

Sculptures

During the Gupta period, a new school of sculpture developed around **Sarnath**. It was characterised by the use of **cream coloured sandstone** and the **use of metal**. The sculptures of this school were immaculately dressed and **lacked** any form of nakedness. The *halo* around the head of Buddha was intricately decorated.

Example: Sultanganj Buddha (7.5 ft high)



Fig. 1.16: Sultanganj Buddha

IMPORTANT ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS AND EDICTS

1. **Sohgaura Copper Plate:** The earliest known copper-plate, known as the Sohgaura copper-plate, is a Mauryan record that mentions **famine relief efforts**. It is one of the very few pre-Ashoka Brahmi inscriptions in India.
2. **Ashokan Edicts:** The Edicts of Ashoka are a collection of 33 inscriptions on the Pillars of Ashoka as well as boulders and cave walls made by the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire during his reign from 269 BCE to 232 BCE. These inscriptions were dispersed throughout the country and **it represents the first tangible evidence of Buddhism**. The edicts describe in detail the Ashoka's view about dharma, to solve the severe problems faced



Temple architecture, with the development of a square sanctum and a pillared portico emerged during the Gupta period. There was a gradual progression from the flat-roofed, monolithic temples in the initial stages to the sculptured 'shikhara' in the later years. The progression can be distinguished into **five stages**:

First Stage:



The features of the temple developed during this phase are:

- The temples had **flat roof**.
- The temples were **square** in shape.
- The portico was developed on **shallow pillars**.
- The entire structure was built on **low platforms**.

Example: Temple No. 17 at Sanchi.



Fig. 1.17: Temple No. 17, Sanchi

Second Stage:



The temples built during this phase continued most of the features of the earlier phase. However, the **platforms were higher or upraised**. Some instances of **two-storied temples** have also been found. Another important addition of this phase was a **covered ambulatory passageway** around the sanctum sanctorum or *garbhagriha*. The passageway was used as a *pradakshina path*.

Example: Parvati temple at Nachna kuthara in Madhya Pradesh.



Fig.1.18: Parvati temple, Nachna Kuthara

Third Stage:



This stage saw the **emergence of shikharas** in place of a flat roof. However, they were still quite low and almost square, i.e. curvilinear. **Panchayatan style** of temple making was introduced.

In the **Panchayatan style** of temple making, there were **four subsidiary shrines along with the temple of the principal deity**. The main temple was square with an elongated mandap in front of it, giving it a

rectangular shape. The subsidiary shrines were placed opposite to each other on either side of the mandap, giving the **ground plan a crucified shape**.

Example: Dashavatar temple at Deogarh (U.P.), Durga temple at Aihole (Karnataka), etc.



Fig.1.19: Dashavatar temple, Deogarh

Fourth Stage:



The temples of this stage were almost similar, except the **main shrine became more rectangular**.

Example: Ter temple at Sholapur.

Fifth Stage:



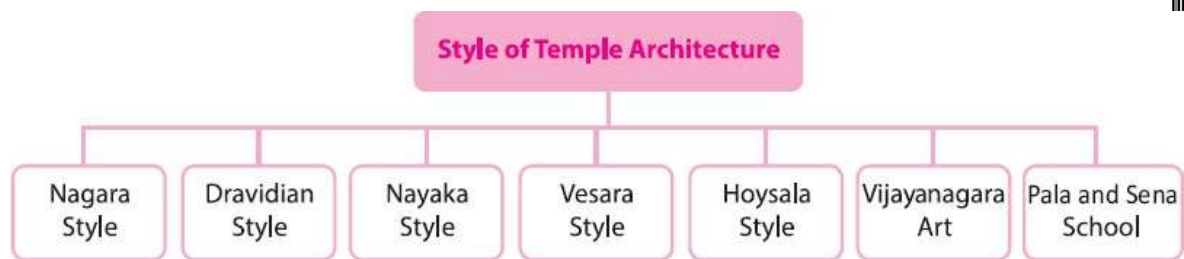
In this stage, there was the introduction of **circular temples** with *shallow* rectangular projections. Rest of the features of the previous stage continued.

Example: Maniyar Math at Rajgir.



Fig. 1.20: Maniyar Math, Rajgir

Styles of Temple Architecture



The basic form of the Hindu temple comprises the following:

- **Sanctum Sanctorum:** Also known as **Garbhagriha** (literally womb-house) is a small room, generally cubicle, which houses the principal deity of the temple.
- **Mandapa:** It is the entrance to the temple. It may be a portico or a hall and is generally designed to house a large number of worshippers.
- **Shikhara:** It is a mountain like spire. The shapes varied from pyramidal to curvilinear.
- **Vahana:** It is the mount or vehicle of the main deity and was placed just before the sanctum sanctorum.

