

Nagara and Dravida Temples

The *nagara* and *dravida* temples are mostly identified with the northern and southern temple styles respectively. The terms *nagara*, and *dravida* which are found in the Sastra texts do not function as all-embracing stylistic categories, but indicate a general impulse to classify temples according to their typological features (Michell 88). [for discussions of *nagara* and *dravida* terminology for classifying temples see Kramrisch 1991]. Discussing the role that religion plays in the day to day life of a Hindu is imperative to the history of the architectural choices. The rituals and ceremonies that lie at the very core of the religious life of Hinduism, as well as the more elusive ideas and beliefs that accompany divine personages, have fundamentally influenced the forms of temple architecture (Michell 61).

An important aspect of the design of the ground plan is that it is intended to lead from the temporal world to the eternal. A typical Hindu temple consists of the following major elements - an entrance, often with a porch, one or more attached or detached *mandapas* or halls; the inner sanctum called the *garbhagrha*, literally “womb chamber”; and the tower build directly above the *garbhagrha*. “The fundamental preoccupation of Hindu thought is with mans release (*moksha*) from an illusory world into which he is recurringly born. The architecture of the Hindu temple symbolically represents this quest by setting out to dissolve the boundaries between man and the divine” (Michell 61). [Information can be found on these symbolic ideas and beliefs are found in the Epics and the Puranas, see Michell 1977] For the upper classes this place of contact was usually the temple, in the form of either daily worship or a special occasion or celebration. “To the traditional Hindu the religious and the secular life are never truly distinguished, and the ordinary procedures of everyday life necessitate frequent contacts with the divine” (Michell 49).

There is ancient literature that describes to the reader the merit that is due to the patron of a temple- a motivator for one to build such a place: “Let him who wishes to enter the worlds that are reached by meritorious deeds of piety and charity build a temple to the gods” suggests the *Brhatsamhita*, while a later text *Silpaprakasa* –a manuscript specifically on temple buildings “ensures that the patron will always have peace, wealth, grain and sons” (Michell 60). Fame and immortality might have been a motivator to build a grand temple, Michell suggests that such an idea is mentioned in the *Silpaprakasa*; “everything vanishes with time, only a monument lasts forever” (Michell 60). [For more information on the *Silpaprakasa and Brhatsamhita* see Dowson 1982].

The distinct temple style which emerges is the *nagara* style, which is typically characterized by its distinctive *sikhara*, a superstructure or tower.

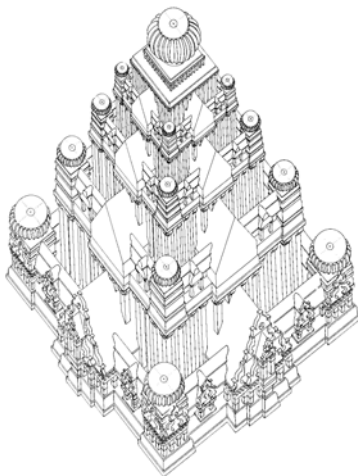


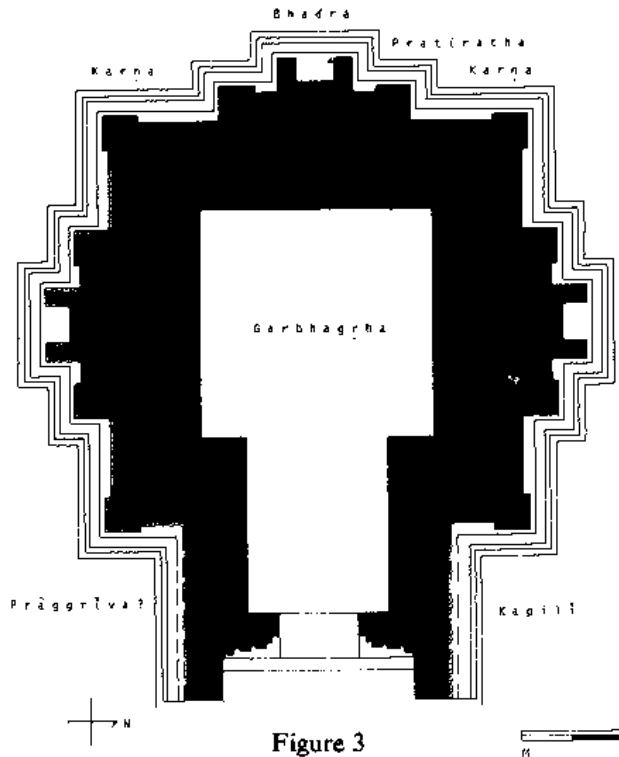
Fig. 11. Alternative architectural drawing of Nagara-style sikhara based on the original drawing and perspective drawing (reproduced from the original drawing). (Drawing: Author on paper)

A Nagara sikhara (Meister, 1989-99)

The typical Hindu temple of northern India, the *Nagara* temple consists of a small square-shaped sanctuary called the *garbhagrha*, housing the main image, preceded by one or more adjoining pillared porches or halls, which are connected to the sanctum by an open or closed vestibule.

