CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Architectural data in the Purâṇas are of absorbing interest for both specialist and the common people. Variety of stipulations provide sound canonical base for this plastic art. Here we have systematically scrutinized the various details of architectural nature incorporated in the Purâṇas. The architectural details of the Purâṇas make us aware of the fact that this corpus had the privilege of witnessing an age of great advancement in the realm of art and architecture.

The MP mentions as many as eighteen ancient architects and a list of twenty-five traditional works on śilpa appears in the AP.¹ It seems likely that some of these names are mythological, but at the same time, it may be possible that some of them were historical personages, and reputed authors in the science of architecture or sculpture. But unfortunately, their works have not yet come to us. Architecture is generally considered as a secular science, but the Purāṇic chapters and the treatises dealing with architectural and sculptural subjects contain verses eulogizing Vāstudeva, the presiding deity of buildings. The MP explains the name vāstu as follows: 'As the various gods stayed (on the body of the creature; from ṯvas – ‘to stay’) he came to be called vāstu'.² It further says that the construction of building should start after the worship of Vāstudeva which
custom exists in India even today. The GP takes the word vastu in the sense of building, houses, hamlets and mansions, formation of townships, laying out of parks and gardens, construction of commercial streets, forts, temples and monasteries.3

Analysing the date of the Purāṇas, discussed in this study, no exact date has been fixed by scholars for their composition. The earliest architectural data in the MP belongs not earlier than the Gupta period whereas the text cannot be placed later than the tenth century AD. The GP was composed between the eighth and tenth century AD since there is common terminology used in these Purāṇas. Scholars such as R.C. Hazra and F.E. Pargiter hold that the AP was completed between AD 800 to 900. The BSP incorporates data extending from fourth century BC to the Mughal times. It seems very likely that its compilation was not completed until the nineteenth century. Certainly many chapters contain data of much earlier period. Both MP and AP contain each twenty-two and twenty-one chapters on architecture (MP, chaps. 130, 217-18, 252-70; AP, chaps. 38-43, 45, 61, 65, 93-4, 100-106, 167, 222, 247, 282), whereas GP only three (chaps. 46-8) and BSP only one (chap. 130).

Uniqueness of Indian architecture is its perceptive concept of Vastupuruṣaṁanta. In the formation of the concept of the Vastupuruṣa, or Vastunara,4 as he is called in some texts, the starting point is vastu. The area for the construction of the vastu is called vastuka in the
Arthaśāstra. The AP and other Purāṇas do not seem to make a difference between vāstu and the Vāstupuruṣa. The Purāṇas are, however, clear about the nature of the vāstu or the Vāstupuruṣa. According to them the Vāstupuruṣa was in the form of a demon. His figure was to be laid in the foundation of a building. The figure was to have a normally short hand contracted on the chest, his knees bent, pointed to the north-west and elbows to the south-east. On his body were to be shown various deities. On the surface above this figure the plan of the dwelling (be it a temple, house, fort or palace) was made with various other deities at different points. But in the MP the Vāstupuruṣa is ordained to be laid down in a prostrate position, with his face down, while in the earlier account he is prescribed to be posited in a sitting posture. The BS's account, more or less, closely follows that of the MP, in the theme of the Vāstupuruṣa, it calls the Vāstupuruṣa also by the name Vāstunara. The SS follows the same pattern and scheme of the Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala as given in the two texts mentioned above. The Purānic Vāstu/Vāstupuruṣa was of a terrible and demoniac form. However, earlier in the Vedic belief, he was identified with Rudra and considered the grha-devatā. Gradually this concept was applied to all architectural edifices whether sacred or secular.

As pointed out earlier that the MP could be taken as the oldest of the four Purāṇas under study, this would mean that the concept of the Vāstupuruṣa as elaborated in the Purāṇas could be taken back to the
third/fourth century AD.\(^5\) This concept has been extended to the shapes of the plot, extension of plots and location of plots. The accurate measurement of time units perhaps brought further revolution in Vāstuparīkṣā as months, vara (days) and role of constellations too was considered of utmost importance in building a house or temple.

For example the MP says that one should always select an auspicious time to start a bhavana.\(^9\) It prescribes that only some months and days, and certain muhūrtas are beneficial for house-building of the twelve months. Vaiśākha, Āśādha, Śrāvana, Māgha and Phālguṇa are described as auspicious as well of profitable for starting a building construction.\(^10\) All the other days barring Sunday and Tuesday are stated to be auspicious.\(^11\) Then the process of examination of soil, where the building is to be constructed, is enumerated. The Purāṇas show favouritism to the construction of a building with plan of 64 and 81 squares diagrams.\(^12\)

Chapter 253, 254 and 255 of the MP deal with the characteristics of houses with four śālaś, three śālaś, two śālaś and one śāla.\(^13\) The building with śālaś, whether it is a palace or temple, should have four doorways in different directions; it is known as sarvabhadra and is considered very auspicious for both god and king. Other varieties having three, and one are also known. A slightly unsymmetrical building is known as triśāla or dhanyaka.
The Purāṇas recommended that an expert in the science of house-building should first select and examine the site suitable for erecting the edifice of a temple. Particular and pointed attention was paid to the selection of the site for the temple. Many methods have been prescribed for the examination of the ground on which the temple was to be built. The fruits to be reaped by putting up a temple (either donating land or financing the construction) have been much publicized in the Purāṇas. Without inventing an idea of Heaven there would have not been much donations to the construction of temples. It was considered the best of punya. The selected site for a temple is to be divided into sixteen parts of which four parts should be preserved for the garbhagṛha. Doorways are to be planned on the sides of the temple. Measurements of the vedicā, śikhara passages for circumambulation and walls are minutely prescribed, according to the plan of the temple.