However, under the patronage of the local rulers, different styles of architecture developed in the different regions of India.

Nagara School of Architecture

From fifth century A.D. onwards, a distinct style of temple architecture developed in the northern part of India, known as the *Nagara style of architecture*. Even in the Nagara school, different sub-schools emerged in western, central and eastern parts of the country. Some of the features of Nagara style are:

- The temples generally followed the **Panchayatan style** of temple making, which consisted of subsidiary shrines laid out in a crucified ground plan with respect to the principal shrine.
- **Presence of assembly** halls or mandaps in front of the principal shrine.
- Outside the *garbhagriha*, images of the river goddesses, **Ganga** and **Yamuna**, were placed.
- There were **no water tanks** or reservoirs present in the temple premises.
- The temples were generally built on **upraised platforms**.
- The porticos had a **pillared approach**.
- The **Shikharas** were generally of **three types**:
 - ❖ **Latina or rekha-prasad**: They were *square* at the base and the walls curve inward to a point on the top.
 - ❖ **Phamsana**: They had a *broader base* and were *shorter in height* than the Latina ones. They slope upwards on a straight line.
 - ❖ **Valabhi**: They had a *rectangular base* with the roof rising into *vaulted* chambers. They were also called wagon-vaulted roofs.
- The vertical end of the *shikhara* ended in a horizontal fluted disc, known as the **Amalak**. On top of that, a spherical shape was placed known as the **kalash**.
- Inside the temple, the wall was **divided into three vertical planes** called *rathas*. These were known as *triratha* temples. Later, *pancharatha*, *saptaratha* and even *navaratha* temples came into existence. The vertical planes were used as

different panels to make narrative sculptures.

- The ambulatory passageway or the *pradakshina path* around the sanctum sanctorum was covered.
- Generally, the temple premises did **not** have elaborate boundary walls or gateways.

