CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION, DEVELOPMENT AND
ARCHITECTURE OF HINDU TEMPLE

Temple is defined in lexicons as a place or building dedicated to the worship of a deity or deities. It is also place where god makes himself present.¹ Like many other religions, in Hinduism also a place to worship and perform ritual has been a must. It is unthinkable to have a deity without a shrine or abode of its own and this belief goes back to hoary past. Eversince the god was perceived to have a form, images were made and enshrined at specific places for worship. In the early Hindu thought, during the age of the Ṛigveda, we find the prevalence of the worship of nirākāra i.e. ‘formless’ for which perhaps no shrines were required. Even then the fire altars of specific shape and dimensions were required for the performance of sacrifices. They generally existed in the open but had a shape of their own and may be called the earliest places of worship. However, even at that time the images of various deities did exist, for we find some references to the image of god Indra, whatever its form may have been. It means that the worship of sākāra existed alongwith nirākāra. With the passage of time the former became more popular though the latter continued and was considered to be meant for those who had already achieved high degree of religious merit. The existence of numerous images from the pre-Harappan time is a living testimony to this fact. No temples or places of worship belonging to such an early period have come to light as yet. The view that the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro or another building with a big hall and places to sit
were religious in character remains a mere hypothesis so far. What was then the origin of a temple?

Let us take another approach to arrive at a definite conclusion. An image of a god or goddess for the Hindus was not merely a statue in stone, metal wood or terracotta but a living personification of a particular deity to whom the image belonged. But an image did not become an idol or an icon till it was infused with life by performance of some rituals known as prāṇa pratiṣṭhā. Only after the prāṇa pratiṣṭhā it became living and worshipful. Now if the deity was a living being it required to be housed in a proper abode of its own along with all the paraphernalia that was required for daily use and rituals. This was perhaps the beginning of a temple, whatever shape or dimensions it might have had.

In Hinduism a unique distinction existed with the concept of image of deity and its temple that is not present in any other religion. Here, not only a divinity was a living being but also the building of his or her residence. It was conceived that the relationship between a temple and the deity housed in it is same as between body and soul. Like the soul dwells in a living body so the deity lives in a temple. This gave rise to the idea of vāstu puruṣa in Indian architecture. Stella Kramrisch as also several other scholars have discussed the concept of vāstu puruṣa both in physical and metaphysical forms. Thus a temple is ritualistically invested with human personality and its various parts have been named as feet and legs (pābhāga), thighs (jaṅghā), neck (kaṇṭha or grīvā) and head (śikhara). The temple has been aptly described as ‘a monument of manifestation and all constituents of the temple plan and elevation partake in it.’ Krishna Deva rightly defines it as "combining the axis of a
world pillar, the cube of a sacrificial altar and the body of a palace to house the image of divinity, it represents the cosmological symbolism in an aesthetic garb.\textsuperscript{5}

The origin of temple in India is a highly debatable issue amongst scholars who widely differ in their opinions. Of the extent remains most of the times temple no. 17 at Sanchi, adjacent to the Great Stūpa, that belongs to c. 4\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. in the Gupta period is referred to as the earliest example of the temple architecture in India.\textsuperscript{6} It is a small square chamber with flat roof and plain walls with a small portico in front resting on four pillars. There is no doubt about its date, but the stark simplicity of the structure during the highly advanced artistic trends of the age makes one think if this is the beginning or just a monument that does not truly represents the age it was constructed in. Of course some similar temples like the Kaṅkāḷī Devī temple at Tigawa, Pārvatī temple, Nachna, a tiny temple at Kunda and a temple at Udayagiri all belong to the same period and are marked by the simplicity of their structures. The temple at Kunda near Tigawa definitely indicates that these monuments cannot be taken as parameters of the origin or development of temple architecture in India. One must wonder that if gigantic stūpas like the one adjacent to the temple no. 17 at Sanchi were built during the Gupta period and the finest rock-cut examples at Ajanta and Ellora were carved during this period, why the temples alone were marked by simplicity both in dimensions and embellishment.