The entrance doorway of the sanctum is usually richly decorated with figures and geometric

ornamentation. Above the main sanctuary rises the superstructure (*sikhara*), which is usually curvilinear in outline and possessing smaller rectilinear *sikharas*. The whole may be raised on a terrace (*jagati*) with attendant shrines at the corners (Meister 1979).



3. Mahua, Śiva temple, *mūlaprāsāda*, plan.

A *nagara* temple plan (Meister, 1979).

One typical form of the North Indian style is seen in the early temples at Orissa, such as the graceful 8th-century Parasuramesvara Temple at Bhubaneswar, a city that was a great centre of temple-building activity.

South Indian temple architecture, or *dravida*, style—with its commanding *gopuras* (gateways)—can be seen in the Rajarajeshvara and the Gangaikondacolapuram temples. This style is characterized by its pyramidal, or *kutina*-type, tower superstructure (Michell 1979).

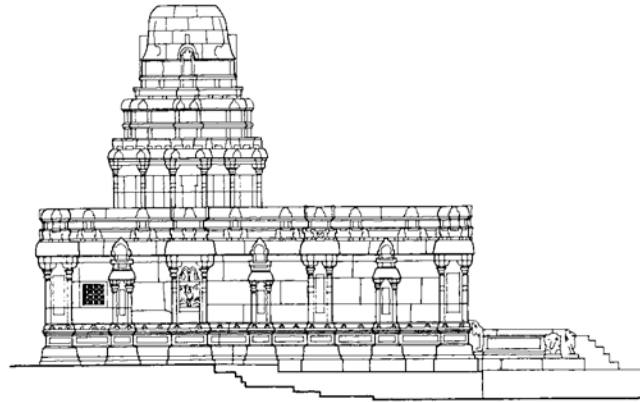


Fig. 16 North Fort Vaisnava Temple, Bidāmi. Elevation (George Michell, *Early Western Chalukya Temples*, London, 1977, Drawing 3)

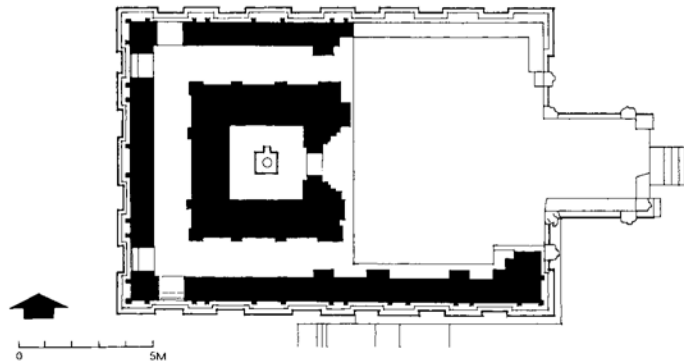


Fig. 17 North Fort Vaisnava Temple, Bidāmi. Floorplan (George Michell, Drawing 3, with alteration of the doorway (*śikhāra*))

Dravida temple outline as well as example of its *kutina*-type, tower superstructure (Tartakov, 1980)

The South Indian temple consists essentially of a square-chambered sanctuary topped by a superstructure, tower, and an attached pillared porch or hall (*mandapa*, or *mantapam*), within a rectangular court. The external walls of the temple are segmented by pilasters and carry niches housing sculpture (Branfoot 2002). The superstructure above the sanctuary consists of an arrangement of gradually receding stories in a pyramidal shape. Each story is defined by a wall of miniature shrines, square at the corners and rectangular with barrel-vault roofs at the centre. The tower is topped by a dome-shaped cupola and a crowning pot and finial. The South Indian

style became increasingly elaborate—the complex of temple buildings enclosed by the court became larger, and a number of successive enclosures, each with its own gateway (*gopura*), were added (Michell 1977). [Information on the *dravida* style of temples can be found in Tartakov 1977]

Repetition is inevitably one of the factors that explain the stylistic evolutions of Hindu temples. The southern temples created their wall systems by the repetition of projections that framed the recesses working its way up the wall, there were pairs of pilasters marking each change in the wall plane. The *dravida* style developed a complex system of breaking up the plane of the wall into little straight sections until the temple plan almost approaches a circle (Michell 1977). Fundamental characteristics of these temples is the choice of architectural forms and how many of these details continue to be used in different way other than their original purpose. For example, the northern (*naraga*) temples used the horseshoe shaped for arched windows, however it can be found on later temples superimposed into the mouldings or onto the superstructure decorations.

The temple as one can see plays an extremely important role in the lives of everyday Hindus. When one takes a deeper look at the various aspects of the temple; style, purpose as well

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