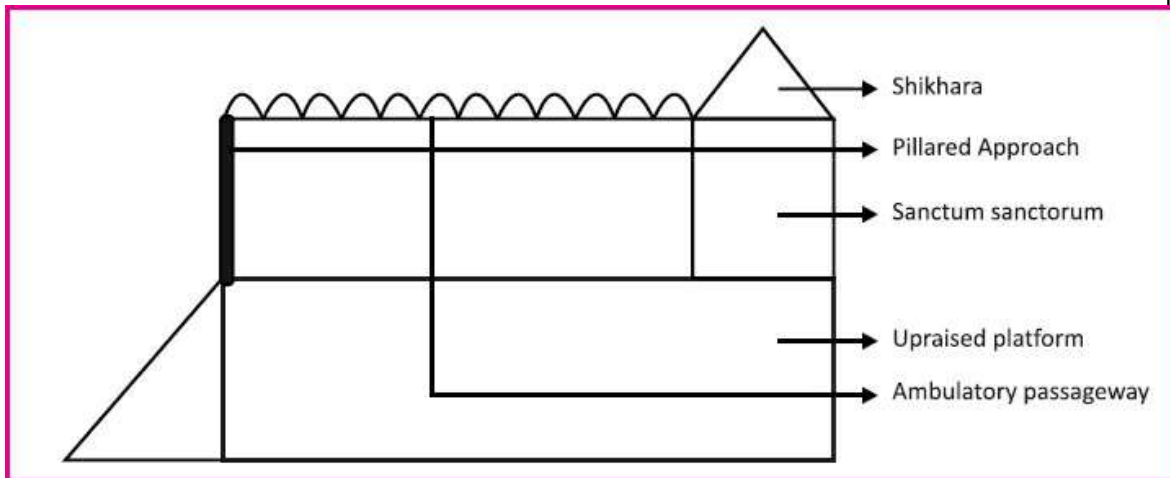


Fig. 1.21: Basic Nagara architecture

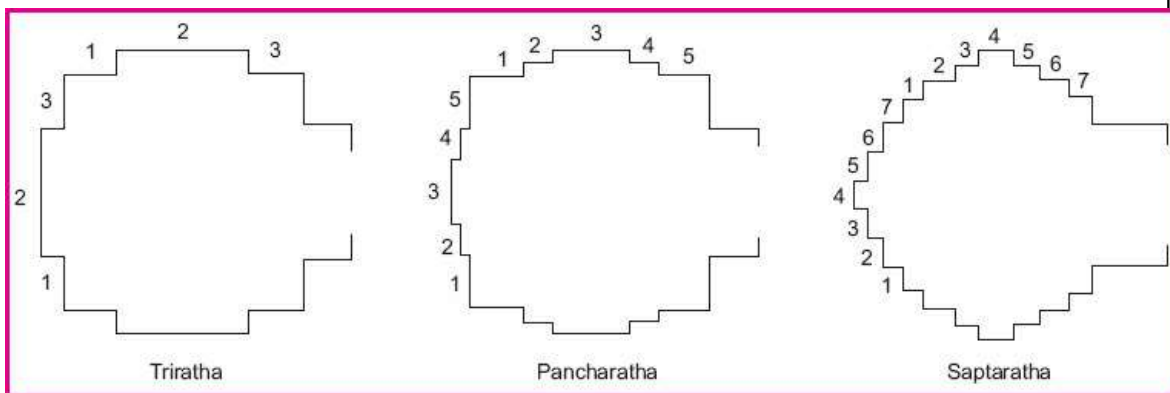


Fig. 1.22: Triratha, Pancharatha and Saptaratha walls in Temples.

Under the Nagara School, the following **three sub-schools** emerged:

1. Odisha School:



In different parts of the Kalinga empire, a distinct style of temple architecture developed. Some of its features are:

- The *exterior walls* were **lavishly decorated** with intricate carvings, but **interior walls were plain**.

- There was **no use of pillars** in the porch. Iron girders were used instead to support the roof.
- The shikharas in the Odisha school were known as **rekhadeuls**. They were almost vertical roofs which suddenly curved inwards sharply.
- The mandap was known as **jagamohan** in this region.
- The ground plan of the main temple was **square**.
- Temples were surrounded by a **boundary wall** as in Dravidian style of temple architecture.

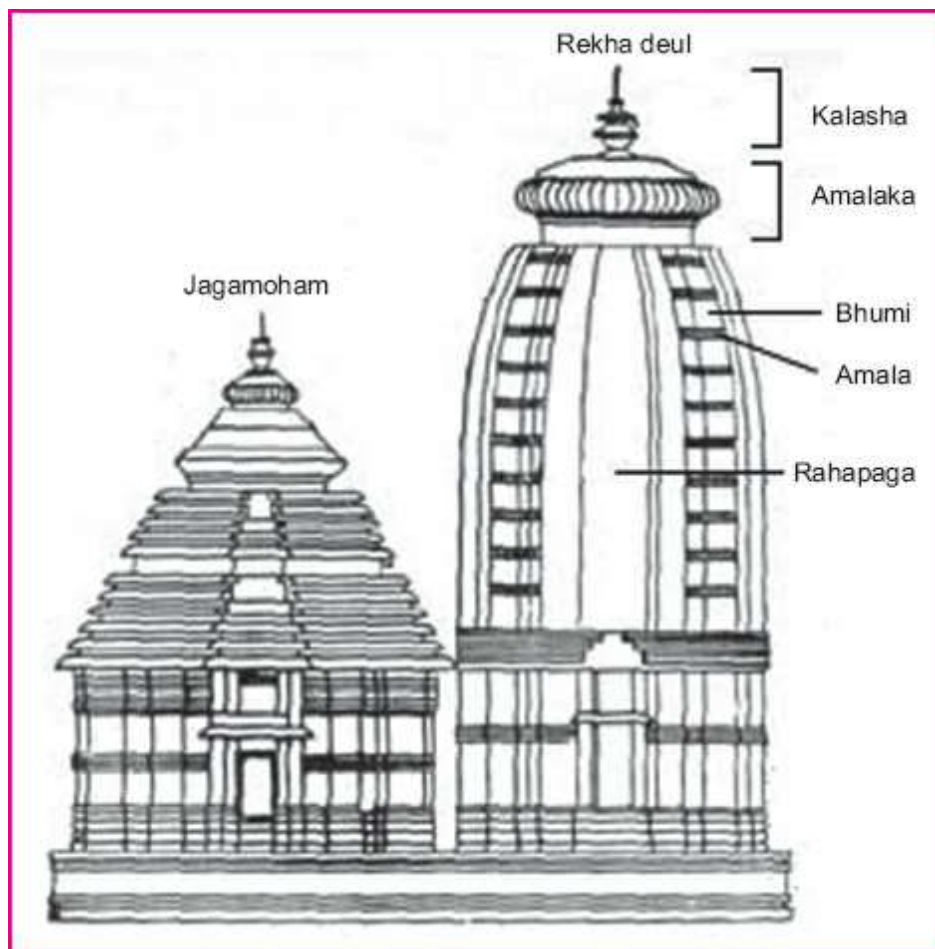


Fig. 1.23: Basic structure of a temple in Odisha school of architecture.

