construction in the eleventh century. The temple was subsequently rebuilt in the twelfth century. According to some scholars, the Kasivisvesvara temple may have been built as early as 1075 CE based on an analysis of its iconography and architectural features in comparison to other temples built in the same region in the 11th and 12th centuries by the Lakkundi and Sudi schools.

This temple features a unique double-shrine configuration, with one shrine aligned alongside another. The larger shrine, facing east, venerates Shiva as Kasivisvesvara, while the slightly smaller one is dedicated to Surva as Suryanarayana. These shrines are connected by a rangamandapa and gudhamandapa. The larger shrine boasts a three-story vimana adorned with intricate wall pilasters, some displaying bifacial pallavi and bharaputraka figures in the upper section. Situated on a molded platform, the temple exhibits a melding of architectural styles from different subcontinental regions, including Nagara, Maru-Gurjara, Dravida, and Vesara, despite suffering damage to its superstructures. While the mandapa and its surviving walls exhibit simplicity in design, featuring a uniform decorative scheme with minimal embellishments, the entrances to the gudhamandapa stand out for their highly ornate artwork. These doorways are complex compositions, with an inner satsakha for Surva and saptasakha for Shiva, enclosed by an outer trisakha. These concentric bands feature elaborate carvings, adding to the temple's artistic richness.



View of the Kasivisvesara Temple

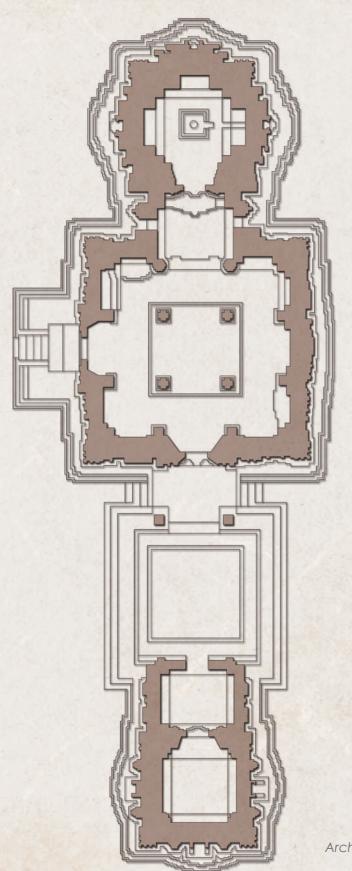
### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

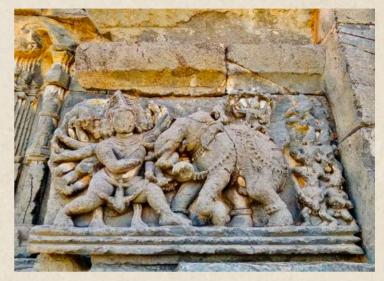
#### The Miniature Shrines

Interestingly, the pilasters are decorated with miniature aedicule which are small shrines that are reminiscent of those found in Hindu temples in North India, namely the Sekhari-Nagara and Bhumija-Nagara styles. The miniature towers embody the concept of repetitive emanating shrines.



Miniature shrines at the Kasivisvesara Temple





A Carving at the Kasivisvesara Temple

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

In contrast to the Sudi school's concentration on sandstone, the Lakkundi school architects demonstrated their inventiveness in exploring the potential of soapstone in the Kasivisvesvara temple. This innovative approach influenced Hoysala artisans, leading to the construction of multiple temple groups in southern Karnataka. These schools played central roles in the Western Chalukya Empire's cultural and temple-building activities near the Tungabhadra river region, leaving a lasting legacy in the form of numerous monuments.

Architectural Plan of the Kasivisvesara Temple

# 13 MAHADEVA TEMPLE





Mahadeva Temple

**Built in** 12th century CE

**Dynasty**Western Chalukya

**Style** Vesara

**Material** Soapstone

#### **HISTORY**

Around 1112 CE, Mahadeva, the dandanayaka or commander of King Vikramaditya VI of the Western Chalukya dynasty, constructed the Mahadeva temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is one of the Chalukya temples that defined the Karnata dravida architectural tradition and is based on the Amruteshwara temple in Anigiri. The complex also houses two other shrines honouring Mahadeva's parents, Murthinarayana and Chandraleshwari. An inscription on the wall refers to it as the 'Emperor' among temples, known as Devalaya Chakravarti.

The design of the temple includes a vestibule that connects a closed mandapa to the sanctum. The entire temple faces east and the closed mandapa leads to an open mandapa that is supported by pillars. Interestingly, some features that were part of the open mandapa's outer roof edge, such as the parapet and cornice, have disappeared. Thirteen smaller shrines, each with a unique linga, surround the sanctum, which is home to a linga. The eastern entrance of the closed mandapa leads to the open mandapa, while the western entrance provides access to the sanctum. The eastern mandapa has doorways on both sides, and the porch ceilings feature ribbed designs, with beautifully crafted door panels. Four central pillars support the open mandapa's square ceiling, which displays exquisite fretted stonework. In contrast, the interiors of the sanctum and the closed mandapa maintain a simple design.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Makaratorana

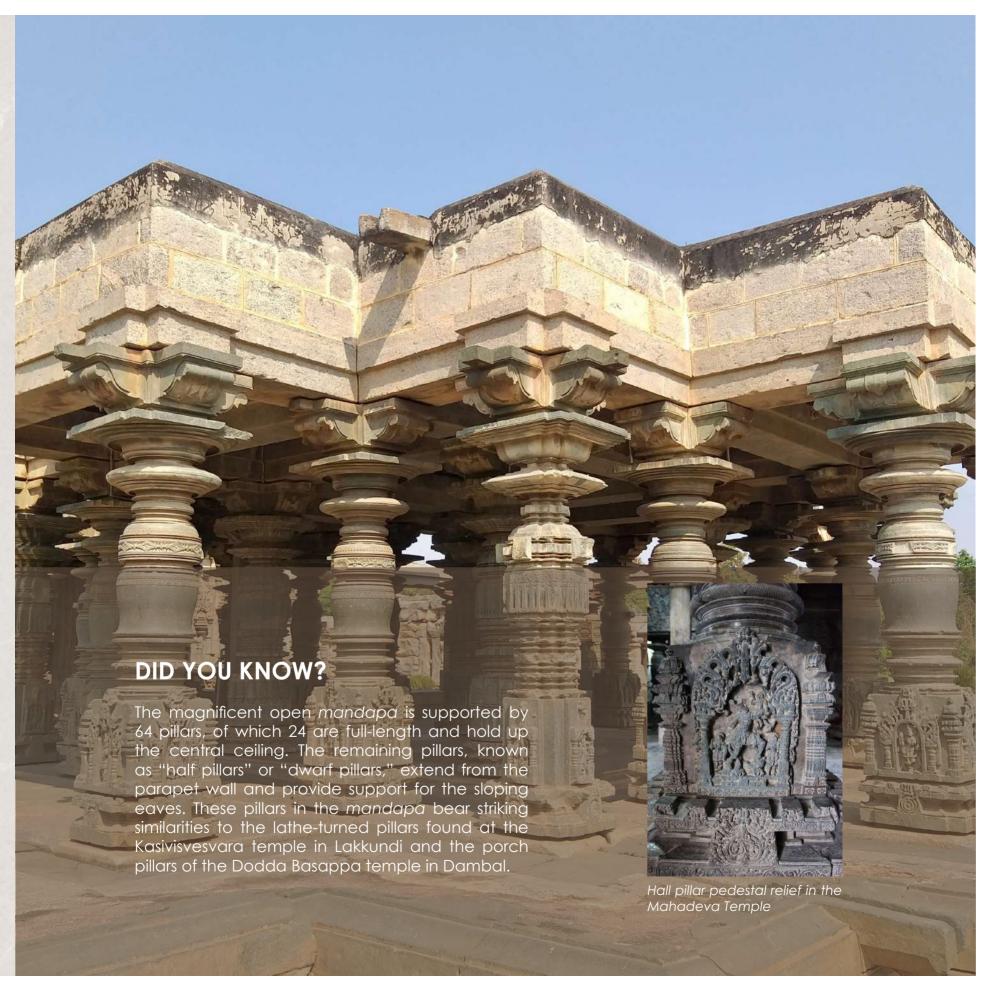
The exquisitely carved *makaratorana* (lintel), that adorns the shrine, is the temple's most notable feature. This beautiful piece of art depicts a dancing Shiva accompanied by smaller musicians. *Chauri* bearers flank Shiva, with standing images of Brahma and Vishnu surrounding him. There are mythical animals on either end of the lintel called *makaras*. The sanctum's tower features recurring motifs and a unique stellate pyramid shape. A closer look reveals multiple monkey figures that appear to be climbing the tower, enhancing the intricate artistic design of the temple.



An intricately carved pillar at Mahadeva Temple

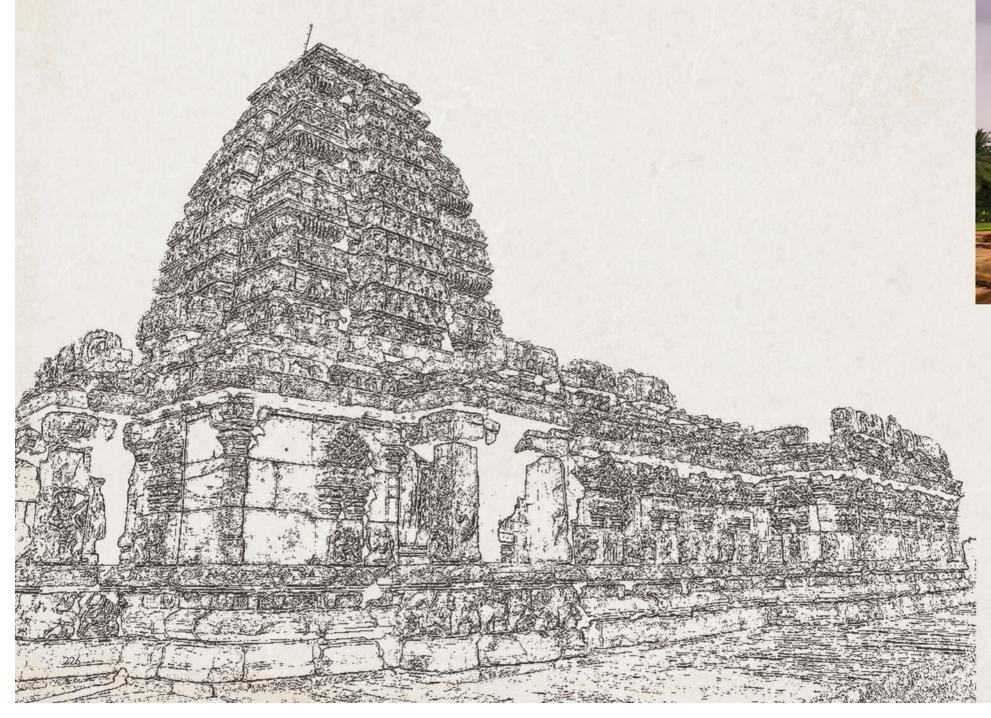


Exquisitely carved Makaratorana at Mahadeva Temple



## 14 PAPANATHA TEMPLE

Pattadakal, Karnataka





Papanatha Temple

### **Built in** 12th century CE

## **Dynasty**Western Chalukya

### **Style** Vesara

**Material** Soapstone

#### **HISTORY**

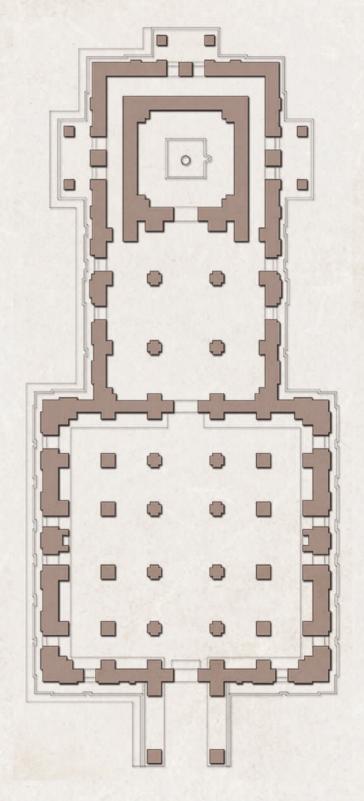
Pattadakal, which translates to 'coronation stone,' was a prominent city during the reign of the Badami Chalukyas. As the name suggests, it was a site where royal coronation ceremonies took place. The Papanatha temple, dedicated to Mukteswara Shiva, is one of the early monuments in the Pattadakal cluster that dates back to the second half of the 7th century. According to the dedicatory inscription, the temple was completed in 740 CE. It is a unique blend of dravida and nagara architectural styles, renowned for the rich sculptural corpus from the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics.

The temple facing east, has a mukhamandapa, sabhamnadapa, ardhamandapa, anatarala, and garbhagriha and is surrounded by a pradakshinapatha. Devakoshtas featuring Shaiva and Vaishnava themes that are intricately carved into the outer wall surfaces. They are topped by chaitya-arch motifs and perforated windows. The mukhamandapa is adorned with sculptures of mythical creatures and couples. It also has side lattice windows depicting episodes from the Ramayana. The subsequent sabhamandapa is a 16-pillared hall with a Nandi statue placed inside. The ardhamandapa leads to the antarala, which is topped with a sukhanasi tower. The garbhagriha, crowned with a rekha-nagara shikhara, has ornate door frames that warmly welcome visitors inside.

### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Rekha-Nagara Shikhara

The superstructure over the sanctum of the Papanatha temple marks a significant shift in the architecture style of other Chalukya monuments. Unlike the slightly older temples in Pattadakal, such as the Sangameshwara temple, the *shikhara* of the Papanatha temple resembles the north Indian *rekha-nagara* style. The tower, characterised by its curvilinear bee-hive shape, whose *amalaka* and *kalasha* are now missing, is one of the most distinct features of the Papanatha temple.



Architectural Plan of the Papanatha Temple



A view of the Papanatha Temple in Pattadakal, Karnataka

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

According to historian Percy Brown, the temple might have been originally dedicated to Vishnu or Surya. Brown points out that the Surya image on the west outer wall and the Anatashyana Vishnuimage on the ceiling of Sabhamandapa do not correlate with the Shiva dedication. Also, unlike the typical Shiva temple, the Papanatha temple does not have a separate Nandi-mandapa. The Nandi statue is placed at the Sabhamandapa and belongs to a later period.



### **Built in** 13th century

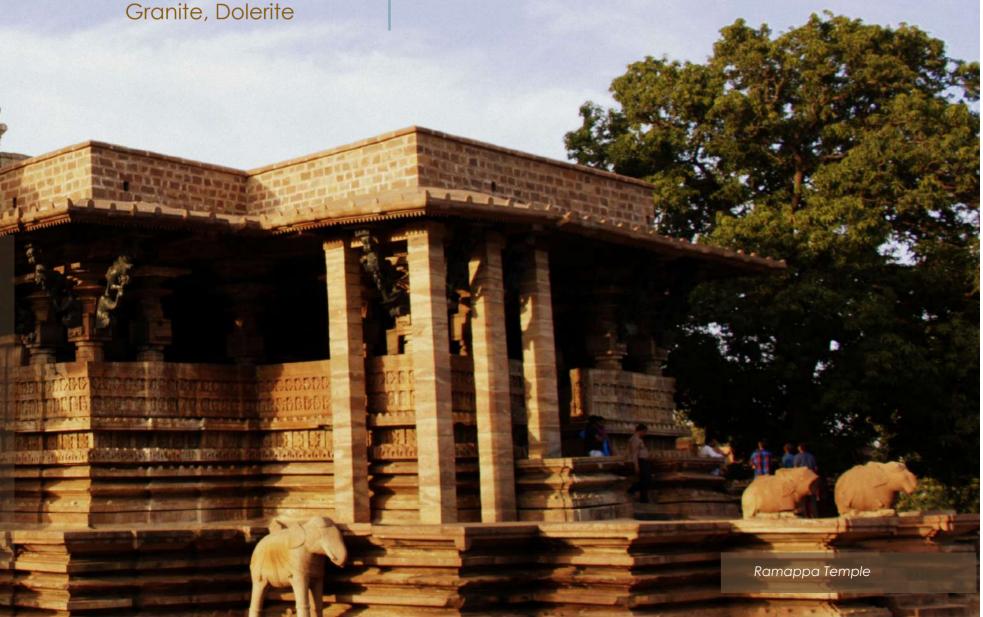
### **Dynasty** Kakatiya

### **Style**Vesara (Kakatiya)

# Material Red Sandstone, Basalt, Cranita Delarita

#### **HISTORY**

The Ramappa temple, also called the Rudreswar temple, is the only temple in India named after its architect, Ramappa, who spent 40 years, from 1173 to 1213, building this temple. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this temple was commissioned by Recharla Rudra, a general serving under the Kakatiya King, Ganapati Deva. Marco Polo, the Venetian explorer who visited the Kakatiya kingdom in the late 1200s, described the Ramappa temple as the "brightest star in the galaxy of temples." This abode of Rudreswar, declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 2021, is a testimony to the remarkable engineering innovations of the 12th century.