If we keep the evidence of the existing temples to one side and consider archaeological evidence afresh a new insight may be gained into the issue. At least two examples of the existence of temples as early as the
second century B.C. during the Śuṅga period have come to light and have been described by several scholars. On the outskirts of Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh there stands the famous stone pillar called Kham Baba, bearing an inscription of Heliodorus, the Greek ambassador from Taxila to the court of king Bhāgabhadra, the Śuṅga ruler. The inscription records the installation of a *Garuda-dhvaja* by Heliodorus the son of Dion for his deep devotion to the supreme god Bhagavata i.e. Vishṇu. Despite of this being an indicator no one thought of the existence of a temple at the site till the remains of an apsidal temple were excavated over there in front of the pillar. The evidence is clear about the existence of Hindu temple at Vidisha in 2nd century B.C. The second example has come from Nagari near Chittaurgarh in Rajasthan. Here too a big stone enclosure has yielded a 2nd century B.C. inscription that refers to Nārāyaṇa Vāṭikā, presumably having a temple of Vishṇu on the spot.

The art evidence is equally revealing on the point. The narrative panels at Bharhut and Sanchi depict several representations of temples as early as the 2nd century B.C. they depict beautiful shrines with a railing enclosure, a vaulted or a dome like *sikhara* and pinnacle or a number of pinnacles on the top. A pillared pavilion at Bharhut labelled as ‘Sudhamma-Devasabhā’ shows a beautifully carved doorframe also, that reminds one of the rock-cut example of the Lomas Rishi cave at Barabar in Bihar. Along with the art evidence we find the numismatic evidence is equally revealing. The copper coins of the Audumbaras and the Yaudheyas who ruled in the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in the region between Yamuna and Beas depict the figures of temples on them, some of which were more than one storey in elevation. First published by Alexander Cunningham in 1872-73, they were reproduced by John
More recently Devendra Handa has not only highlighted these coins but has dwelt upon in detail about the shape of the structures of temples in the 2nd century B.C. The figures on the coins depict an elaborate base, a pillared pavilion of one or more storeys, a \textit{śikhara} with pinnacle consisting of \textit{āmalaka}, \textit{kalasa} and \textit{dhvaja}. They leave no place for doubt that the temple architecture was already in advanced stage of development during this period and that too in Himachal Pradesh and its periphery.

The most numerous references to the temples are found in literature of ancient times. As early as in the time of the \textit{Śatapath Brāhmaṇa} we find reference to the existence of temple. Pāṇini also refers to temples in his \textit{Ashtādhyāyī}. His commentator, the second century B.C. grammarian gives more specific references to temples of Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa (Dhanapati), Keśava and Balarāma. V.S. Agrawala has cited a large number of terms like \textit{thāna}, \textit{chaurā}, \textit{devāyatana}, \textit{devālaya}, \textit{devagriha}, \textit{yakshasadāma}, etc. from various literary sources from the Vedic age down to the beginning of the Christian era. This overwhelming literary, archaeological, numismatic, art and epigraphic evidence leaves no place for doubt about the very early origin of the Hindu temple in India. However, we still have no concrete evidence about the shape and size of the temples prior to about second century B.C.

V.S. Agrawala has reconstructed an interesting account of the evolution and development of the Hindu temple in a long essay. He traces its origin from “the remotest antiquity” when the temple was just a platform open to sky with some aniconic representation or symbol of the deity placed on it for worship. A railing was provided round the
platform as a second stage of development. When the railing and gateways fell in disuse they were assimilated in high plinth. The image of deity placed on the platform was then provided with a parasol in which he finds the germination of the future garbhagriha or the sanctum sanctorum. The parasol was gradually replaced by three stone slabs on the sides of the image with a fourth to cover the top. This was then replaced by a chamber of modest size with plain walls and flat roof, as is the case with the temple no. 17 at Sanchi. A small vestibule was then added in front of this chamber for the worshippers which with the passage of time grew into maṇḍapa and mukhamañḍapa further developments coming to this plan later on as we find in the temples of Orissa, Khajuraho and Thanjavur.