Example: Sun Temple at Konark (also known as Black Pagoda as the first rays of the Sun entered the

garbhagriha through the sea-facing pagoda), Jagannath temple at Puri, Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar, etc.



Fig 1.24: Lingaraj temple, Bhubaneswar

2. Khajuraho School:



In the central part of India, the **Chandela rulers** developed a distinct style of temple making of their own – known as Khajuraho school or Chandel school. The features of the temples here include:

- In these temples, **both the interior and exterior walls were lavishly decorated** with carvings.
- The sculptures were generally **erotic** in their themes and drew inspiration from Vatsyayana's Kamasutra.
- The temples were made of **sandstone**.
- The temples had **three chambers** – garbhagriha, mandapa and *ardha-mandapa*. Some temples had a vestibular entrance to the *garbhagriha* known as *antarala*.
- The temples were generally **north or east facing**.
- **Panchayatan style** of temple making was followed. Even the subsidiary shrines had *rekha-*

prasad shikharas. This created an impression of a **mountain range**.

- The temples were built on **relatively high platform** and belong to Hindu as well as Jain religion.

Example: Kandariya Mahadeva temple, Lakshman temple at Khajuraho, etc.

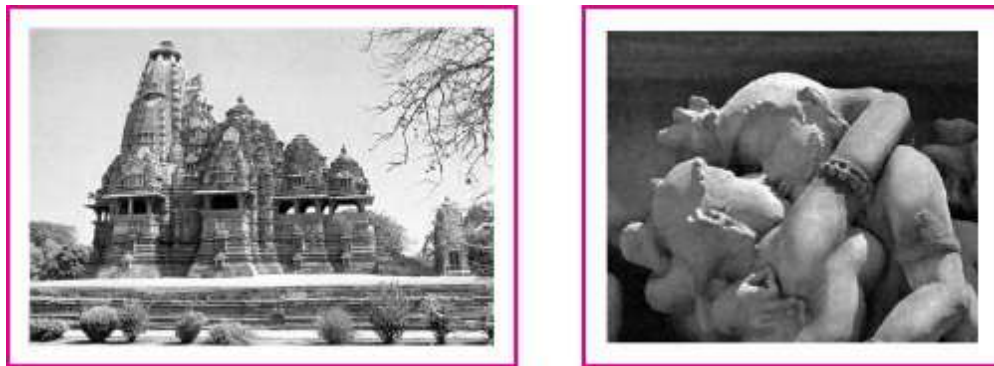


Fig. 1.25: (from left) Vishwanath temple, Khajuraho; erotic sculptures at Khajuraho

3. Solanki School: (also known as Maru-Gurjara style)



In the north-western parts of India including **Gujarat and Rajasthan**, this school developed under the patronage of the **Solanki rulers**. The features of this school are:

- The temple walls were **devoid** of any carvings.
- The *garbhagriha* is connected with the *mandapa* both internally as well as externally
- The porticos have decorative arched gateways known as *torans*.
- A unique feature of this school is the **presence of step-tank**, known as *surya-kund* in the proximity of the temple.
- The steps of the tank are full of **small temples**. There are **wooden carvings** present in these

temples.

- The Solankis used a **variety of material** to make temples including sandstone, black basalt and soft-marble.
- Most of the temples are **east-facing** and designed such that every year, during the equinoxes, the sun-rays fall directly into the central shrine.

Example: Modhera Sun temple, Gujarat (built in 1026–27 by Bhima-I).



Fig 1.26: Sun temple, Modhera

South Indian Art

Temple Architecture in South India

Just as the Nagara school of architecture with the different sub-schools emerged in the northern part of India, a distinct style of temple architecture emerged in peninsular India as well.

Temple architecture in South India began under the **Pallava** ruler Mahendravarman. The temples developed during the Pallava dynasty reflected the stylistic taste of the individual rulers and can be classified into **four stages** chronologically.

1. Mahendra group:



This was the first stage of Pallava temple architecture. The temples built under Mahendravarman were basically **rock-cut temples**. Under him, the temples were known as *mandapas*, unlike the Nagara style in which the *mandapas* meant only the assembly hall.