The Ramappa temple is a *trikuta* temple with three sanctums: the main temple and two temples dedicated to Kateshwara Shiva in the north and Kameshwara Shiva in the south. The star-shaped central shrine is situated on a high sandbox foundation and follows a magnificent stellate plan. The complex, surrounded by temple walls, has a *Nandimandapa* that leads to a *Sabhamandapa*. One of the pillars in the *mandapa* has 13 fine holes, each as narrow as a needle. A small *natyamandapa* is situated in the middle of the *sabhamandapa*. The *garbhagriha* proceeds beyond an *antarala*, and the superstructure of the former is constructed using floating bricks. The *vimana* is pyramidal in shape and possesses a hollow interior.

### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Dance Iconography

The Ramappa temple sculptures speak volumes about dance. Together with 600 other dancing sculptures, Shiva is shown dancing on the temple's central ceiling. They are portrayed in twelve distinct dance postures through the amazing twelve Manadanika sculptures, with one of the dancing women even wearing high heels. The temple also has carvings of various classical and local dance traditions, including Perani Natya, Pindibandha, and Paravratta. The temple sculptures were the primary resources for the efforts of Nataraja Ramakrishna, a renowned dance guru, to revive the Perini Natya dance form.



Nandi Mandapa at Ramappa Temple



Dance Iconography at the Ramappa Temple



Vimana of the Ramappa Temple



Dance Iconography at the Ramappa Temple

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The temple is truly an architectural marvel in every sense. It is erected on a sandbox foundation made up of a mixture of sand lime, jaggery, and Myrobalan fruit, a composition that has protected the structure from numerous invasions and powerful earthquakes. Furthermore, the vimana's bricks are so light that they float in the water. The Ramappa temple serves as a reminder of the depth of knowledge that once thrived in this region.

# 16 SHIVA TEMPLE

Elephanta Islands, Maharashtra





Shiva Temple, Elephanta Islands

### **Built in** 5-6th century CE

### **Dynasty** Kalachuri

### **Style** Vesara

## Material Basalt (Rock-cut)

#### HISTORY

The Elephanta Caves are a cluster of rock-cut temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, and were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. Among these caves, Cave No. 1 houses the largest Shiva temple and is located on the Elephanta Islands in the Arabian Sea. It is believed to have been constructed by King Krishna Raja I, who hailed from the 6th-century Kalachuri dynasty. The Kalachuris of Mahishmati were great patrons of Pashupata Shaivism. This theory is supported by the presence of Krishna Raja's coins discovered in the caves, despite the fact that the absence of epigraphical evidence raises questions about the validity of the Kalachuri patronage.

The basic temple plan of the Cave 1 temple resembles that of the Buddhist viharas. It has a north-south alignment, unlike the typical Shiva temples. The entrance leads to a square court with a mukhamandapa, main mandapa, and garbhagriha, which is surrounded by cells. East of the entrance, shrines of the saptamatrikas, Parvati, Kartikeya, and Ganesha can be seen. Shiva-Parvati, Ravananugraha, Shiva slaying Andhaka, and Shiva's wedding are carved on both ends of the main courtyard. Towards the south of the garbhagriha, a sculpture of Sadashivamurty is placed between panels of Gangadhara and Ardhanariswara. The west and north wings have the shrines of Natraja and Yogihshwara, with the north wing also having an entrance flanked by smaller shrines.



Sculptures at Shiva Temple

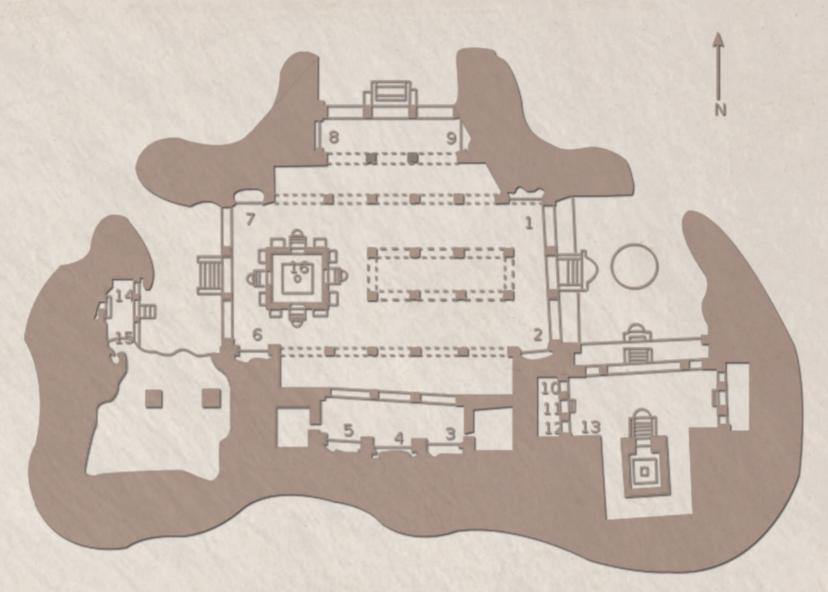
### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

### The Sadashiva Murty of Elephanta

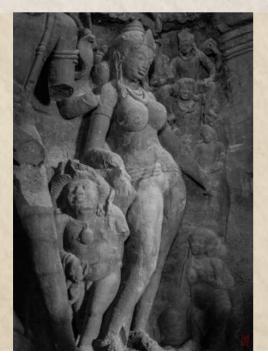
The 17-foot-tall idol of Sadashiva Murty situated on the south side of the main sanctum is one of the most celebrated sculptures at Elephanta. This *trimurti* Shiva sculpture depicts three aspects of Shiva: Mahadeva, representing the creator; Bhairava, signifying the destroyer; and Vamadeva, embodying the preserver. The Sadashiva Murty is a quite significant Shaiva image as it replaces Vishnu and Brahma with various forms of Shiva as the creator and preserver, contrary to the typical mythological descriptions.



Sadashiva Murty, Shiva Temple



Architectural Plan of the Shiva Temple

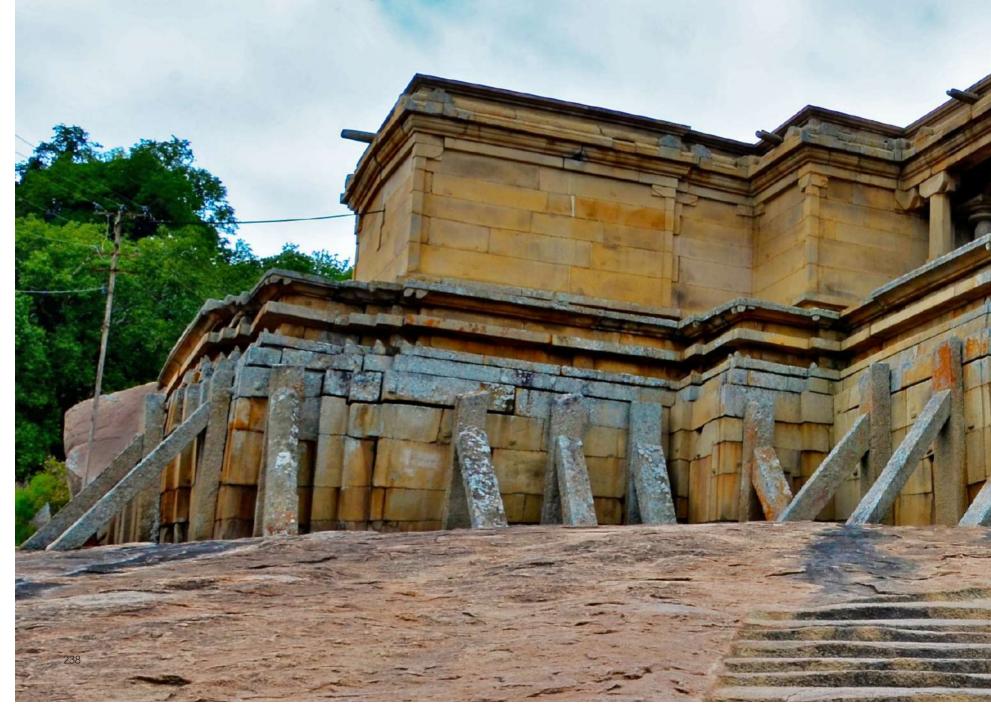


### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The east wing of the Shiva temple is dedicated to themes of Shaktism. In other 6th-century rock-cut temples like Samalaji and Jogeshwari temples, which are contemporary to Elephanta, the prominent Shakta presence is conveyed through sapta matrika imagery. However, at Elephanta, the ashta matrikas (the sapta matrikas and Goddess Parvati) are depicted, which marks a significant and unique shift from contemporary Shakta imagery.

# 17 SHRAVANABELAGOLA ODEGAL BASADI

Shravanabelagola, Karnataka





**Built in** 14th century CE

**Dynasty** Hoysala

**Style**Vesara

**Material**Granite

#### **HISTORY**

Odegal Basadi, the largest temple among the Shravanabelagola temples, is the first temple a visitor sees upon entering the walled complex of the Vindhyagiri hills. Shravanabelagola is one of the most popular pilgrimages for the followers of Jainism in India. It consists of two hills, Vindhyagiri and Chandragiri, each adorned with numerous basadi or temples. Odegal Basadi gets its name from the odega, or supporting stones strategically placed at an angle to the elevated temple platform and are used all around the temple. This temple is also known as Trikuta Basadi because of the three sanctums in the temple dedicated to Adinatha, Shantinatha, and Neminatha—the first, sixteenth, and twenty-second tirthanankaras, respectively.

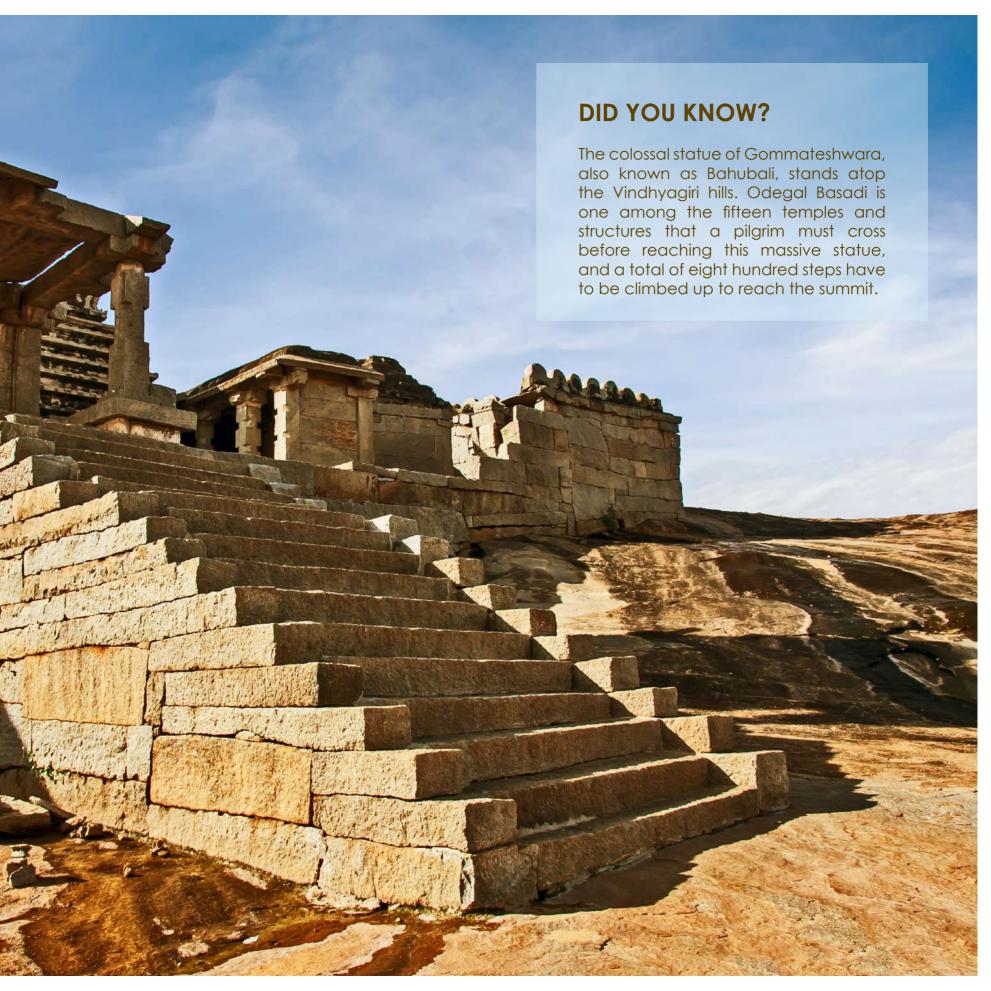
The temple has a simple facade and an exquisite structure. It has two main sections: a small mukhamandapa and a large mahamandapa, complete with a raised circular platform and cylindrical pillars known as navranga. It is constructed in the traditional Hoysala architectural style. The mahamndapa has three open sukhnashis, also known as antartatalas, with a lotus pendant adorning the central ceiling. Within the mahamandapa are three sanctums oriented towards three distinct directions. The idols within the sanctuary are seated and carved from a dark-coloured, lustrous schist. Adinath's image flanked by two male chamara-bearers and a beautifully carved prabhavali, is located in the main sanctum. From the basadi's mandapa, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the city.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Jagati

The jagati, also known as the vedi, is a high, conspicuous platform that is a distinctive feature of Odegal Basadi. This elevated platform plays a crucial role in Jain temple architecture as it raises the sacred temple structure above the ground, facilitating an upward approach to its revered icons. This design symbolises the challenging and prolonged journey towards enlightenment.









**Built in**11th century CE

**Dynasty**Early Chalukya

**Style** Vesara

**Material** Granite

#### HISTORY

Situated in the northern part of the town, the Someshwara temple is the most prominent temple in Lakshemshwar. In the early Chalukya period, this temple received religious sanction. Important information about the temple's past can be found in an inscription dating back to 1102 CE. Shiva is the main deity in the temple, originally known as Muddeshwara, but later evolving into Swaymbhu-Somanatha. The mahasamantadhipathi Someshwara is credited with building the temple in 1096 CE as a tribute to his son Sovideva. Notably, the Someshwara temple is referred to as a temple complex because it is surrounded by a collection of smaller temples.

The Someshwara temple resembles a fortress due to its towering walls. With entrances on both the southern and northern sides that lead to the navaranga, this east-facing temple is oriented west-east. On the ground floor, you will find a garbhagriha, antarala, navaranga, mahamantapa, and mukhamantapa. The doorframe of the garbhagriha features three shakhas, with an interior sculpture of Uma-Maheshwara. With three entrances and four pillars supporting it centrally, the navaranga features mukhamandapas at its northern and southern entrances. These mukhamandapas have a variety of architectural elements, such as adhistanas (decorative bases), pillars, sloping parapets, and intricately designed ceilings. Distinctive architectural features, including adhistana, walls, prastara, griva, shikhara, and stupi, identify the temple's external elevation. The Adhistana serves as an ornamental base for the temple, embellished with intricate mouldings that enhance the temple's aesthetic appeal.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### **Hero Stone**

In the ceiling of the mahamantapa, an engraved hero stone is divided into four panels. The lower panel depicts three renowned heroes in a battlefield, with foot soldiers brandishing bows and arrows. The second panel also portrays a battle scene, while the third panel showcases three dead heroes, each being carried by two women. However, the upper panel exhibits some damage and lacks clarity in its illustration.





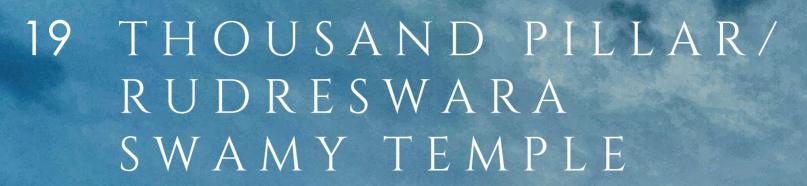


Architecture of the Someshwara Temple

The temple was given the appellation "Saurashtra Someshwara," based on local folklore, which narrates how a devotee of Lord Shiva transported the idols of Shiva, Parvati, and Nandi from Saurashtra to the Someshwara temple.

Intricate Carvings on the exterior facade at Someshwara Temple





Hanamkonda, Telangana





**Built in** 12th century CE

**Dynasty** Kakatiya

**Style** Vesara (Kakatiya)

Material
Sandstone, Dolerite,
Basalt and Granite

#### HISTORY

In the 10th and 14th centuries, the Kakatiyas were a powerful political force that influenced the affairs in the Deccan region. The Rudreswara Swamy temple in Hanamkonda, also called the Thousand Pillar temple, is a masterpiece of Kakatiya architectural style. The ancient temple complex is dedicated to three presiding deities: Lord Shiva as Rudreswara, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Surya. The construction of the temple is thought to have started in the second half of the 12th century, following the orders of King Pratapa Rudra Deva I. Though the 14th Sultanate invasions left the temple partially destroyed, it was later repaired and restored in the 20th century under the patronage of Mir Osman Ali Khan, the Nizam of Hyderabad.