The MP and BSP have discussed twenty types of temples along with their suggested dimensions. In Table 3 of chapter III we have made an effort to compare these twenty types with those types mentioned in other vāstuśāstras such as Brhat Saṁhitā, Viśvakarmā Prakāśa and central Indian text of eleventh century, Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra. What becomes clear from this comparison is that once the list appeared in the MP it was copied with minor variations by the authors and compilers of the later works such as the VKP and the SS? The two other Purāṇas which
we consider chronologically later than the MP add a list of temples in five
category, each category possessing nine models.

The MP says that seven prāsādas from Meru to Sarvatabhadra are
considered to be jyestha (i.e. of best quality), the eight from Vṛṣa to
Mṛgarāja and madhyama (medium) and the five from Harṣa to Šoḍāśāśra
are kanistha (low quality) ones.

The GP and AP have 45 types of temples divided into five broad
categories which are certainly of a developed stage in comparison to that
of MP and BSP. They do not contain chapters on the maṇḍapa-laksāna.
The MP has the detailed description of 27 types of maṇḍapas. Thus, it
seems that this second stratum of architectural material in the MP is later
than the date of the GP and AP. It is prescribed that all these temples
should be made of bricks, wood or stone.¹⁴

The several distinctive features of temples enumerated in the
Purāṇas seem to indicate that the nāgara style of architecture was in an
evolving stage and maṇḍapikā-type of stone temples have appeared in
Madhyadesa and Orissa. The Kailāśa-type of shrine appears to have
referred to the temple with a śikhara on the roof, a style which later came
to be adopted all over north India. It is to be noted here that the nāgara-
style of temple with a curvilinear śikhara was framed after the model of the
mountain-peaks. Evidence tells us that some of the late Gupta shrines
were crowned with rudimentary sikhara structures. Inscriptions inform us that already in the fifth century AD temples with high and lofty towers (śikharas) came into existence. The Mandasor stone inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman (AD 436-473) refers to a sun temple at Daśapura, which was 'very lofty and pure, which touched the sky as it were with charming spires.' In fact the age of the Guptas proclaimed a new epoch in the history of Indian architecture and the MP chapters on artistic developments contain the description of monuments some of which certainly existed during the Gupta period.

While GP, AP and BSP do not provide detailed account on the dimension of the maṇḍapas, however, the MP describes the characteristics of various types of maṇḍapas. They are of three classes: uttama, madhyama and kaniṣṭha. Altogether twenty-seven varieties of these maṇḍapas may be triangular, circular with sixteen beautiful sides or rectangular. The biggest maṇḍapa, according to this Purāṇa, is puṣpaka with 64 pillars. It further states that paintings and beautiful carvings should be made on all types of pillars. The carving should be of lotuses, creepers, leaves, earthen pots and jars.\(^{15}\) We have noticed that during the time of the MP the age of plain and simple art gave way to that of the decorative art which formed a remarkable feature of buildings.\(^{16}\) It seems probable that there was much advancement in the realm of art in India during the period of the composition of the MP.
The stipulations given in the Purāṇas were not only mere recommendations but trained artisans who were familiar with vāstu texts applied them while constructing temples. Survey of temples in central and western India by Michael W. Meister, and in the western Himalaya by Laxman S. Thakur revealed that the ritual grid was actually put into practice. These scholars have found temple-plans of both 64 squares and 81 squares. The *MP* contains the earliest and most elaborate description of the Vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala. It prescribes a grid of $8 \times 8 = 64$ squares for the temples, palaces, and a grid of $9 \times 9 = 81$ squares for the domestic buildings.

Purāṇas contain chapters on the planning of forts (durgas). Six types of forts are mentioned in the *MP* and *AP*. Among these giridurga is regarded as the best because it is difficult to conquer while other forts can be captured comparatively easily. From table 7 (appended to chapter IV) we can infer that the six types of forts referred to in the *MP* and *AP* have common names. Interestingly, the names of the forts given in the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are similar to those which appeared in the *Arthaśāstra*. Names given in the later works such as the SS and *Yuktikalpataru* are different from those given in the Purāṇas.