2. Narasimha group:



This represented the second stage of the development of temple architecture in South India. The rock-cut temples were decorated by intricate sculptures. Under Narasimhavarman, the *mandapas* were now divided into separate **rathas**. The biggest one was called the *Dharmaraja ratha* while the smallest one was called the *Draupadi ratha*. The design of a temple in the **Dravidian style of architecture is a successor of the Dharmaraja ratha**.



Fig. 1.27: The Pancha-rathas, i.e., 5 temples at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu.

3. Rajsimha group:



Rajsimhavarman led the third stage of temple development. Under him, development of **real structural temples** was started in the place of rock-cut temples.

Example: Shore temple at Mahabalipuram, Kailashnath temple at Kanchipuram, etc.

4. Nandivarman group:



This was the fourth stage of temple development during the Pallava dynasty. The temples built under him were smaller in size. The features were almost similar to the Dravidian style of temple architecture.

After the decline of Pallava dynasty, temple architecture acquired a **new style under the Chola kingdom, known as the Dravidian style** of temple

architecture. This marked a new era in the development of temples in the Southern India. In the later periods, three other styles – Vesara style, Nayaka style and Vijaynagar style – also emerged in this region.

ARCHITECTURE AT MAHABALIPURAM

The ancient port city of Mamallapuram under Pallava dynasty in Tamil Nadu, flourished with a number of marvelous architecture. These seventh century **Pallava sites** have been declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 by the name “Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram”.

They include:

1. **Ratha temples or Pancha Ratha:** Also known as Pandava Rathas, they are the earliest rock cut temples in India, comprising of **Dharmaraja Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Nakula and Sahadeva Ratha, and Draupadi Ratha**, dated around 7th century AD. Dharmaraja Ratha is the largest structure among the five.
2. **Rock-cut caves:** which include **Varaha Cave Temple, Krishna Cave Temple, Panchapandava Cave Temple, and the Mahishasuramardini Mandapa** (Bas-relief of Goddess Durga killing Mahishasura).
3. **Open Air Rock Reliefs:** which include **Descent of the Ganges** which is also known as **Arjuna's Penance or Bhagiratha's Penance** carved on two huge boulders. It narrates the story of descent of River Ganga on earth from heaven by the efforts of Bhagiratha.
4. **Shore Temple complex:** which includes which has two small and one large temple enclosed within a two tier compound wall studded with images of Nandi, the vahana of Shiva. The temple is **predominantly dedicated to Lord Shiva** with a sculpture of **Anantashayana Vishnu** in one of the three temples within the complex.



Fig. 1.28: (1) *Descent of the Ganges or Arjuna's Penance*, (2) *Shore Temple Complex*

Chola Art

Dravidian Style of Temple Architecture



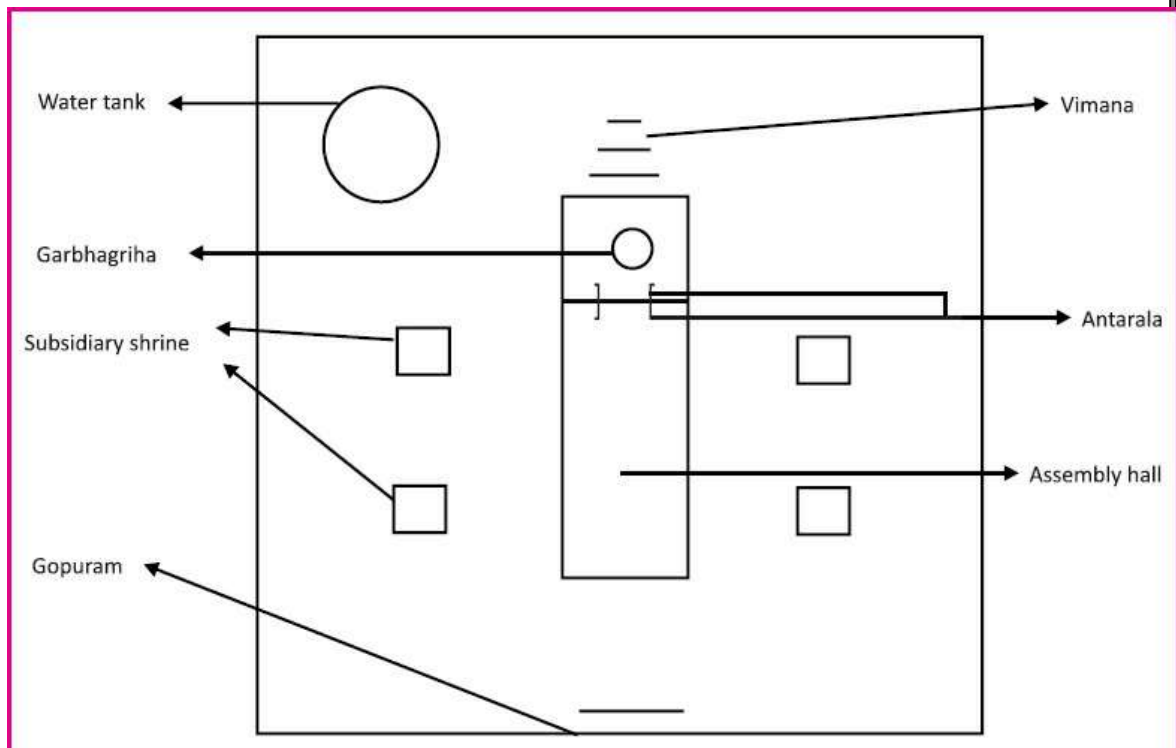
Under the patronage of the **Chola rulers**, hundreds of temples were built in South India. It was a continuation of the previous Pallava architecture, with some variations. This is what came to be known as the Dravidian style of temple architecture. The **features of the Dravidian style or chola style** are:

- Unlike the Nagara temples, the Dravidian temples were surrounded by **high boundary walls**.
- The front wall had a high entrance **gateway** known as the **gopuram**.
- The temple premise was laid out in the **panchayatana style** with a principal temple and four subsidiary shrines.
- In the Dravidian style, the spire is in the form of a stepped pyramid that rises up linearly rather than curved. It is known as **vimana**.
- The crowning element is shaped in the form of an octagon and is known as *shikhara*. It is similar to the *kalash* of the Nagara temple, but not spherical.
- There is **only one vimana** in the Dravidian architecture on top of the main temple. The subsidiary shrines do not have

vimanas, unlike in Nagara architecture.

- The assembly hall was connected with the *garbhagriha* by a **vestibular tunnel** known as **antarala**.
- The entrance of the *garbhagriha* had sculptures of **Dwaarpal**, *mithun* and *yakshas*.
- The presence of a **water tank** inside the temple enclosure was a unique feature of the Dravidian style.

Example: **Brihadeswara temple** at Tanjore (built by Raja Raja I in 1011 A.D.), Gangaikondacholapuram temple (built by Rajendra I to commemorate his victory in the Gangetic delta), etc.



Chola Sculpture

An important feature of the Chola temples was the importance placed on the decoration through sculptures. An important piece of Chola sculpture was the sculpture of **Nataraja** in the Tandava dance posture. Though the earliest known Nataraja sculpture, which has been excavated at Ravana phadi cave at Aihole, was made during the early Chalukya rule, the sculpture reached its peak under the Cholas.

Some of the **features** of the Nataraja sculpture are:

- The *upper right hand* holds the drum, which signifies the sound of creation. All creations spring from the great sound of the *damru*.



Fig.1.29: Brihadeswara temple, Thanjavur

- The *upper left hand* holds the eternal fire, which represents the destruction. Destruction is the precursor and inevitable counterpart of creation.
- The *lower right hand* is raised in the gesture of **abhay mudra** signifying benediction and reassuring the devotee to not be afraid.
- The *lower left hand* points towards the upraised foot and indicates the path of salvation.
- Shiva is dancing on the figure of a small dwarf. The dwarf symbolises ignorance and the ego of an individual.
- The matted and flowing locks of Shiva represent the flow of river Ganges.
- In ornamentation, one ear of Shiva has a male earring while the other has female. This represents the fusion of male and

female and is often referred to as **ardhanarishwar**.

- A snake is twisted around the arm of Shiva. The snake symbolises the **kundalini power**, which resides in the human spine in dormant stage. If aroused, one can attain true consciousness.
- The Nataraja is surrounded by a nimbus of glowing lights which symbolises the vast unending cycles of time.



Fig. 1.30: *Bronze Nataraja of Chola period*

Other Schools of Art

Nayaka School:



The Nayaka school of architecture flourished under the Nayaka rulers in the period between **16th centuries and 18th centuries A.D.** It was also known as **Madurai school**. It was architecturally similar to the Dravidian style, but much larger in scope. It also has Islamic influence. Some of the unique **features** are:

- Presence of **Prakarms** or **huge corridors** in the portico, around the *garbhagriha*, along with roofed ambulatory passageways.