This Thousand Pillar temple is a *trikuta* temple, with three *garbhagrihas* housing idols of Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya. They appear star-shaped because they have a stellate plan. Shiva's sanctuary faces eastward, while Vishnu's and Surya's face south and west. The three *garbhagrihas* have *antaralas* in front that are linked to the common *natya* mandapa. On the eastern side, facing the Shiva sanctum, is a monolithic basalt Nandi. There once stood a 300-pillared *kalyana* mandapa behind the Nandi statue, but it is now destroyed. This temple is constructed on a tall sandbox foundation, just like the Ramappa Temple.



Architecture of the Rudreswara Swamy Temple

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Thousand Pillars

The thousand pillars made of granite and dolerite are undoubtedly the prime attraction of the Rudreswara Swamy temple. The temple's stellate natya mandapa is supported by these perfectly symmetrical pillars. They are laid down in such a style that no pillar obstructs the view of the sanctums. These pillars are a visual feast due to their exquisite carvings.

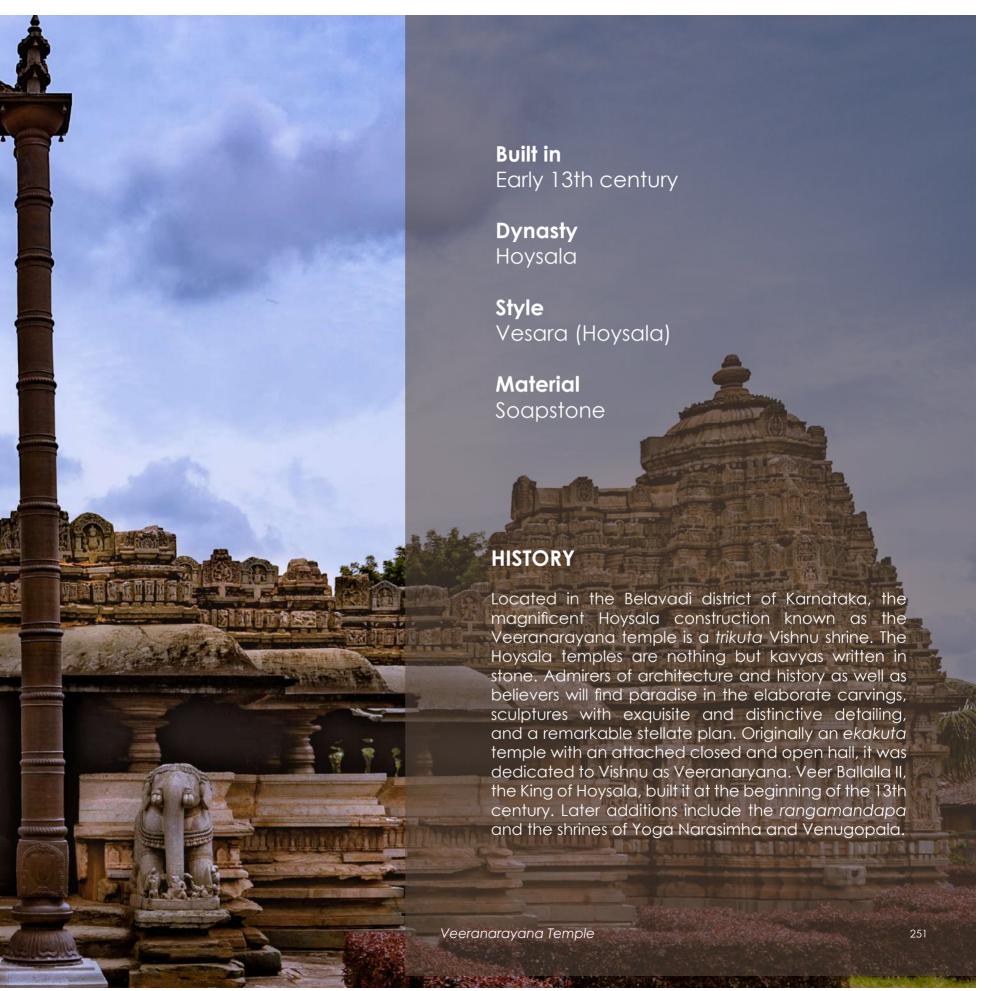


Exquisitely carved pillars of the Rudreswara Swamy Temple

Even on hot summer days, the temple remains remarkably cool. Some say that it is because the architects of the temple added soft wet sand at the foundational levels. Another theory is that there is a secret underground pipe that connects the temple and Warangal Fort to Bhadrakali Lake, which is responsible for this cooling effect.

An Exquisitely carved pillar at the Rudreswara Swamy Temple





The entrance through the rangamandapa, which is a stellate pillared hall, is adorned with two ornate elephant sculptures. Yoga Narasimha and Venugopala garbhagrihas, along with their vestibules, are located on either side of the mandapa. There is a closed mukhamandapa after the large hall, followed by an open sabhamandapa. Connecting the main garbhagriha to the mandapas is an anatarala crowned with a sukhanasika. Attached to their individual antaralas are two-tiered sukhanasikas and three-tiered shikharas at each of the three shrines. All the shikharas and sukhanasikas, have very distinctive artwork. A single-tier upward extension is placed on the top of the walls throughout the temple.



Architecture of the Veeranarayana Temple

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Rangamandapa

The rangamandapa of the Veeranarayana Temple serves as the shared mahamandapa for both the Venugopala and Yoga Narasimha shrines. The diagonally staggered square shape of the hall gives it a star-like appearance. Three projections are located on each of the pillar-supported sides of the hall. Singletier upward projections can also be seen in the layout. The rangamandapa adds so much magnificence to the original structure that art historian Gerard Foekema called it "the most bold extension imaginable."



Domical bay ceiling art in outer mantapa of Veeranarayana temple



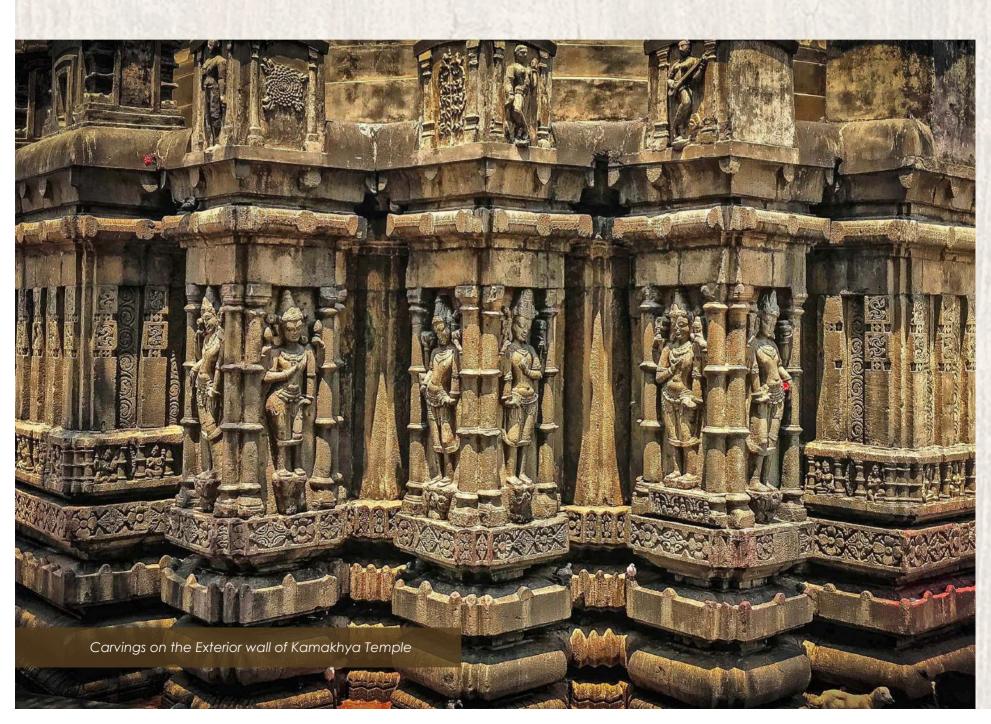
A view of the Veeranarayana Temple

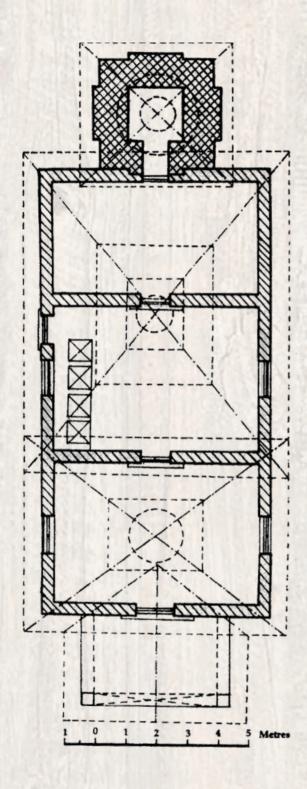
Belavadi is recognised as the *Eka Chakra Nagara*, as depicted in the epic *Mahabharata*, according to the *Sthala Purana*. The text describes this as the location where Bhima vanquished the demon Baka, who used to devour *Nagara* residents as compensation for defence against the intruders.



Belavadi Vimana of Sri Yoga Narasimha at Veeranarayana Temple

# REGIONAL TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE





Architectural Plan of Mahsu Devta Temple



Intricately carved wooden panels in the Hidimba Devi Temple

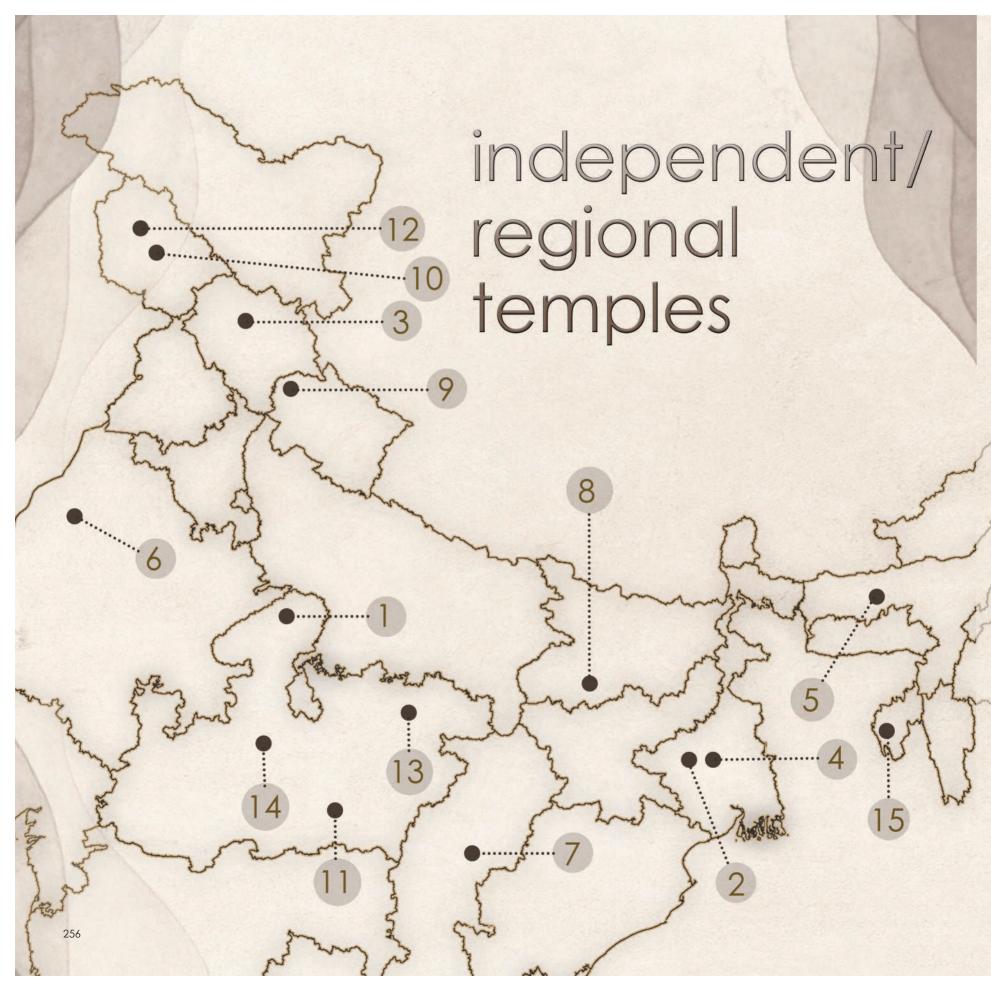
Beyond the well-known *Dravida*, *Nagara*, and *Vesara* styles, the country boasts of regional temple architectures, each with its distinctive features and materials.

In the central regions of India, sandstone was the primary construction material. Within this landscape, some of the most ancient surviving structural temples from the Gupta Period can be found. Traveling northwest to Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western Madhya Pradesh, one encounters an array of temples constructed from stones of varying colors and types. Though sandstone is the predominant building material, occasionally features a striking grey-to-black basalt as well as easily moldable soft white marble, which also graces certain Jain temples from this period.

Heading eastward, the temples of the Northeast, Bengal, and Odisha embraced terracotta as their primary medium of construction. Assam also developed its own regional style influenced by a fusion of Tais from Upper Burma and the dominant Pala style of Bengal, giving birth to the renowned Ahom style in and around Guwahati.

In the hills of Kumaon, Garhwal, Himachal, and Kashmir, a unique form of hill temple architecture emerged, characterized by pitched roofs and, at times, pagodashaped temples.

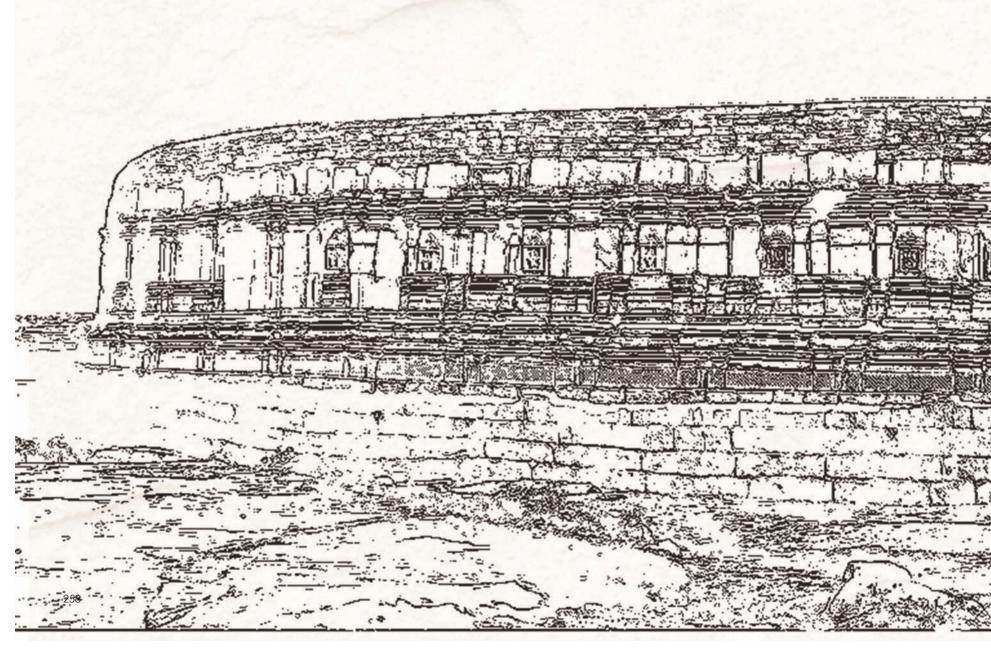
As one travels from one Indian state to another, a fascinating fusion and blend of different temple architectural styles form a captivating landscape.