Like the plan of the temple architecture, there was gradual development of the other architectural members of the temple. A simple low platform became a high base with five mouldings called pañcathara. The plinth was raised to a high impressive part of the base with several moulding designs. The vedibandha mouldings were called khura, kumbha, kalaśa and kapotālī, etc. The next element was the sanctum proper also called maṇḍovara which usually denoted the cubical portion of the temple including walls on three sides with an entrance on the fourth.¹⁸ Here also we find gradual development. The three walls were provided with central niches called rathikās or bhadrikās on the outside and images of various deities were housed in them. The shape of the sanctum underwent a major change with the passage of time as a number of projections were added to it making it tri-ratha, pañcha-ratha, sapta-ratha and so on till the outer shape became almost circular. The decorations of the walls also increased. The doorframes of the
Garbhagriha as also those of the mandapa doorways were initially plain but became divided into several sākhās and lintel panels. We shall discuss it in details in the next chapter. A vestibule or an antarāla was added between the sanctum and the mandapa. The latter to saw development and underwent change. For instance many a time side entrance or high balconies were added on both sides of mandapa. The topmost portion of the temple, śikhara also had its development in stages. From the flat roof of the Sanchi temple, it grew into lofty nine storeyed or more curvilinear śikharas of the temples of Orissa and Khajuraho in the early medieval period.

The development of temple has now been divided into several phases. From the 4th to 7th century of the Christian era they are generally called the Gupta temples. Several beautiful examples of the same exist throughout the northern India in stone as well as brick. Besides what we have already referred to, Śiva temple at Bhumra near Satna in Madhya Pradesh, Dah Parbatīya Śiva temple in Assam, temples at Nachna-Kuthara are the early examples. The Bhitargaon temple in brick near Kanpur and slightly later in time brick temples at Kalayat in Haryana form examples by themselves. The Gupta temple architecture at its zenith can be seen in the beautiful example at Deogarh, near Lalitpur in U.P. The Vishnu temple here has most exquisitely carved panels on wals and a developed style of architecture with high plinth19 terraced brick temples of the Gupta period can be seen at Pawaya (Madhya Pradesh), lauriya Nandangarh (Bihar), Ahichhatra (U.P.) and Mirupur Khas (sind, Pakistan). Recently remains of the Gupta brick temple have been excavated at Bhitari in the Ghazipur district of U.P.20
In the next stage from the 7th to 13th century A.D. the temple architecture saw tremendous development throughout India, in plan, elevation as also in details of carvings, plinth, doorways, walls and śikhara, etc. Starting from the pre-Pratihāra period in north India, the development saw through the Pratihāra style, Chandella at Khajuraho, Pāla in Bengal and the Orissan temples. Likewise the temples of the Deccan under the Chālukyas in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and the South Indian temples of Tamil Nadu and Kerala developed their own features. We may call it the regional styles of early medieval Indian temples, though the essence remained the same. It was only an outward difference to adjust them to the regional environment with the same spirit prevailing throughout the length and breadth of the country for several centuries. Now they wee divided into nāgara with curvilinear śikhara temples, vēssara, the mixture of the north Indian and the south Indian styles during the Chālukya period onwards and the dravīḍa style of the extreme South under the Pallavas, Cholas, Pāṇḍeyyas, etc. Whereas we find high rising curvilinear śikharas in the north Indian temples, the Chalukyan temples have vaulted roofs and the dravīḍa temples are marked by pyramidal roofs of the vimāna or the shrine proper. Likewise the lofty gateways called gopurams forming entrances through the enclosing walls to the premises of the temple are a distinguished feature of the South Indian temples. Of all these styles, it is the nāgara form of temple architecture that became popular in Himachal Pradesh with several variations and some exceptions. Many a time the region had its own architectural technique and features as necessitated by the geographical conditions of the region.
TEMPLES OF HIMACHAL PRADESH:

CLASSIFICATION:

Though all early temples of Himachal Pradesh were built in the nāgara style or its off-shoots, we find a good mixture of local tradition and style in them thus creating an idiom of its own in the realm of temple architecture. Many of them are wooden structures, the others are built with alternate courses of wood and stone. Yet some other are built of stone in pre nāgara style prevalent in north India. Various scholars who have had an occasion to examine these temples have given their own classification, while the others have followed the classifications of the earlier scholars with or without modification. One of the earliest proposed classification was made as early as 1871 by A.F.P. Harcourt. Though he confined himself to the region of Kullu and Lahul-Spiti, yet his classification was meant for all the temple styles of Himachal Pradesh. He divided these temples into four architectural categories, viz.:

1. The pyramidal carved stone temple, common in India.

2. The rectangular stone and wood temple, furnished with pentroof and verandah.

3. The rectangular stone and wood temple, in pagoda fashion with successive wooden roofs, one on the top of the other.

4. The small rectangular temple with a pent-roof – this being probably but a variety of the edifices of the second order quoted above.22
Some minor changes were proposed in the classification of temples done by Harcourt. Penelope Chetwode at a later date observed that there is hardly any scope for improvement in classification proposed by Harcourt. However, she used another term for the temples of Kullu and Shimla region, what she called was ‘Sutlej Valley Style’. In a more recent work, O.C. Handa, though confining to wooden temples only, has proposed his own classification as follows:

1. Gable-roofed temples
2. Composite-roofed temples.
3. Tower temples.
5. Canopied composite-roofed temples.
7. Composite temples.

He thinks that the earlier classification is neither proper nor correct. For instance, he says that the ‘pagoda fashion’ temples should actually be called ‘receding multi-tiered roof’ as these are actually single storied temples. However, Handa seems to be saying the same thing in a more complex manner as compared to the earlier writers. Laxman S. Thakur who did an indepth study of the temple architecture of Himachal Pradesh has proposed a rather simple and appealing classification. He gives only three categories, viz.

1. The Nāgara,
2. The pent-roofed, and

3. The pagoda style. 

Subhashini Aryan has further simplified the style of Himachal temples and put them in a single separate category under a term coined by the late Shri Krishna Deva, called the Himādri Temples.

In all these classifications, the point that emerges is that there is no specific style or classification on the basis of the temples belonging to various sects or deities such as Vaishnava, Śaiva or Śākta. No such identification is possible because the temples of each category can be found dedicated to any of the above mentioned deities or even to local devatās and folk-deities. Therefore, each temple has to be discussed by itself. One way to discuss the temples would have been in a chronological order. Though for a student of history it is generally considered to be an easy and good method, yet in the present case it may pose several difficulties. The date of many temple is not certain and some of them have undergone repeated renovations. The geographical division has also been adopted by some scholars but in that one can neither maintain chronology nor style, leading to a garbled version.

Despite of the classifications suggested by the scholars referred to above, some of which are admittedly scientific in nature, we have followed an absolutely different classification in this work for a simple and easy understanding. The above classifications are primarily based on stylistic grounds but have no separate class for the rock-cut temples at Masrur. They are simply clubbed with the nāgara style stone temples. We feel they deserve to be treated as a separate class as has normally
been done in the case of the rock-cut architecture. Likewise we also feel that the early wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh deserve to be treated in a class of their own. Hence we have dealt with the subject in the following three divisions:

a. Structural stone temples.

b. Rock-cut temples.

c. Wooden temples.

In the first category we have put all the structural stone temples that range from c. 600 A.D. to 1250 A.D. Amongst these we have taken early temples of Nirmand and Hatkoti (Parahat and Sawara), Mangarh temple, Sirmaur, temples of Jagatsukh, Bajaura and Naggar, Dashal (Kullu), Nirath, Triloknath temple, Lahul-Spiti, temples of Chamba, Saho and Bharmaur (Chamba) and the Śiva temple of Baijnath. The rock-cut temples are represented by a single complex at Masrur in Kangra district. The wooden temples include those of Lakshaṇā at Bharmaur, Śakti Devī at Chatrarhi, Markulā Devī at Udaipur and Dakshinēśvara Mahādeva at Nirmand. They also include some other references like the one to Chāmunḍā Devī temple at Chamba.

**EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEMPLE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:**

We have already discussed the occurrence of temple motifs on the coins of the Audumbaras in brief. This is the earliest glimpse of the temple architecture in Himachal Pradesh and also the earliest evidence to their existence in the land. There are no literary references of the early times
that may help us to determine the antiquity of temples in Himachal Pradesh. The evidence of coins which does not take us anterior to the second century B.C. has been discussed by several scholars from time to time. Alexander Cunningham who was the first to publish the Audumbara coins described the motif on square copper coins described the motif on square copper coins as “pyramidal temple of two or three storeys”. V.A. Smith was not sure if the building was a temple or a granary. R.D.Banerji agreed with Cunningham. The view of John Allan who thought it to be a Buddhist stūpa with railing was far from the truth and has not been accepted by any serious scholar. K.P. Jayaswal like Smith identified it as a ‘mote hall’. S.V.Sohani who rightly identified it as a Śaiva shrine drew a reference to temples in Beas valley from the play Pratimā nāṭaka of Bhāsa. The view of Sohani has been endorsed by J.N. Banerjea who called it a “Śaiva shrine with double dome and multiple pillars.” Both P.L. Gupta and Dolly Mukherjee have given a detailed description of the shrine on these coins in a factual manner. Laxman S. Thakur has also dwelt upon the subject on the basis of earlier writings. We have already quoted Devendra Handa who has reviewed the entire problem and besides identifying the figures as those of temples have redrawn various shapes and types. Close examination of these figures reveals that they were neither primitive in nature, nor all of them were made of wood. For example coins no. 8-10 on plate VI published by Handa show a railing or enclosure with high pillars, three storeys with a circular śikhara topped with āmalaka, kalaśa and dhvaja. More revealing are coins on his plates L II and L III where railing is replaced by high plinth besides
the other architectural members like pillars, varandika or roof, domed sikhara and pinnacle.

The extant temples in Himachal Pradesh cannot be taken earlier than the 6th-7th century A.D. whether in wood or stone and they do not fully resemble with the shrines depicted on the coins. What happened in a long period of at least six hundred years from the second century B.C. onwards is anybody’s guess. In all probability the wooden structures perished due to decay and the stone temples were renovated or rebuilt in such a fashion that it is almost impossible to guess their original form. The Sandhya Gāyatrī temple at Jagatsukh is a good example of the same. As for the later temples in wood, stone and rock-cut, we have given a brief description of each in chapters IV to VI when discussing the door frames of the respective temples for an easy comprehension.

We may conclude that in structure, plan, elevation and other features the temples of Himachal Pradesh followed the pattern of north Indian temples in general while having some peculiar features of their own in Pahari style.
Notes & References:

1 Cf. Collins Shorter English Dictionary.


5 Op.cit., P.1


8 Ibid., pp. 91

9 Marshall, John, Monuments of Sanchi. Also see Krishna Deva, op.cit., pp. 5-7, Figs. 2-6.

10 Ibid., fig. 5.

11 Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India.

12 Tribal Coins of Ancient India, p. 33. fig. 4, p. 191, fig. 21 etc.

13 III. 1.2.2 and III.6.1.2. For other references see Agrawala, P.K., Gupta Temple Architecture, p.3.

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14 Agrawala, V.S., *India as Known to Pāṇini*.

15 Ibid., also see Krishna Deva, *op.cit.*, p. 4

16 *Evolution of the Hindu Temple and other Essays*, p.1

17 ibid., pp. 1-10.

18 In case of apsidal temples like the one at Vidisha, it is possible that the sanctum and the *mandapa* were combined in the same fashion as the Buddhist rock-cut *chaityas*.


23 *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, Kullu, Lahul and Spiti, 1897*, Lahore, 1899.


The style of Himachal Temples was jointly discussed by Dr. Deepak Rawat and myself with our supervisor Prof. Ashvini Agrawal. Therefore the matter may be identical in both the theses upto here with reference to the temples of Himachal Pradesh.


*JASB*, 1897, P.8.

*Numismatic Supplement*, XXIII, P. 249.

*Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India*, P. 122f.

*Hindu Polity*, p. 154.

*JNSI*, IV, PP. 55-57.

39  *Numismatic History of Himachal Pradesh*, 1988, Delhi, p.16.

40  *JNSI*, XLV, PP. 20-21.