- The *gopurams* built under the Nayaka rulers were some of the **largest gopurams**. The Meenakshi temple in Madurai has the tallest *gopuram* in the world. The art of *gopuram* reached its climax in the Nayaka style.
- The temple structure was filled with *intricate carvings*.

Example: Meenakshi temple, Madurai, etc.



Fig. 1.31: Meenakshi temple, Madurai

Vesara School:



Also known as the Karnataka school of architecture, it was conceptualised under the later Chalukya rulers in the mid-seventh century A.D. It **combined features of both Nagara school and Dravidian school** and resulted in a **hybridised style**. Some of its features are:

- Emphasis on vimana and mandapa
- Open ambulatory passageway
- The pillars, doorways and the ceilings were

decorated with intricate carvings.

Three prominent dynasties who made Vesara style temples are:

- **Chalukyas** of Badami and Kalyani.
- **Rashtrakutas** (750-983 AD). For Example, Kailashnath temple in Ellora, etc.
- **Hoysala Dynasty** (1050-1300 AD). For example, temples at Halebid, Belur etc.

Influence of Nagara style is in Curvilinear Shikhara and square base of Vesara temples.

Influence of Dravida style is seen in intricate carvings and sculptures, design of Vimana and Step or terraced Shikara of Vesara temples.

Example: Doddabasappa temple at Dambal, Ladkhan temple at Aihole, temples at Badami etc.



Fig. 1.32: Doddabasappa temple, Dambal

Vijayanagara School:



The rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire (1335-1565 AD) were great patrons of art and architecture with capital at Hampi (Karnataka). **They combined the features of Chola, Hoysalas, Pandyas, Chalukyas architectural styles.** Under them, the architectural style started to be influenced by the Indo-Islamic style of Bijapur, which in turn was reflected in the temples built during this period. The features of the temples were:

- The walls of the temples were highly decorated with carvings and geometrical patterns.
- Goupurams, which were previously present on the front side, were now built on all the sides.
- Monolithic rock pillars
- Generally, temple pillars have a mythical creature Yali (Horse) engraved in them
- The enclosing walls were larger
- More than one mandaps were built in each temple. The central mandap came to be known as kalyan mandap.
- The concept of **secular buildings** inside the temple premises was also introduced during this period.
- Temple complex is enclosed by boundaries

Example: Vittalsami temple, Lotus Mahal, Virupaksha temple in Hampi, Raghunatha Temple in Hampi etc. Rock-cut idol of Narasimha on Shesha (snake) near Hampi is a marvel in itself.



Fig. 1.33: Lotus Mahal, Hampi

Hoysala Art:



In the region of **Karnataka** near Mysore, the temples built under the Hoysala rulers developed a distinct style of their own known as the Hoysala School of art. It developed in the period from **1050-1300 A.D** with the prominent seats being **Belur, Halebid** and **Sringeri**.

Some of the **features** of the architecture are:

- **Multiple shrines** were built around a **central pillared hall**.
- Unlike the crucified ground plan of the Panchayatan style, the shrines led out in the shape of an intricately designed **star**. This was known as the **Stellate** plan.
- **Soft sope stone** (Chorite schist) was the main building material.
- Massive emphasis was laid on the **decoration** of the temple through sculptures. Both the interior and exterior walls, even the jewelleryes worn by the

deities were intricately carved.

- All the chambers had *Shikharas* which were interconnected by an arrangement of horizontal lines and mouldings. This resolved the tower into an orderly succession of tiers.