- 01. Chausath Yogini Temple Mitaoli, Madhya Pradesh
- 02. Gokulchand Stone Temple Gokulnagar, West Bengal
- 03. Hidimba Devi Temple Manali, Himachal Pradesh
- 04. Jor Bangla Temple Bishnupur, West Bengal
- 05. Kamakhya Temple Guwahati, Assam
- 06. Karni Mata Temple Bikaner, Rajasthan
- 07. Lakshmana Temple Sirpur, Chattisgarh
- 08. Mahabodhi Temple Bodg Gaya, Bihar
- 09. Mahasu Devta Temple Hanol, Uttrakhand
- 10. Martand Temple Anantnag, Kashmir
- 11. Parvati Temple Nachna-Kuthara
- 12. Shankaracharya Temple Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir
- 13. Shiva Temple Satna, Madhya Pradesh
- 14. Temple No.17 Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh
- 15. Tripura Sundari Temple Udaipur, Tripura

## 1 CHAUSATH YOGINI TEMPLE

Mitaoli, Madhya Pradesh



#### **Built in** 11th century CE

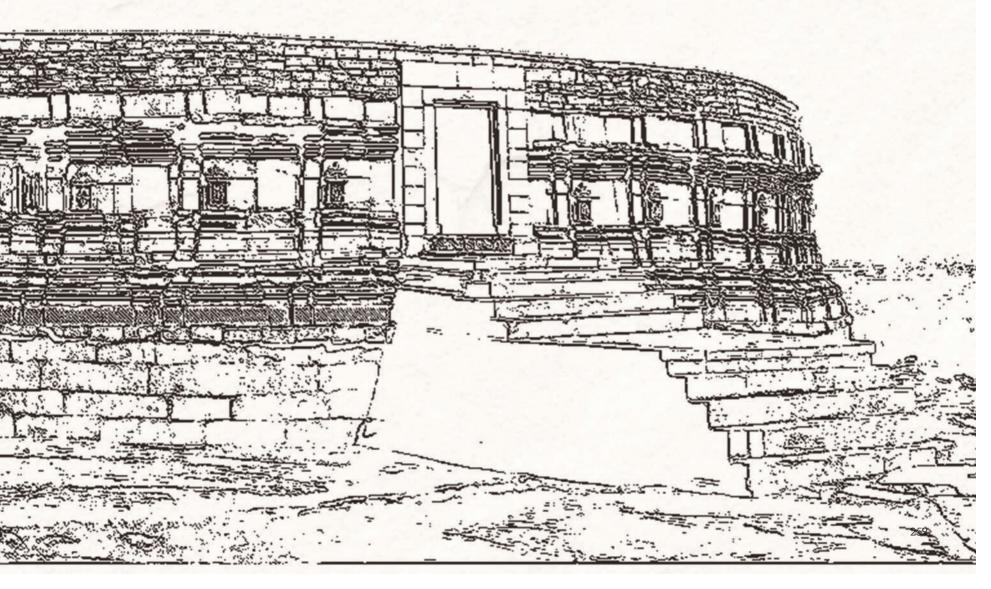
**Dynasty** Kachchhapaghata

**Style**Hypaethral

**Material** Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

Across India, there are eleven Chausath Yogini temples that still stand, with two in Odisha, five in Madhya Pradesh, three in Uttar Pradesh, and one in Tamil Nadu. According to an inscription that dates back to 1323 CE, the Chausath Yogini temple in Mitaoli was built at the beginning of the 11th century, under the rule of King Devapala of the Kachchhapaghata dynasty. It is believed that astrology and mathematics, with a special emphasis on solar transits, were studied at this temple.



The temple has a distinctive hypaethral design with a circular layout and a radius of about 170 feet (52 metres), which encompasses an open courtyard elevated on a high plinth. It is located atop a hillock that is about 100 feet (30 metres) high. There are 100 stairs to climb in order to get to the entrance. This courtyard is surrounded by a circular cloister that houses 65 tiny cellars, or chambers, with an open mandapa at the front supported by pillars and pilasters. Presently, these chambers and the roofs of the mandapas are flat. A circular shrine facing east is located in the middle of the courtyard. Nowadays, shivalingas are housed in each chamber and the central shrine. In its original design, these chambers were meant to house 64 images of yoginis and possibly one image of Devi. Each of these chambers is thought to have had a shikhara before it was altered to have a flat roof.



Panaromic View - Chausath Yogini Temple

### ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Circular Walls

One of the purest forms—simple yet complete—is the circle that represents the Yogini temples. This circle is symbolic of various concepts, encompassing everything and nothing, signifying both the sun and the all-seeing eye. It is also thought to represent the self and the self-contained whole. The circular walls of the Yogini temple create a space that is closed to the world and yet open to the sky. Within these walls, secret rituals were performed to appease the yoginis, who were considered to be wrathful and capable of devouring anyone.

The Yogini cult underwent a significant evolution, reaching a mature phase by the 9th century, which finds a mention in the Agni Purana. The cult is associated with the tantric aspiration of the five 'm's: matsya (fish), mamsa (meat), mudra (parchedgrain), madya (liquor), and maithuna (intercourse). At the same time, it is also related to the achievement of magical powers and is a unique cult that has nothing to do with moksha or liberation.

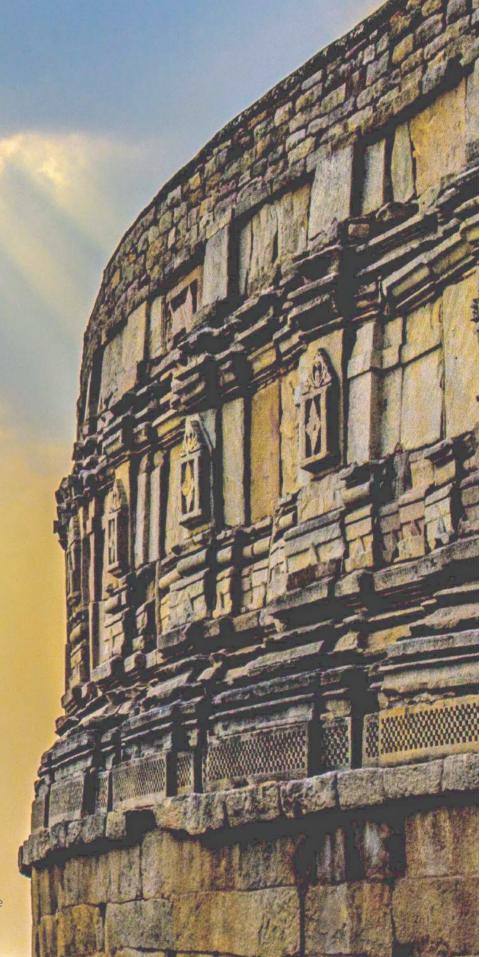


Carved stone doorway

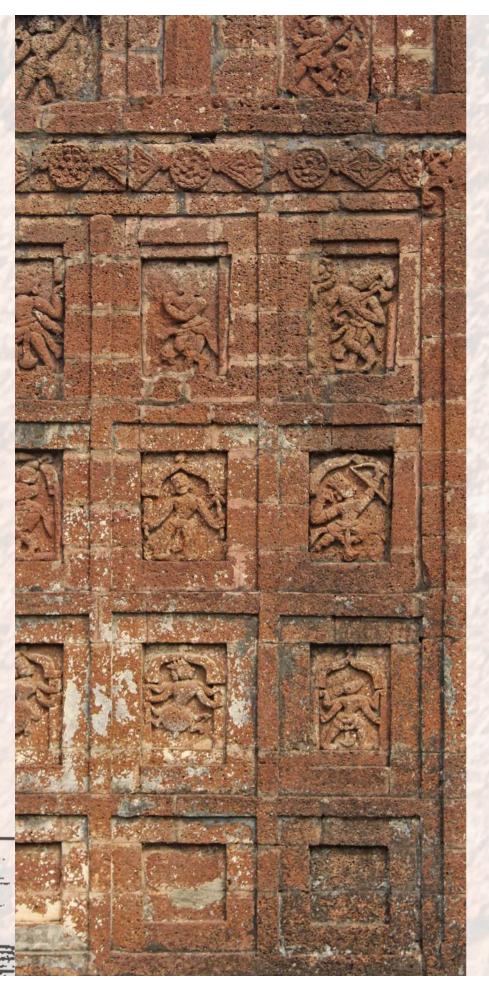




Chausath Yogini Temple







**Built in** 17th century CE

**Dynasty**Malla

**Style** Pancharatna

**Material**Laterite Stone

#### **HISTORY**

The extensive, level floodplains in the Bengal region had limited natural stone quarry sites, which resulted in temple architects predominantly relying on the abundant clay to create bricks as their primary construction material. Nevertheless. stone-constructed temples can be found in this area, with the Gokulchand Temple in Gokulnagar, made from laterite, standing out as the largest stone temple in the Bankura District of West Bengal. This temple, following the traditional pancharatna style, was erected by the ruling Malla dynasty of Bishnupur in 1643, predating the terracotta temples of Bishnupur. In the 1920s, Rakhal Das Banerii, famed for his work on Mohenio Daro, drew attention to the deteriorating condition of the Gokulchand Temple. The ASI took over and successfully restored the temple in the 1990s.

The traditional four-sided curved roof of this pancharatna temple rises 64 feet above the ground and is topped with decorative columns and turrets. With its expansive 20,000 square foot complex, the temple offers a wellpreserved alimpse into history. It is enclosed by fortified walls, and a quaint tulsi mancha occupies one corner, alongside a modest tube well, supplying crystal clear drinking water. The natmandir's balconies and stairwells are in good enough condition despite some signs of wear, enabling guests to reach to the top and soak in a panoramic view of both the entire temple and Bengal's quaint rural landscape. The temple has little ornamentation, but faint low-relief carvings with raslila motifs and other mythological images on the east and south faces, show different avatars of Vishnu. These carvings are weathered. Additionally, the temple features triple-arched veranda entrances on its east, south, and west sides, as well as a corridor that circles the entire structure.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Natmandir

Next to the main temple structure, a natmandir, or performance hall, with graceful arched gateways, adorns the landscape. This natmandir is located at the southernmost point of the temple complex. Its striking triple-arch entrance faces the main temple, and its western and eastern sides are decorated with single-arch entrances. It is admirable that so much of the fallen masonry has been collected and stored inside the natmandir, even though the roof gave way to the forces of nature long ago. The structure remains an enigma that will never be fully understood.

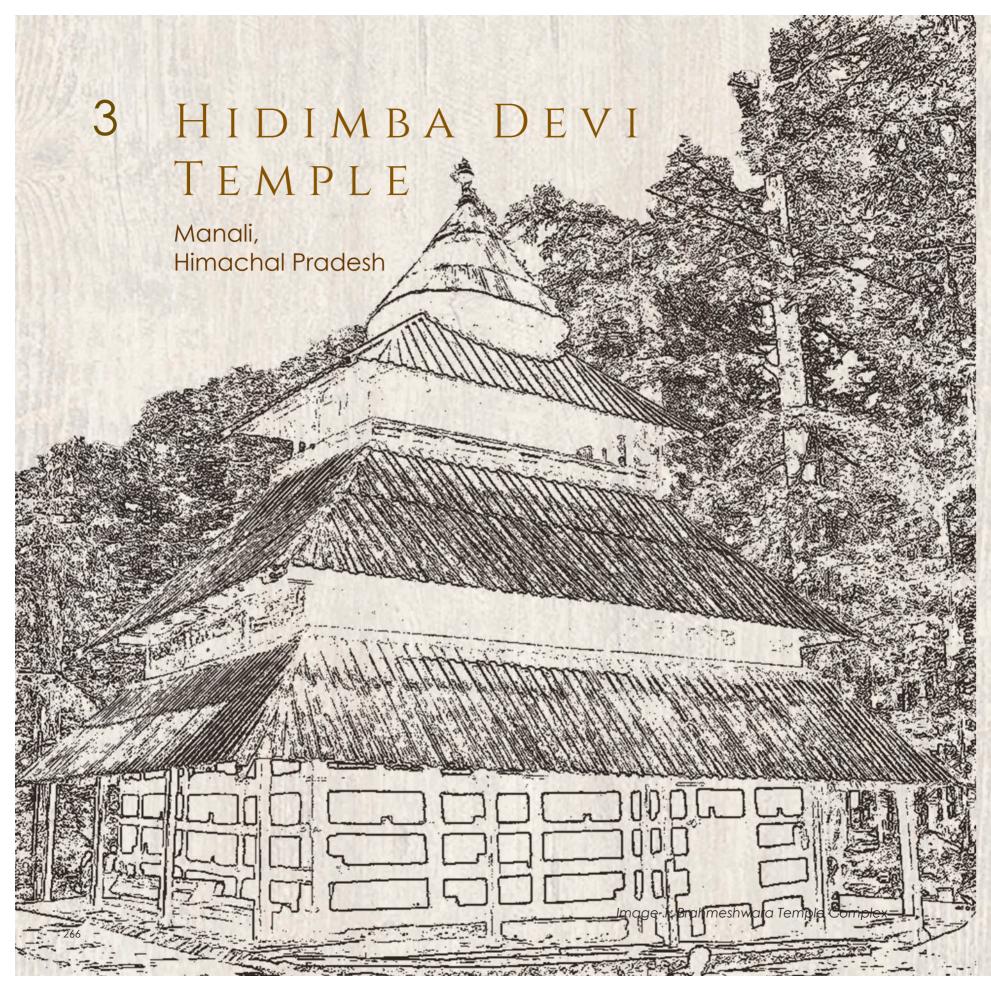


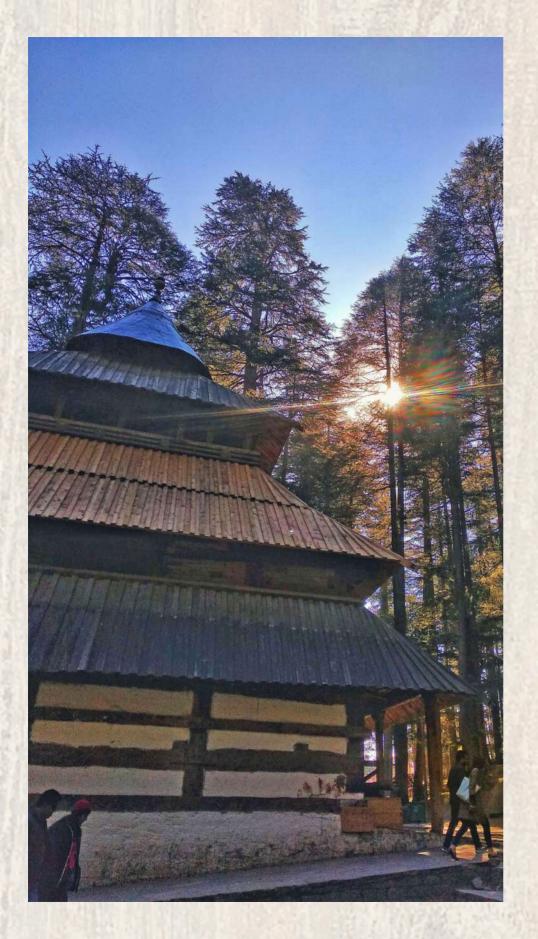


The original Krishna idol has been relocated to the Bishnupur palace of the Malla dynasty. To ensure the temple operates on a daily basis, everyday prayers are conducted using a simple photograph. Nevertheless, during the yearly Rathayatra and Holi celebrations, the idol is brought back to the temple for opulent and elaborate puja ceremonies.



Carved figures on the exterior facade of the Temple





Built in 1553 CE

**Dynasty** Rajas of Kullu

**Style**Kath Kuni Style,
Pagoda substyle

**Material** Wood, Mud

#### HISTORY

Standing amidst the serene deodar trees of Dhungiri Forest, the Hidimba Devi temple in Manali is a captivating sight for both believers and tourists. The temple is dedicated to Hidimba, the wife of Bhima, a central figure in the epic Mahabharata. According to legend, the temple stands where Hidimba meditated after her maternal responsibilities to Ghatotkacha had been fulfilled. Hidimba Devi is the patron deity of the royal family of Kullu, and during the coronation of the new king, her symbolic approval is required along with a buffalo sacrifice. This exquisite pagoda-style temple for the tutelary deity was built in 1553 by Raja Bahadur Singh, the Raja of Kullu.

The pagoda-style wooden temple has elaborate stonework and walls made of whitewashed mud. Its beautiful wooden doors are carved with images of Goddess Durga, different animals, scenes from Krishna's life, the navagrahas, etc. Interestingly, there is no idol inside the sanctum sanctorum. Instead, devotion is focused on a massive rock that has a rope suspended in front of it. It was once believed that the hands of sinners were bound to this rope and they were forced to swing against it as a form of penance.

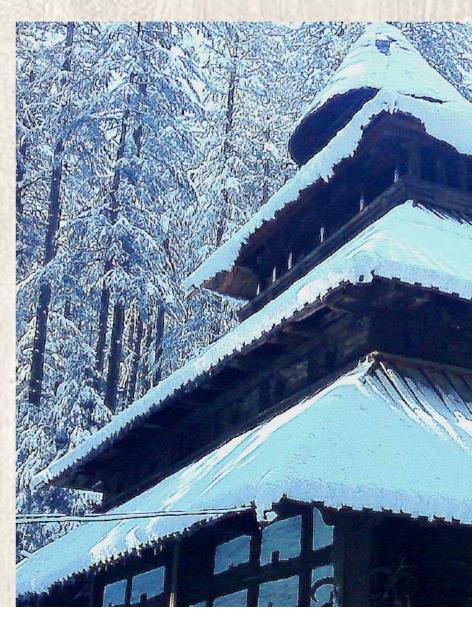


#### The Wooden Shikhara

The wooden shikhara crowning the garbhagriha of Goddess Hidimba is one of the prime attractions of the temple. Built in the pagoda substyle of Himachali Kath Kuni architecture, the shikhara has four storeys. The first three floors are square-shaped and have timber tiles, while a brass cone-shaped crown adorns the top level. The shikhara, receding towards the top, is specially designed to withstand the challenging climatic conditions of the region.