The *MP* and *AP* provide a detailed guidelines as to how to protect a fort. The construction of rampart and moats ditches was considered very important from the viewpoint of security of the fort.
Apart from providing a detailed regulations for the constructions of temples, forts and ordinary houses there was no separate section on palaces in the Purāṇas. The MP, GP and AP discuss general features for palace architecture. A royal palace, according to MP, may be of five varieties. Such categorization has been devised on the basis of their sizes. The best of these five classes should be 108 by 135 cubits in width and breadth. There are also some prescriptions for the houses of the four castes: the Brāhmaṇas given the top rank, and the largest of the houses. What is peculiar that the rājāniveśa must also be planned according to ritual diagram Vāstupadavinyāsa. Whether such regulations were followed or not are not yet clear for no scholar has examined early medieval Indian palaces from the Vāstupadavinyāsa viewpoint.

The measurements of the houses meant for the crown-prince, commander in-chiefs, chief servants, ministers, astrologer, preceptor, physician, priest as well as for the members of the four castes are enumerated in this study. The MP maintains repulsive attitude against constructing multistoreyed buildings on a open road-way; a high-rise building on the open road is compared with vajra and brings in ruin of the owner of the house within a short time. 20

The planning of a house, as presented in the Purāṇas discussed by us in chapter VI is a most valuable information for a student of ancient
Indian vernacular architecture. According to the MP, dwelling-house should not be built near a temple or close to wicked man's house or near a minister's residence or on a meeting place of four roads.\textsuperscript{21}

Information on house construction has been preserved in the three Purāṇas\textsuperscript{22}: MP, GP and the AP. There are detailed description right from the selection of the site to its completion. As we have pointed out that Brāhmaṇas has received very dominating role in allotting a best piece of land at the secure place. There are some unusual methods for selecting the site for different castes. By the composition of the MP and AP, it seems likely from the description in these texts, that astrology has come very popular, rather it was popularized by the Brāhmaṇas by proliferating from urban to far flung areas where they were granted agrahāras for performing pujās in the Brahmanical temples. Thus they popularized the science of astrology in these areas. One space should be left all round a building; the front-side of a house should not be covered with trees; rather, the back-portion may be covered with various trees. It is stated that the house should not be extended in one side only; if extension is required to be made, it should be carried on uniformly and symmetrically in all directions.

The material used for the construction of houses is of great relevance in the present study. The material remains reveal that mainly mud-bricks, burnt bricks, wood and stone were used for the construction
purposes. The MP has advised that the foundation should be made with well-burnt bricks, but timber and mud may also be used for that purpose.\textsuperscript{23}

Perhaps to make the site environment friendly, the MP and AP recommended the plantation of certain species of trees in the vicinity of the habitations. The prescriptions for the locations of different rooms in a house are not uniform in the Purāṇas. Perhaps such variations have occurred because these texts were composed at different places where the movement of sun, moon and other constellations varied at different hours of a day.

The architectural data in the four Purāṇas presented and analysed above have evolved in the Puranic text roughly between AD 300-1200, with the exception of certain portion of the BSP, composed and incorporated in it as late as the nineteenth century. Some of the specifications and prescriptions for building temples, palaces, houses could be followed, and in recent years many trained architects possessing Bachelor of Engineering degrees, have found vāstuśāstric text very useful for planning houses or cities. This hidden knowledge needs to be studied, analysed and translated into various Indian languages so that the aspirants could be benefitted from this treasured corpus.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *MP* chap 253, 2-3; *AP*, chap 39 1, see table 2 in chapter I

2. Ibid chap 252 12: *niväsāt sarva-devānām vāstunyā bhīdhiyate*.

3. *GP* chap 46 2-3


6. *MP*, chap 252, 5-19


8. *AB*, 22 9, TS, III. 4.10.3.

9. *MP*, chap 253 1: *yathā kālam śubhām jñātvā sadā bhavanam ārabhet*

10. Ibid., 253 2-5

11. Ibid, 253 7 *āditya-bhaumavarṇyāstu sarva vāraḥ śubhāvahāḥ*.

12. See in chap II, figs. 3, 4, 5.

13. See figs 7 (a-e), 8 (a-c); 9 (a-c)

14. *MP* chap 269, 47.

15. Ibid , chap 254. 4: *padmāvati-latā-kumba-patra-darpaṇa-rūpītāḥ*.


19. Ibid., chap. 253. 19-46; *GP*, chap. 46; *AP*, chaps 40, 93, 105, 106. also in *BS*, chaps. 53. 43-6; 56.10.

20. *MP*, chap. 255. 17: adhvano madhyadeśe tvadhiko yasya vistārah

Vrajaṇtu sarīkaṭam madhye sadyo bhartur vināśanam

21. Ibid., chap. 256.2: nadeva-dhūrta-saciva-catvārānaṁ-sāmantataḥ

Kārayed bhavanarṁ prājño duḥkhaśokabhayaṁ tataḥ

22. *MP*, chap. 256; *GP*, chap. 46; *AP*, chap. 106.

23. Ibid., chap. 254. 41: pakveṭṭakā bhaved bhītiḥ dārvair api kalpyā

syāt tathā mṛṣmayabhīttikā.