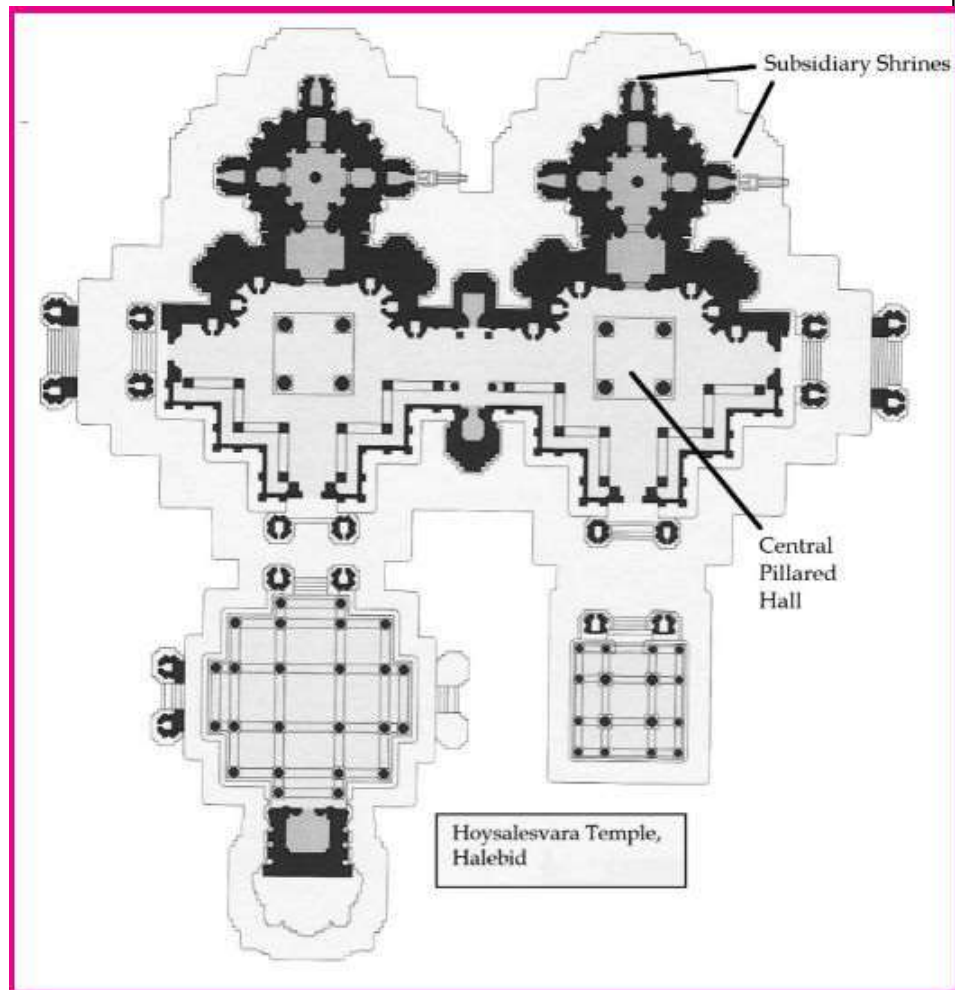


Fig. 1.34: Ground Plan of Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebid.

- The temples were built on an upraised platform known as **Jagati**, which was about 1 metre high.
- The walls and stairs of the temple followed a *zigzag* pattern.

Example: Hoysaleswara temple at Halebid, Vijayanarayana temple at Belur.



Fig. 1.35: Chennakesava temple, Somanathapura

Pala and Sena School:



In **Bengal region**, the style of architecture came to be known as Pala and Sena School of Architecture. It developed in the period between 8th and 12th century A.D. under the patronage of Pala dynasty and Sena dynasty. The Palas were primarily Buddhist rulers following Mahayana tradition, but were very tolerant and patronized both the religions. Pala Kings built lots of Viharas, Chaityas and Stupas. The Senas were Hindus and built temples of Hindu gods, and also sustained Buddhist architectures. Thus, the architecture reflected the **influence of both the religions**.



Fig. 1.36: *A specimen of Pala art*

Monuments under Pala rulers are:

- Universities of Nalanda, Jagaddala, Odantapuri and Vikramshila were developed under Pala rulers.
- Somapura Mahavihara is a magnificent monastery in Bangladesh developed by them.

Monuments under Sena rulers are:

- Dhakeshwari temple in Bangladesh

The architecture of this region is featured by:

- The buildings had a **curve or sloping roof**, as in bamboo huts. This became popularly known as “Bangla roof” and was later adopted by the Mughal architects.
- Burnt bricks and clay, known as **terracotta bricks**, was the principal building material used.
- The temples of this region had a **tall, curving shikhara** crowned by a large amalaka, similar to the Odisha School.
- For the sculptures of this region, both stone as well as metal was used. Stone was the major component.
- The figures were unique in their **highly lustrous finish**.

Example: Siddhesvara Mahadeva temple in Barakar, temples around Vishnupur etc.

FAMOUS UNIVERSITIES OF ANCIENT INDIA

- **Odantapuri:** It is located in **Bihar** and was made under the patronage of Pala dynasty King Gopala I. It was a Buddhist mahavihara. It was destroyed by Bakhtiyar Khilji.
- **Vikramshila:** It is located in present-day Bhagalpur district of **Bihar**. It was established by King Dharampala of Pala dynasty, primarily as a Buddhist learning centre. The scholars were invited by kings outside India to spread Buddhist teachings. The Vajrayana sect flourished here and Tantric teachings were taught. Other subjects like logic, Vedas, astronomy, urban development, law, grammar, philosophy, etc were also taught.