Intricately carved wooden panels



The Pandavas, during their vanvas, reached Himachal, and encountered a formidable demon named Hidimba, whom Bhimasena killed in combat. However, Bhimasena fell in love with Hidimbi, the sister of the asura, and together they had a son named Ghatotkacha. Once her son was capable of ruling the kingdom, Hidimbi went into isolation and meditated at Dhungiri. She then attained supernatural powers and transformed into a 'Devi,' becoming a protector of the region.

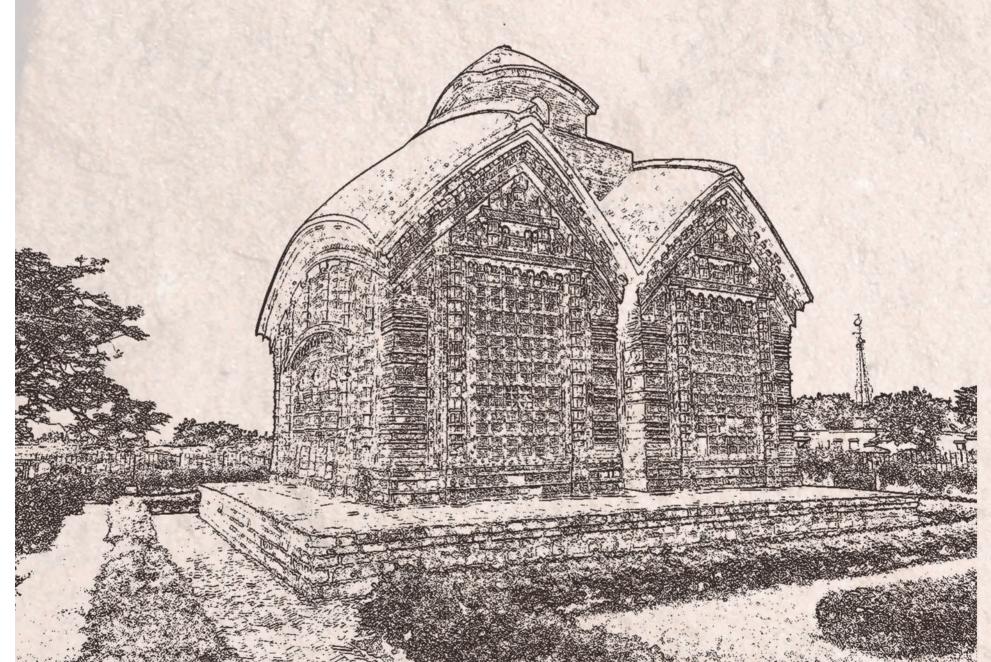


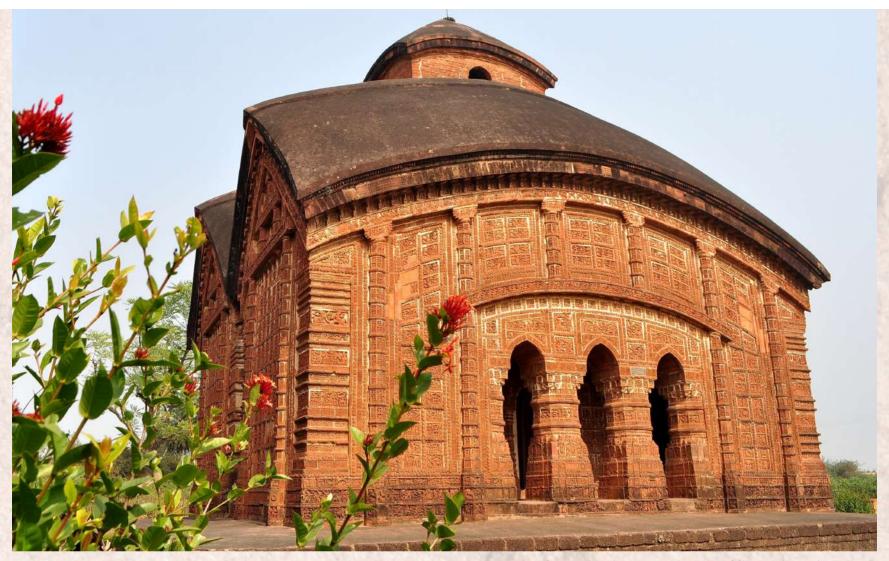


Carvings on the base of the wooden column

# 4 JOR BANGLA TEMPLE

Bishnupur, West Bengal





Carved entrance gateway of the Jorbangla Temple

#### **Built** in

Early 6th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Malla

#### Style

Bengali Do-challa styles

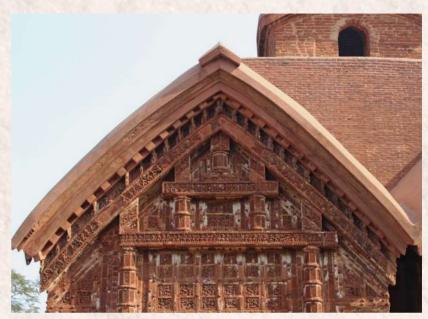
#### **Material**

Terracotta

#### HISTORY

The Jorbangla temple, situated in Bishnupur, West Bengal, is a remarkable example of the region's unique terracotta art and architecture. This temple was constructed by the Malla King Raghunath Singh in 1655, as per an inscription on the front facade of the temple. Also known as Kesta Rai temple, it ranks among the most famous temples in Bishnupur and is an important historical and cultural site in the area. It is well-known for its unique architectural style and intricate terracotta craftsmanship. For several centuries, the Malla dynasty dominated the Bishnupur region, fostering the growth of the distinctive terracotta art and architecture that characterize this region.

The temple derives its name from its distinctive architectural style known as do-chala. This design features a roof with dual curved surfaces, with one serving as a porch and the other as the shrine, seamlessly integrated. The temple faces south and is placed on a square platform, on top of which rise the two huts. These hut-like structures are crowned by a charchala shikhara. Both the exterior and interior are intricately carved with artwork showcasing a range of subjects, from scenes of everyday social life to mythological depictions. The temple is dedicated to Krishna and features an idol of Krishna in his rasa lila pose as the central deity of worship.



Architecture of the Jor Bangla Temple

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Terracotta Art

The elaborate terracotta work of the Jorbangla temple is what makes it truly unique. The entire facade of the temple is adorned with terracotta panels featuring a diverse range of subjects. These panels feature scenes from historical events, episodes from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Hindu mythology, Krishna lila, and depictions of everyday life during the Malla era. Not only does the terracotta art enhance the temple's aesthetic appeal, but it also provides a visual representation of the artistic and cultural diversity of that era.



Terracotta Art on the exterior wall

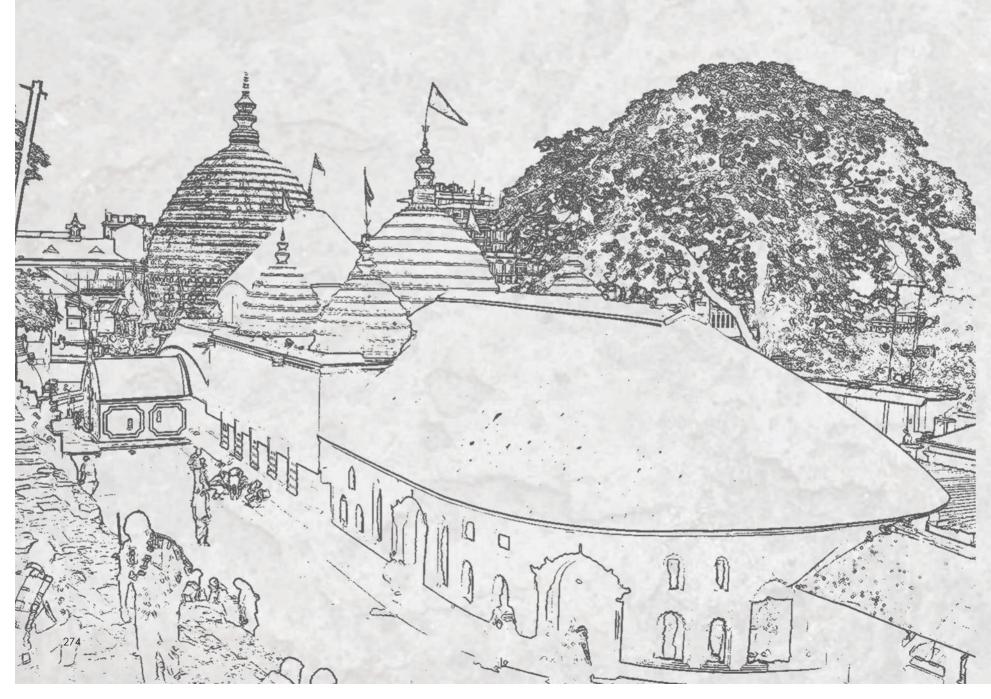


Terracotta Carvings on the exterior wall

Krishna lila, portrayed in exquisite detail on the walls of the temple, is culturally and religiously significant in Bengal. It has been celebrated through music, dance, and art for centuries, depicting tales of Krishna's childhood and romantic adventures, a theme deeply embedded in Bengali folk culture.

# 5 KAMAKHYA TEMPLE

Guwahati, Assam





Kamakhya Temple

#### **Built in** 15th century CE

**Dynasty** Koch

**Style**Nilachala

**Material** Stone

#### **HISTORY**

The Dwarkadhish Temple in Dwarka, Gujarat, boasts a lengthy and intriguing history strongly connected to mythology. With origins dating back thousands of years, the temple has undergone centuries of evolution and has been preserved by various dynasties and rulers, ensuring its enduring role as the centre of religious and cultural activities. The temple contains some materials that predate even 200 BCE. The present-day temple was rebuilt in the 16th century under the direction of the revered saint Vallab Acharya, the founder of the Vaishnavite Pushti Marg sect.

The Kamakhya temple has a basic nagara architectural style with a garbagriha and a shikhara and is built on two levels, with the garbagriha situated six feet below the level of the mandapa. The remnants of the original temple are limited to the adhishtana and vimana sections. A horizontal band of human figures reminiscent of those found in Khajuraho adorns the vimana. While the lower part of the structure is constructed from stone, the shikhara, resembling a polygonal beehive-like dome, is crafted from bricks, a distinctive feature commonly found in temples throughout the Kamrup region. Encircling the shikhara are several angashikaras inspired by minarets designed in the Bengali charchala style as well as by the spires of the wooden rathas dedicated to Jagannatha. Both the shikhara and the garbagriha are built in the pancharatha plan style. The temple has three additional chambers, the calanta, the pancharatna, and the natamandir.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### Garbhagriha

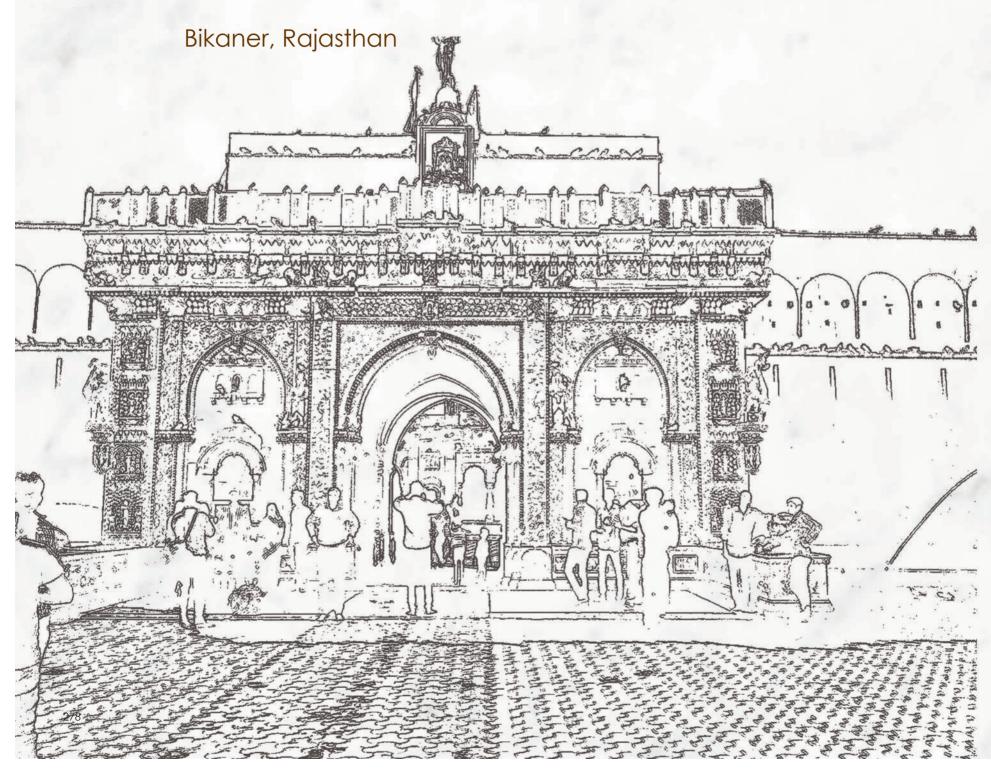
The garbagriha of the Kamakhya temple has a yoni-like fissure in the rock instead of a deity's image. This small and dimly lit inner sanctum is accessible through narrow, steep stone steps. Within the cave, there lies a slanted stone surface that slopes downwards on both sides, forming a yoni-like depression approximately 10 inches deep. This hollow remains constantly filled with water from an underground spring. This vulva-shaped depression is venerated as Kamakhya herself and is regarded as the most sacred pitha, or abode, of the goddess. The garbagrihas in the other temples within the Kamakhya complex share the same architectural feature: a yoni-shaped stone filled with water, positioned below ground level.

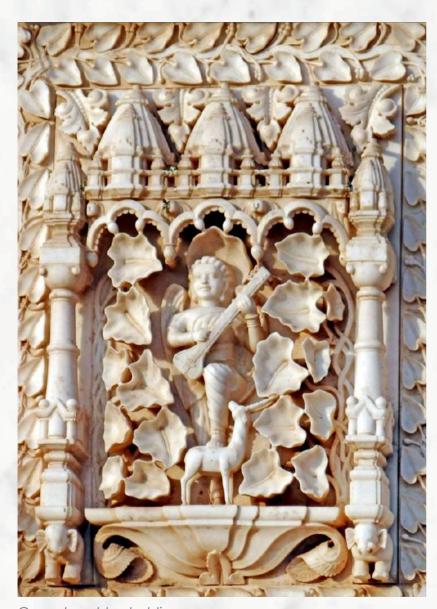


Background: Carvings on the Exterior wall



# 6 KARNI MATA TEMPLE





Carved marble cladding

### Built in

19th-20th centuries CE

#### **Dynasty**

Rathore

#### Style

Rajputana

#### **Material**

Marble

#### **HISTORY**

The Karni Mata temple is dedicated to Karni Mata, believed to be an incarnation of the Hindu deity Durga. During the 14th century, she was a revered ascetic, belonging to the Charan caste. At the behest of the local authorities, she even helped construct the forts of Mehrangarh and Bikaner. Among her numerous temples, the most well-known one is located in Deshnoke, approximately thirty kilometres from Bikaner. This temple was completed in the early 20th century under the patronage of Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner. According to a well-known legend surrounding the Goddess, Laxman, her stepson, drowned in Kapil Sarovar. After fervent prayers with Yama, the God of Death, it was foretold that Laxman and all of Karni Mata's male children would be reborn as rats.

The Karni Mata temple, an architectural marvel, is meticulously crafted from pristine marble, showcasing the influence of Mughal architecture. This splendid edifice boasts of solid silver doors at its entrance, featuring intricately designed panels that narrate the numerous legends associated with the revered Goddess. Inside the inner sanctum of the temple, a 75 cm tall idol of Karni Mata of Bikaner stands, resplendent in her regal attire and adorned with a trident (trishul), a crown, and garlands. Flanking the Goddess are statues of her sisters, creating a harmonious presence. In 1999, Kundan Lal Verma, a Karni jeweler from Hyderabad, contributed to the temple's embellishments by adding exquisite marble carvings and crafting the silver gates, further enhancing its splendour and grandeur.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT



Marble cladding etched with intricate patterns

#### The Mughal Architectural Style

The Karni Mata temple is a prime example of Mughal architecture, which skillfully blends elements from the Mughal dynasty, which ruled India from the 16th to the mid-19th century. The temple is renowned for its exquisite carvings, which may be seen throughout the temple as etched geometric patterns, floral motifs, and intricate patterns in marble. The pointed arches and bulbous domes that gracefully adorn the temple's entrances and passageways bear the hallmark of the influence of the Mughals. White marble, a characteristic material of Mughal architecture, adds to the visual splendour of the temple. The central sanctum of the temple is surrounded by structures that exhibit the symmetry and balance that are characteristic of Mughal architecture. The temple also has elaborate stone screens known as jalis, which allow filtered light to pass through. The Karni Mata temple successfully combines historical and cultural influences, despite not having tall minarets, by incorporating smaller decorative elements reminiscent of Mughal architecture.



Rats being fed milk as an offering

The Karni Mata temple in Bikaner is well-known for its over 25,000 resident rats, which are considered sacred and revered by visitors. Rats freely roam around the temple and are fed with food as part of a sacred ritual. Among these rats, white ones are especially revered, as they are believed to be the incarnations of Karni Mata and her sons. It is a customary practice for people to come from all over India and overseas and offer milk and sweets to these sacred rats.



## **Built in** 595 - 605 CE

#### **Dynasty**

Paduvamshis of Dakshina Kosala

#### Style

Gupta Style

#### **Material**

Brick and Sandstone

#### **HISTORY**

Formerly called Sripura, Sirpur served as the capital of the Sharabhapuriya and Panduvamshi dynasties, and was the political hub of the South Kosala region. The Sirpur Group of Monuments is the name given to a collection of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain monuments that had been unearthed during excavations in Sirpur. Among these, the oldest monument is the Lakshmana Temple. An inscription on this temple confirms that Queen Vasata, the mother of Panduvamshi King Mahashivagupta Balarjuna, built it in remembrance of her late husband, Harshagupta. Dedicated in the second part of the 7th century, this temple stands as one of the finest brick temples in all of India.

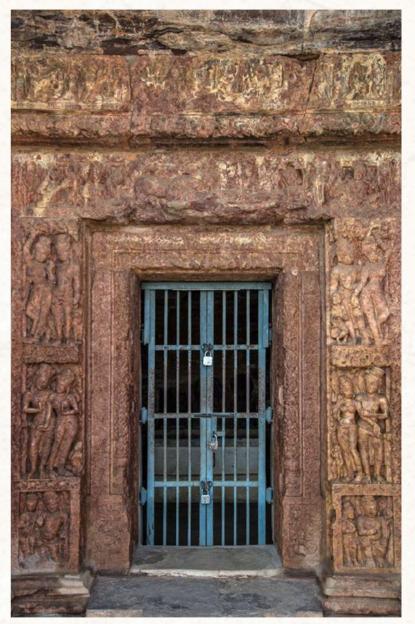


The temple, which is an architectural link between the early Gupta and later Nagara styles, was constructed following a pancha-ratha plan. It is situated on an elevated platform (jagati), which can be accessed through two lateral staircases. The temple comprises a garbhaariha, an antarala, and a mandapa. Although, according to historian Percy Brown, the mandapa was added later and now lies in ruins, the pillar capitals of the oblona mandapa are still visible. The hall is divided into three aisles by two rows of pillars, leading to a small antarala. The garbhagriha has a majestic curvilinear shikhara that has a pyramidal shape and four storeys. Notably, there is no idol within the sanctum. The external walls of the antarala and garbhagriha are decorated with niches and chaitva arches.

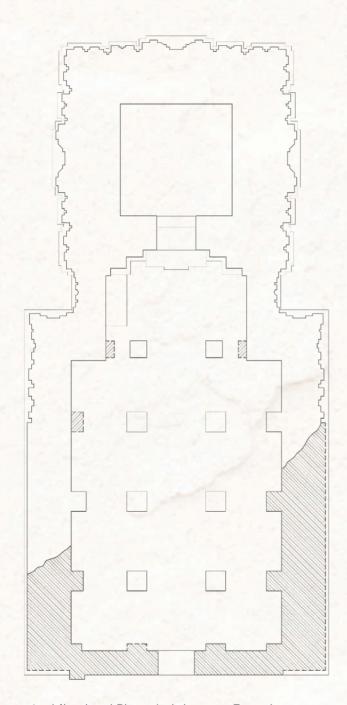
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Stone Doorway

Undoubtedly, the stone doorway of the garbhagriha of the Lakshmana temple is the most splendid structure inside the complex. Made of red sandstone, the doorframes have five decorated bands. The two innermost bands have patrasakha and ratna-sakha carvings. The middle band features depictions of kinnara-mithunas and dwarapalakas, while the door jambs have a fine sculpture of Seshasayi Vishnu. Patravali carvings adorn the fourth band, and the final band is a sculptural extravaganza depicting various Vishnu avatars and scenes from Krishnalila.



Stone Doorway



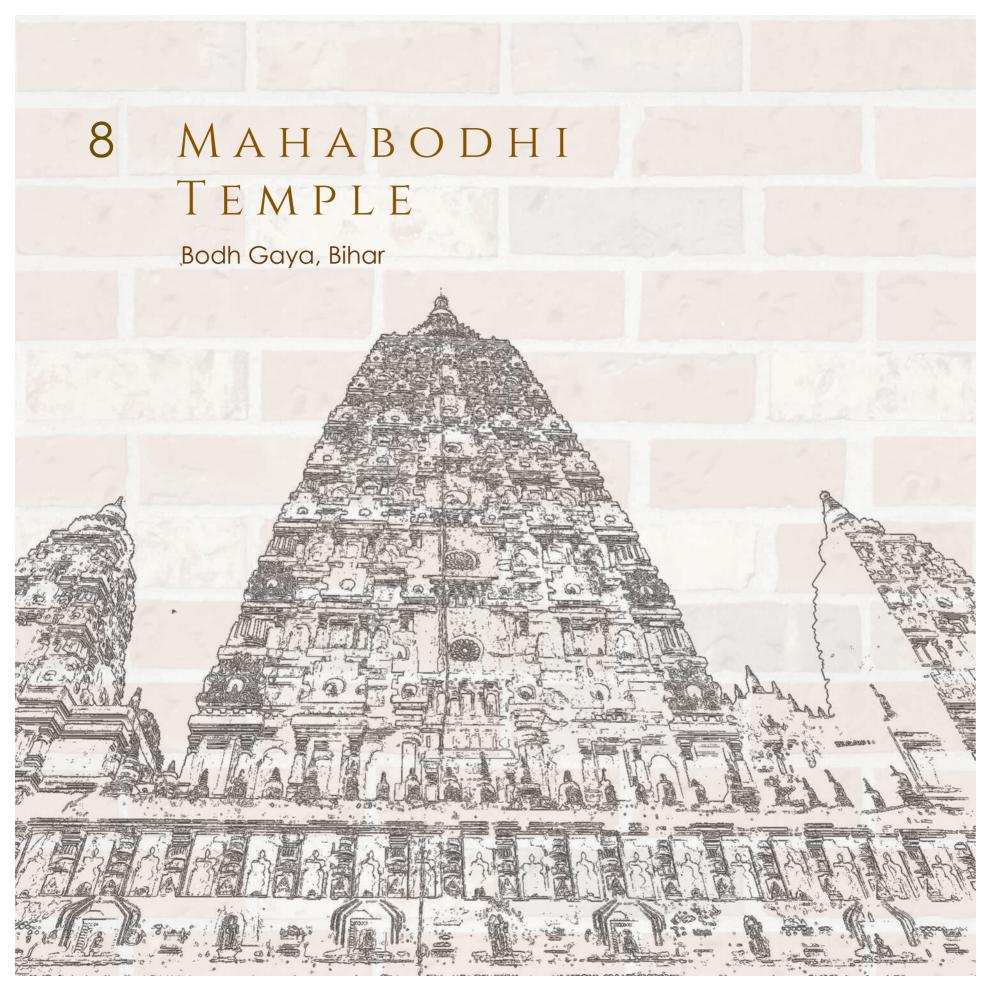
Architectural Plan - Lakshmana Temple





View of Lakshmana Temple entrance

According to the dedicatory inscription in the Lakshmana temple, the invoked deity is Purushothama-Narasimha, a manifestation of Lord Vishnu. The temple gets its name from the black stone statue of Lakshmana, discovered inside the temple premises, depicting him seated on a hooded snake. This statue is the reason behind the temple being known by that name.





Mahabodhi Temple Complex

#### **Built in**

5th to 6th centuries CE

#### **Dynasty**

Gupta

#### **Style**

Gupta

#### **Material**

Brick

#### **HISTORY**

The Mahabodhi Mahavihara is one of the four holy sites associated with the life of Buddha. It is the place where Gautama Buddha is believed to have attained Enlightenment. The site's evolution can be traced over the centuries, with the earliest wooden enclosure around the Bodhi Tree built by King Pasenadi, the ruler of Kosala and a lay follower of Buddha, in the 6th century BCE. 200 years later, Emperor Ashoka is said to have visited the site and erected a pavilion in the form of a tree-shrine or a bodhi-ghara. The Vajarasana, also known as the Diamond Throne, is believed to date back to the 3rd century BCE. The standing structure at Bodh Gaya, however, is thought to have been built in the 6th century CE, with the possibility of restoration work being undertaken on an earlier structure.

The temple is east-facing and features entrances from both the east and the north. Its low basement is adorned with designs of honeysuckle and geese. Above this base, a series of niches house Buddha images, followed by ornamental moldings and chaitya niches. Rising above is the curvilinear shikhara crowned with an amalaka and kalasha. At each corner of the temple's parapet, small shrine chambers shelter statues of Buddha, each surmounted by a tower. Beyond the entrance there is a small hall leading to the sanctum, which houses a seated Buddha statue, over 5 feet tall, symbolizing his Enlightenment with the Earth as witness. Above the sanctum, the main hall holds a shrine with another Buddha statue, where senior monks congregate for meditation. This path is adorned with significant sites linked to events following the Buddha's Enlightenment, interspersed with votive stupas and shrines.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Vajrasana or the Diamond Throne

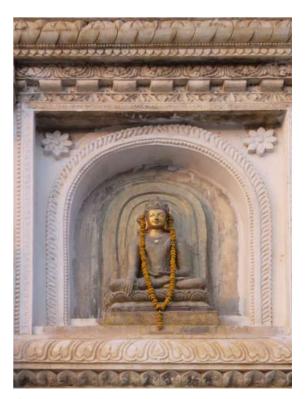
Adjacent to the sacred Bodhi Tree, a significant structure that graces the temple complex is a polished sandstone platform known as Vairasana, or the Diamond Throne. This remarkable platform carries historical significance, as it was originally commissioned by Emperor Ashoka to mark the exact spot where Buddha engaged in deep meditation. In the past, this hallowed site beneath the majestic Bodhi Tree was enclosed by a sandstone balustrade. However, only a few of the original pillars that once formed this balustrade remain in situ. These ancient pillars offer a alimpse into the craftsmanship of yesteryears and are adorned with intricate carvings depicting human faces, various animals, and ornate decorative elements.



Diamond Throne or Vajrasana

`Temple Shikhara

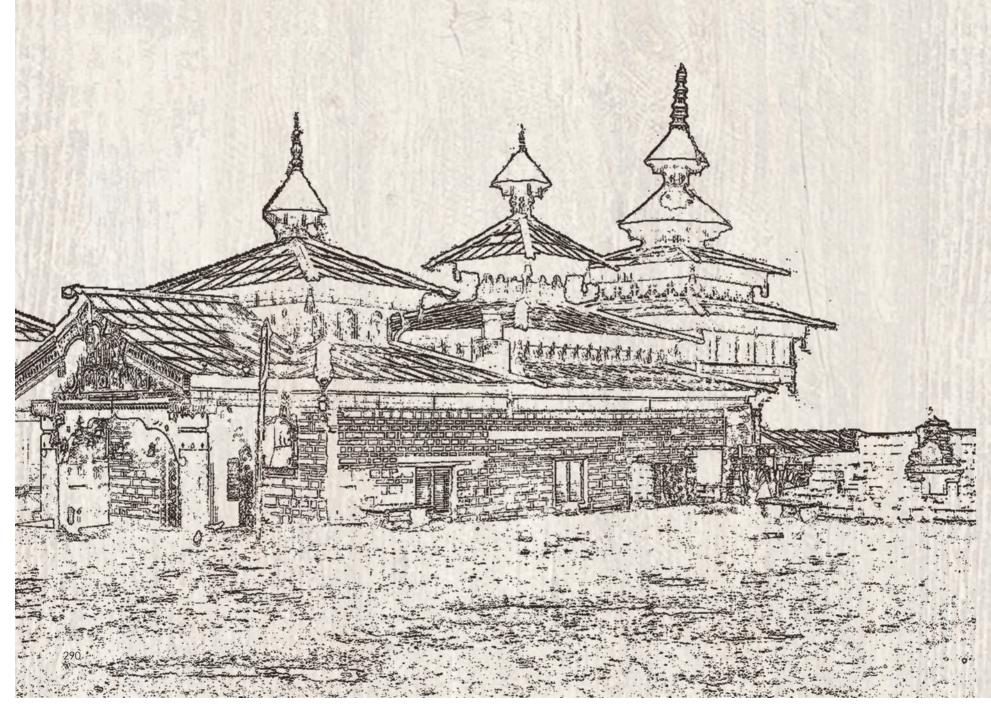
On ascending the central path south of the main temple, one encounters a shrine of significant historical and religious importance. Nestled within this shrine is a standing Buddha statue. What truly distinguishes this sacred spot are the revered footprints, known as padas, of the Buddha, carved in black stone. These ancient relics, dating back to the 3rd century BC, represent a pivotal moment in history when Emperor Ashoka proclaimed Buddhism as the official state religion and placed thousands of such footprint stones throughout his empire, symbolising the profound spiritual journey of the Buddha.

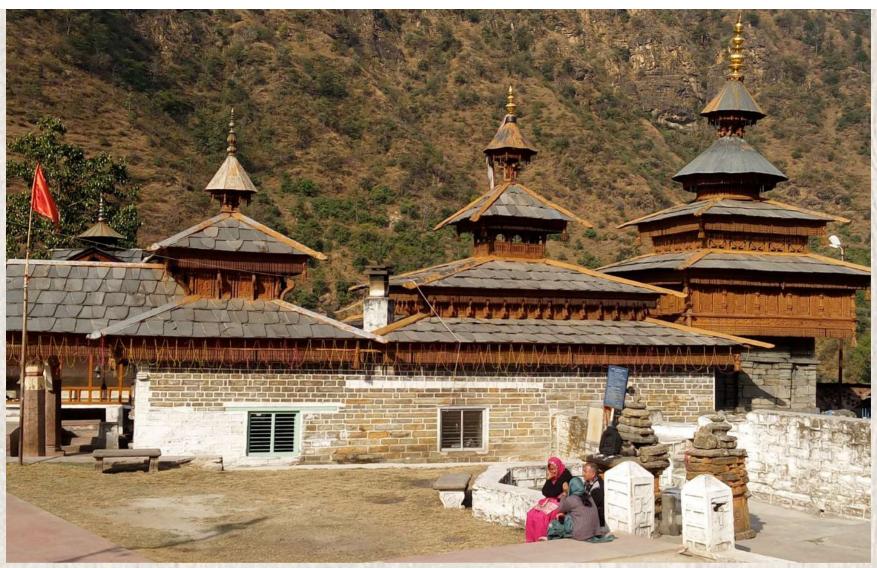


Carved Buddha sculpture

# 9 MAHASU DEVTA TEMPLE

Hanol, Uttrakhand





Mahasu Devta Temple Complex

## **Built in** 9th century CE

**Dynasty** Unknown

**Style**Koti Banal style

**Material**Stone and Wood

#### **HISTORY**

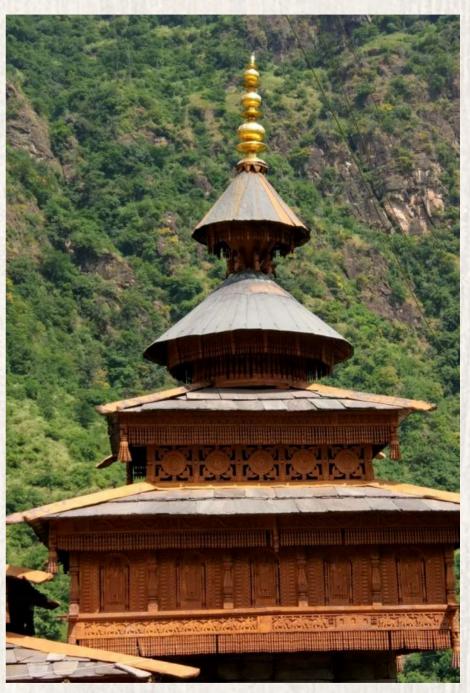
The Mahasu Devta temple in Hanol is a unique place of worship that honours Lord Mahasu in his four avatars as brothers. Because it maintains a theocracy in the region, the Mahasu cult is highly significant in the local way of life. According to the ASI, the Mulaprahsada site dates back to the 9th century CE. While the precise builder of the temple is unknown, local legend attributes its construction to King Duryodana, who was believed to have received Lord Mahasu's blessings. During the British Raj, a British official named Major Young attempted to outlaw the theoretical adjuration with a formal decree, but it had little impact on the locals, and the cult persisted in its strength and popularity.

The temple consists of an open portico (mukhamandapa), a sabhamandapa, a bhandar, a vestibule, and the garbhagriha. The garbhagriha has a rekha-nagara stone shikhara with four levels and a conical canopy crowned with a kalash. The vestibule and the bhandar, a place where sacramental objects are stored, share a common roof, which has a three-tiered conical shikhara. The mukhamandapa has a two-tier shikhara, and its entrance has an ornamental arch supported by two pillars.

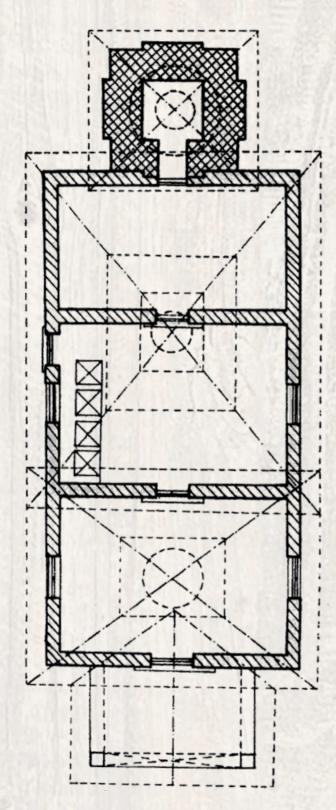
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Koti Banal Temple Style

The Mahasu Devta temple is a stellar example of the local Koti Banal architectural style, specifically designed for the high altitude and rough terrains of the region. Stone and wood from local sources were used to build the temple. The top of the temple also has the typical Koti Banal slate roofing. The low temple walls, built using mixed-masonry techniques made of wood and stone, give the building a distinctive look.



Koti Banal slate roofing



Architectural Plan of Mahsu Devta Temple

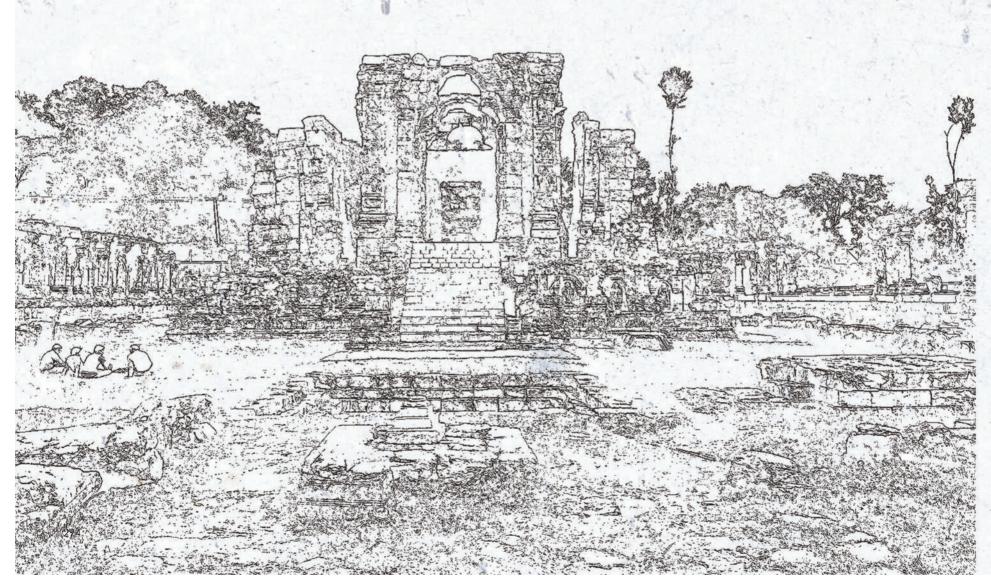
The Lotapani adjuration is a unique folk custom rooted in the Mahasu cult. In this ritual, a neutral person fills a metallic goblet with water and offers it to both parties who are in dispute. It is believed that the party who makes false statements will be afflicted by the water. This adjuration takes place within a theocratic setting where the birs (attendants of Mahasu) are responsible for the administration of justice.



Carved and decorated fascia board

# 10 MARTAND SUN TEMPLE

Anantnag, Jammu & Kashmir





Martand Sun Temple

**Built in** 8th century CE

**Dynasty** Karkota

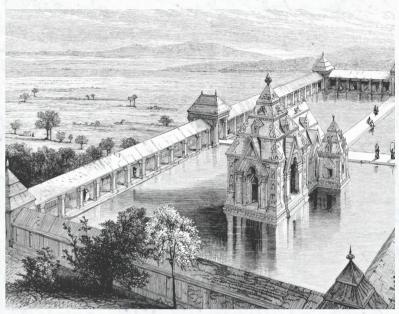
**Style**Multiple styles

**Material** Limestone

#### **HISTORY**

The Martand Sun temple, often considered one of the most exquisite monuments ever made by humans, is a unique blend of local Kashmiri as well as Gandhara, Greek, Roman, and Syrian-Byzantine architectural styles. According to historical accounts by Kalhana, the temple was constructed in the 8th century under the patronage of Lalitaditya Mukhapida, one of the most illustrious rulers in the history of Kashmir. Lalitadiya, the fifth king of the Karkota dynasty, claimed to be from the lineage of Surya. The temple was destroyed in the 15th century during the reign of Shah Mir, as recorded by Jonaraja in his Dvitiya Rajatarangini. The temple, though now in ruins, attracts huge numbers of devotees and tourists.

Located atop a plateau, the Martand Sun temple features three courtyard entrances crowned with distinctive pyramidal superstructures typical of Kashmir. At its heart lies the garbhagriha (sanctum proper), accompanied by a small vestibule and an adjoining mandapa, which was initially supported by 84 pillars. The remnants of the pillared hall still endure. The entire structure is placed on an elevated platform and culminates in a pyramidal shikhara at its zenith. A fusion of architectural influences is evident in the temple's columns, pillars, and ornate fritters, revealing a distinct Greek inspiration interwoven with Kashmiri elements.



Artistic rendetion - original temple as restored in 1870

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### **The Colonnaded Courtyard**

The entire temple structure dedicated to Lord Surya is enclosed in a colonnaded courtyard with three entrances. The concrete pillars and columns, which are now in a dilapidated state, resemble Greco-Roman architectural endeavours. Martand's peristyle colonnade is the largest among all the Kashmiri temples. The courtyard once enclosed a roofed parikrama path, which is now faded into antiquity.



Colonnaded Courtyard



Ruins of the Temple complex

Muriel Talbot, a British-origin poetess who lived in Kashmir during 1896–1900, was struck by the sheer beauty of the temple. She wrote a poem about the temple, which was published in her book *Chenar Leaves* in 1921.

"Temple of the Sun! High radiant beam
Illumes this broken altar, and still fills
These shattered halls at dawn with his clear light
Through human hands many no more lovingly tend"



#### **Built in** 5th century CE

**Dynasty** Uchcha Kalpas

**Style**Gupta

**Material** Stone

#### **HISTORY**

One of India's oldest temples still standing is the Parvati temple in Nachna-Kuthara, dedicated to Lord Shiva. Given that there is a bigger Shiva temple in the vicinity, Alexander Cunningham, who explored Nachna in 1883–1884, thought that this temple was a Parvati temple. Unfortunately, the temple lacks a dedicatory inscription, making it difficult to determine who built it. An inscription discovered on a village *talai* (well) claims that Uchcha Kalpas, feudatories of the Vakatakas in the 4th and 5th centuries CE, ruled over the village. Historians, therefore, often credit the Uchcha Kalpas as the temple's patron.



The Parvati temple has a simple layout, featuring a garbhagriha, pradakshinapatha, and a mandapa on an elevated platform (jagati). Accessible via a staircase, the small mandapa sits on the platform. The pradakshinapatha, once had a roof, which is now lost. This temple holds the oldest surviving circumambulatory path, making it the most ancient sandhara temple today. The outer walls are intricately carved, forming grottos, caves, and niches adorned with human and animal figures. The garbhagriha is a perfectly cubical structure and includes two storeys, while the purpose of the inaccessible upper storey remains unclear.

## ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Door Reliefs

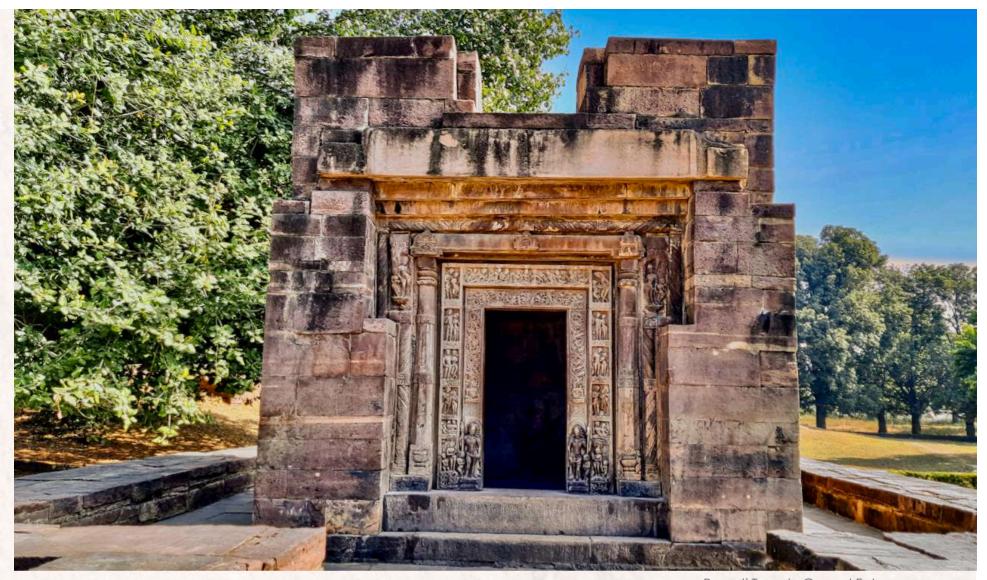
The door leading to the garbhagriha of the temple offers an array of breath taking sculptures. The temple's doorway features four bands, or sakhas, with the innermost band flanked by dwarapalakas and trishula-ayudhapurushas at the base. Ganas and floral motifs can be seen in its upper section. Goddess Ganga with a crocodile and Goddess Yamuna with a turtle are carved at the base of the second sakha with remarkable precision. Towards the top, the band depicts kinnara-mithunas engaged in various romantic scenes. The remaining two are plain bands, with the third one having kalashas at the base. The top of the lintel has seated men and women, with Vinadhara Shiva in maharaja lilasana and Parvati Devi positioned in the middle.



Carvings at the Temple



Door Reliefs

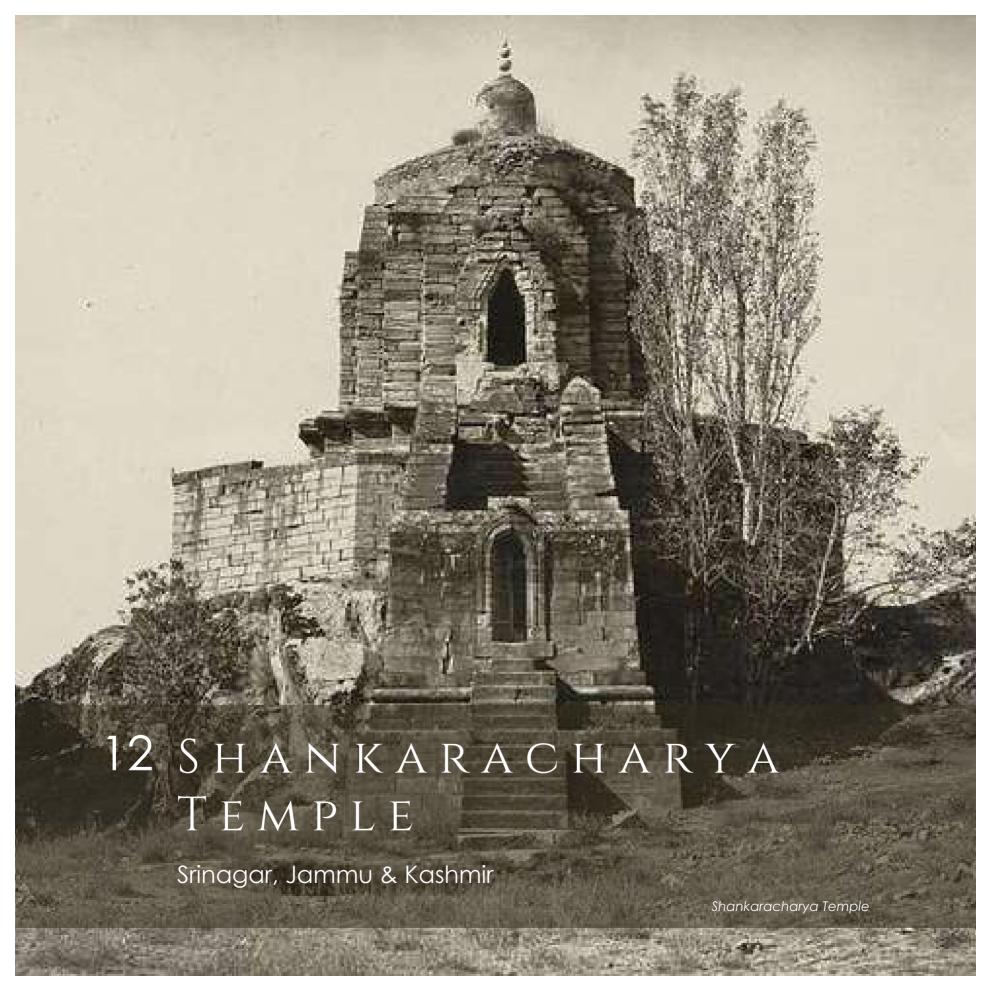


Parvati Temple Carved Entrance



Carvings at the Temple

The temple premises has yielded the earliest lithic *Ramayana* panels available in the country. The six panels depict various scenes, including Sita and Lakshman while Ravan, disguised as Ram, shouts for help; Ravan seeking alms from Sita; Hanuman's meeting with Ram and Lakshman; the Vali-Sugreeva conflict; Ram aiming an arrow at Vali; and Hanuman in Ravan's court. Some historians argue that these panels could have originally been part of a ruined Vaishnava temple rather than being part of the Parvati temple.





Shankaracharya Temple

#### **Built in**

4th century BCE - 20th century CE

#### **Dynasty**

Multiple dynasties

#### Style

Kashmiri style

#### **Material**

Stone

#### **HISTORY**

The Shankaracharya temple is the oldest temple in Kashmir. According to historical accounts by Kalhana, the temple was built by King Gopaditya as a Jyestehswara Shiva shrine in the 4th century CE. However, other historical accounts suggest King Jalauka of Kashmir, the son of Ashoka the Great, with building the temple in 200 BCE. Diverse accounts assert that during their individual eras, the temple was associated with monarchs like Mihirakula, Lalitaditya Mukhapida, and Gulab Singh Dogra. It is also believed that Adi Shankara wrote his Soundarya Lahiri here, during a visit to the temple in the 8th century CE. In 1925, the Mysore Maharaja, while on a visit to the temple, sponsored electrical installations in the temple. The Shankaracharya statue in the temple is relatively recent, having being installed in 1961.

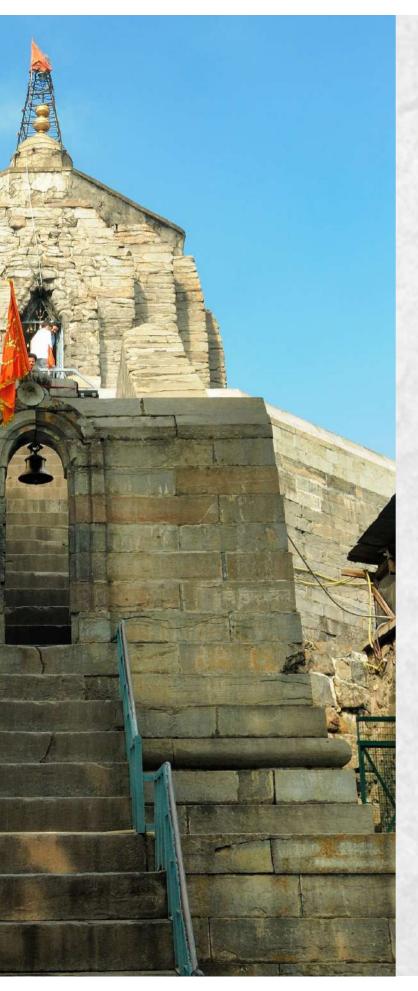
The Shankaracharya temple is a square-shaped structure mounted on a solid rock base with an octagonal shape. The base measures 20 feet, and the garbhagriha is accessed from the ground through a flight of steps. The ceiling of the temple is supported by four octagonal shafts. The garbhagriha is relatively small and dark, where an oval-shaped Shivalinga encircled by Sheshnaag is worshipped. Overlooking the garbhagriha, a shikhara-like superstructure rises to a height of 30 feet in the temple. Aurel Stein says the shikhara is a relatively recent addition. Situated within the complex, behind the slab-built temple, is a 10-square-foot white marble tank.

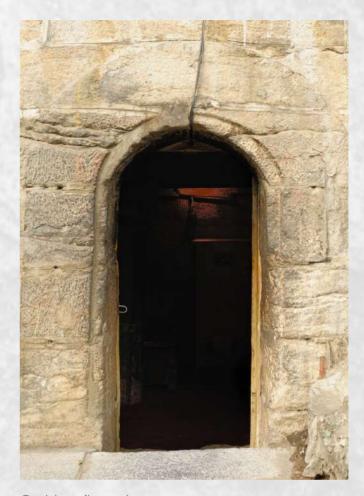
# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Temple Steps

The Shankaracharya Shivalaya is perched atop an octagonal platform, 6.1 metres high. There are 36 steps leading up to the elevated terrace's garbhagriha. Hinduism places a lot of importance on the number 36, as it represents the 36 fundamental elements believed to constitute the universe. Hence, the 36 steps in the temple symbolically represent these fundamental elements within the temple.



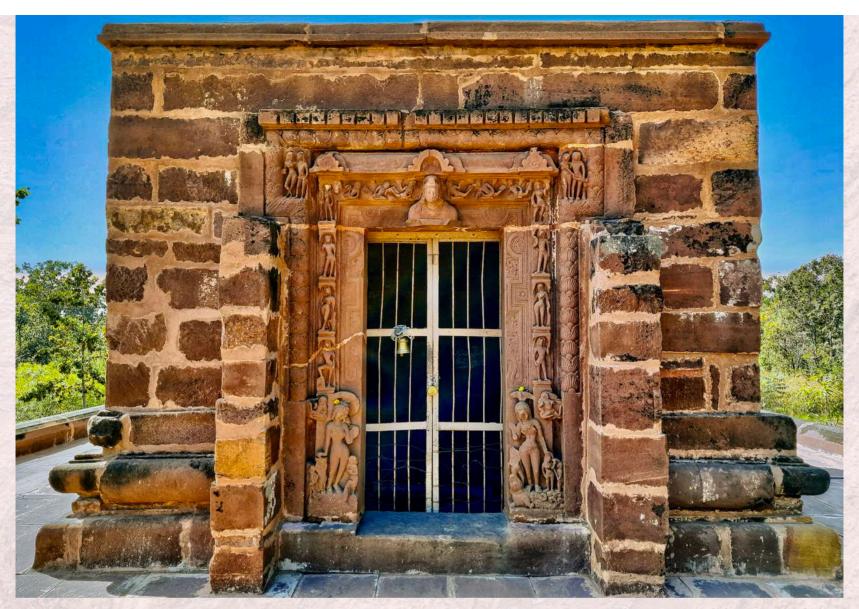




Garbhagriha entrance

Local folktales in the area have intriguing accounts claiming that Jesus Christ stopped by the temple during his lifetime, with some tales even stating that he briefly resided here as well. There are wall inscriptions on the temple's steps leading to the inner shrine that make a reference to this story.





Shiva Temple, Satna

**Built in** 5th - 6th century CE

**Dynasty** Gupta

**Style**Gupta

**Material**Red Sandstone

#### HISTORY

The Bhumara Temple, an ancient stone sanctuary dating back to the Gupta period (late 5th or early 6th century CE) in Madhya Pradesh, is one of the earliest stone temples in India. There is no concrete information regarding the patron of the temple. However, an inscription discovered on the site mentions the kingdoms of Maharaja Hastin from the Parivrajaka family and Maharaja Sarvantha of Uchchakalpa. The temple once featured remarkable reliefs, including the earliest known sculptural representation of Ganesha. Today, only the garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) remains amidst the ruins, offering a glimpse of its ancient grandeur.

The temple is placed on an elevated platform (jagati), which is accessed through a staircase. Originally, the temple had a garbhagriha (sanctum), a covered pradakshinapatha, and a mandapa. Both the sanctum and the circumambulatory path are square-shaped. The temple is one of the earliest Indian temples to feature a pradkshinapatha. The surviving garbhagriha has an intricately carved doorway leading to the ekamukha linga. Although no structure has survived, some historians argue that the gang reliefs found in the ruins were part of the bhumis of the shikharas. The discovery of amalakas on the premises also points towards the experience of a shikhara. According to Joanna Willimas, the erstwhile mandapa had three doors with interior columns and flower friezes along the top.



Intricately carved doorway

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Intricately Carved Doorway

The elegantly sculpted doorway is one of the most captivating features of the temple, characteristic of the contemporary Gupta-era temples. The door to the sanctum of the ekamukhi Shiva in the Bhumara temple is comprised of three sakhas (bands). The outermost band features interconnected lotus motifs, while the innermost band showcases meticulously carved geometric shapes. The middle sakha, with four panels each, depicts male and female figures. On the lintel, the bust of Shiva with three gandharvas on each side, can be seen under a small chaitya arch. The River Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna mounted on Makara and Kachhapa, respectively, flank the bottom of the door jambs with their attendants.

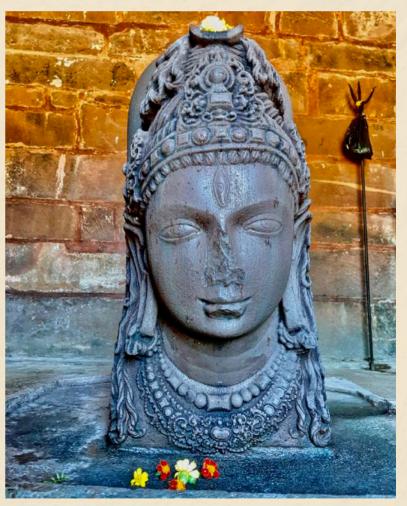


Intricate carvings on the doorway



Sculpture at the Shiva Temple

The Bhumara temple is renowned among art lovers for its *chandrashalas*, which are chaityalike windows with depictions of deities inside the arch. The temple yielded two small *chandrashalas* featuring dancing Shiva and dancing Gana, four medium-sized ones displaying Ganesha, Brahma, Kubera, and Vishnu, and four large *chandrashalas* showcasing Kumara, Mahishamardini, Surya, and Yama. Notably, among these, the Ganesha Relief is the earliest known surviving sculptural representation of Lord Ganesha.



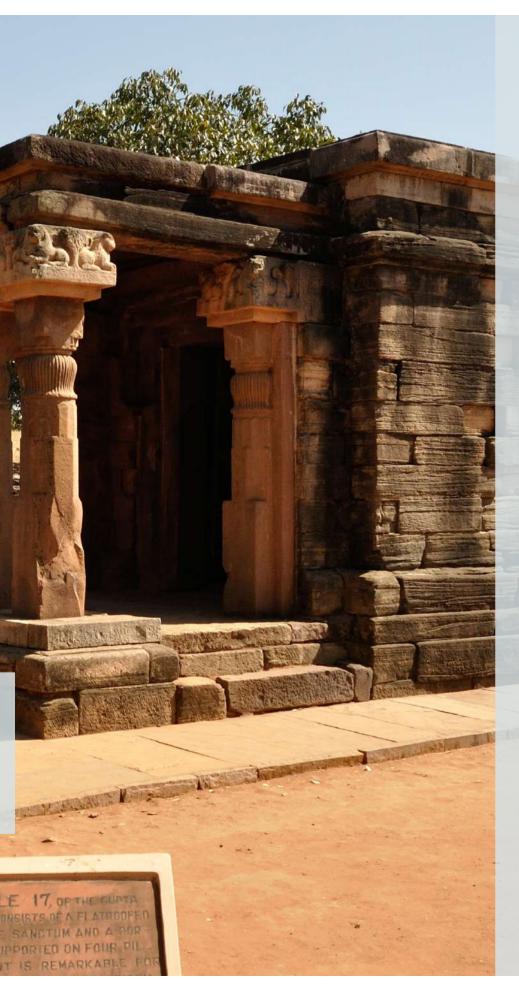
Ekamukha Shiva Lingam



# 14 TEMPLE NO.17

Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh

मन्दिर १७ गप्रकार की कृति है। इस की यत समस्त है। हम में एक तंशीकार गर्भगृह तथा ह्यार स्तरभी पर टिकाहण मुख्यमण्डण साम्पालन हैं ,प्रगोकी प्रमुखातिका तथा TEMPLE
PERIODONISU
SQUARE SA
TICO SUPPO



**Built in** 5th century CE

**Dynasty** Gupta

**Style**Gupta

**Material** Stone

#### **HISTORY**

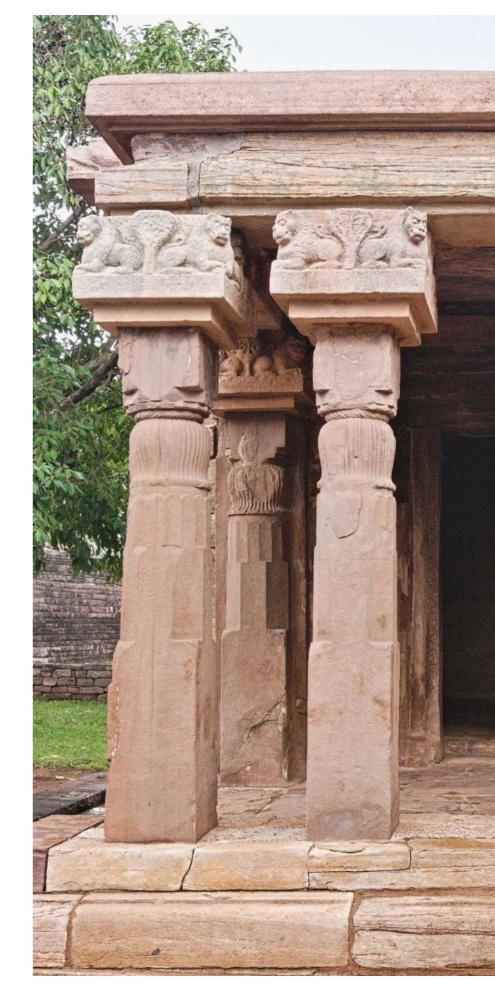
Temple 17, a stone marvel located within the Sanchi complex, dates back to the early 5th century, making it one of India's oldest stone temples. Despite its understated elegance when compared to later architectural marvels, this temple holds immense historical significance in India's temple-building heritage. However, its religious affiliation, whether Brahminical or Buddhist, remains uncertain. This temple represents a pivotal point in the evolution of Indian temple architecture, as its simple layout served as a prototype for the subsequent development of Nagara or Indo-Aryan temple architecture.

Temple 17 in Sanchi, has a simple plan that consists of a sanctum (garbhagriha) and a pillared porch. The sanctum is square-shaped, and lacks a superstructure on top, with a flat roof covering the rectangular sanctuary. Both the interior and exterior of the temple are undecorated, while the four pillars that support the porch are intricately carved. These pillars are octagonal shafts with a square base, ascending to bell capitals, where perfectly carved lions crown the tops.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

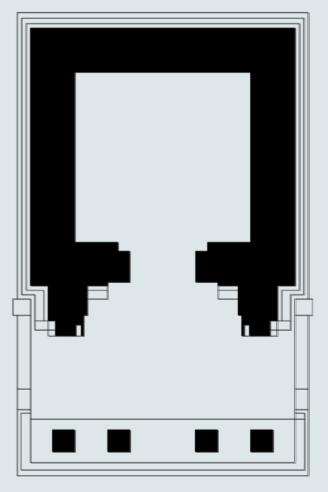
#### The Greek Influence

Temple 17 was heavily influenced by Greek architecture, which the Indo-Greeks popularised in India, much like many other modern Gupta-era constructions. The temple's basic design, which has a rectangular sanctuary with a porch held up by columns, is reminiscent of Greek temple architecture. Noted Buddhism historian P. V. Bapat pointed out that the structure's appropriate proportions and symmetry, its plane surfaces, and its understated ornamentation give it a look reminiscent of ancient Greek temples.

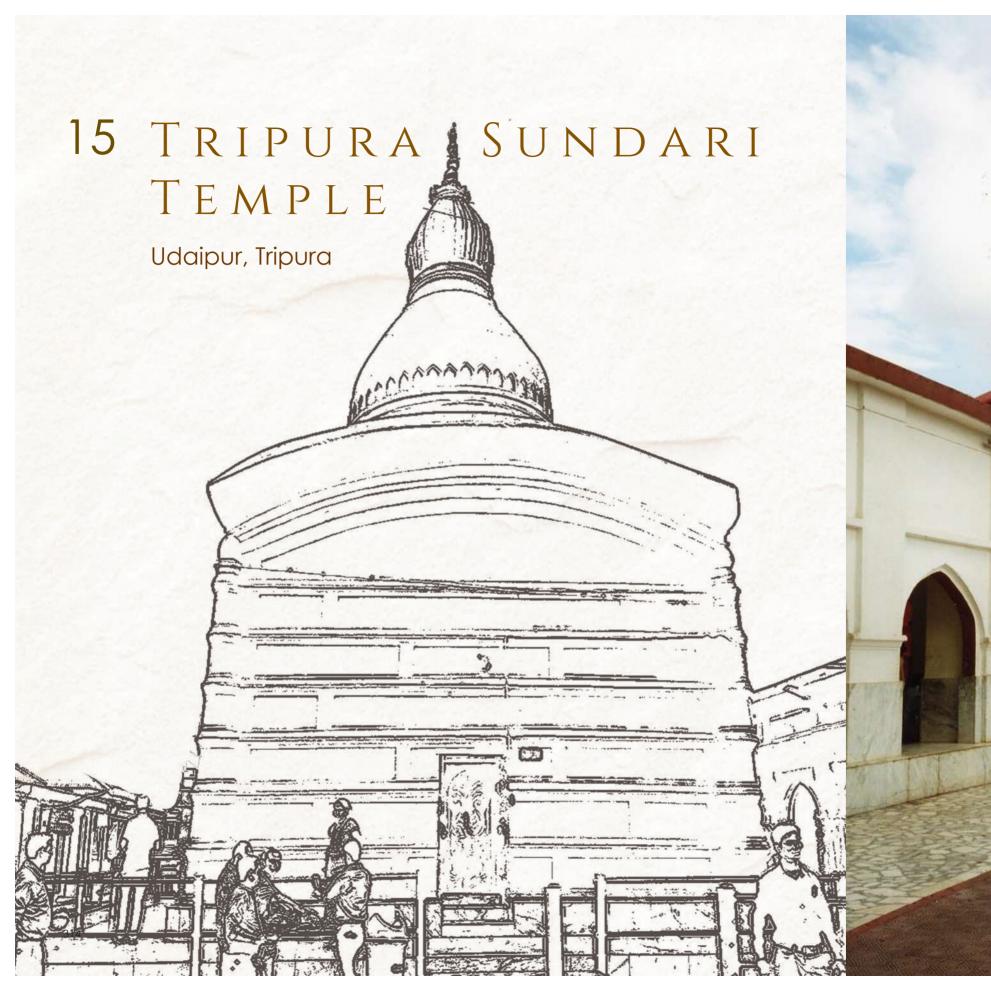




According to historian Frederic Louis, the bell capitals in the octagonal shafts predate the Gupta era, tracing their origins back to the Mauryan period. Louis further proposes that the sculptures of lions in the architrave, situated above the bell capitals, are a consequence of subsequent additions to the temple's architectural features.



Architectural Plan - Temple No.17





## **Built in**16th century CE onwards

#### **Dynasty** Manikya

**Style**Bengali Ek-Ratna and
Charchala styles

**Material**Stone and Brick

#### **HISTORY**

The Tripura Sundari temple, locally known as the Devi Tripureshwari or Matabari, is a revered site among the 108 shakti peeths mentioned in the Devi Bhagwata Purana. It ranks as the second most visited pilgrimage destination in the North-East, just behind Assam's Kamakhya temple. It is believed to have inspired the name of the state of Tripura because of its immense significance. Situated atop a hillock resembling a tortoise or kurma in Sanskrit, it is considered one of the holiest shakti peeths, often referred to as the kurma peeth. Constructed by Maharaja Dhanya Manikya in 1501 CE, it is where devotees worship Shakti as Tripurasundari and Bhairav as Tripuresh. Inside, two kashtipathar idols of the goddess reside, with the larger, standing at 5 feet, representing Tripurasundari, and the smaller, 2-foot idol, known as Chhoto-Ma or "Little Mother," representing Chandi. It is interesting to note that the smaller idol is said to have accompanied the kings of Tripura on battle and hunting expeditions. The current temple was built during the reign of Radhakishore Manikya Bahadur.

The temple complex boasts a striking architectural layout adorned with multiple structures and intricate designs. Its construction prominently relies on locally sourced materials such as stone and brick, resulting in a harmonious blend of traditional and regional architectural elements. At the heart of the complex stands the main shrine, distinguished by its cubic-shaped structure and crowned with a three-tiered roof featuring a finial. This architectural composition adheres to the Bengali ek-ratna style, where the central sanctum is accentuated by a single spire (ratna), encircled by a square structure with a gently sloping roof. The temple stands tall at a height of 75 feet, flanked by four minarets adorning its corners. Perched atop the temple, seven pitchers or pots are carefully arranged, each hoisting a flag. Moreover, the temple's exterior showcases intricate carvings and designs.

# ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT

#### The Minarets encircling the Shikhara

A distinctive and captivating feature within the temple complex is the presence of ornate minarets gracefully encircling the main *shikhara*. These minarets are a testament to the architectural prowess of the region and are deeply influenced by the Bengali *charchala* style, renowned for its unique characteristics, most notably the sloping roofs adorned with multiple ridges. Their intricate designs not only enhances the temple's visual appeal but also symbolises the rich cultural tapestry from which the temple draws its inspiration.





