

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2011
The Arts of South Asia & the Islamic World: Beliefs Made Visible
Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

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Heavenly Bodies: The Indian Temple and its Sculptures

The temple and its parts:

Mandir: temple

Prasada (palace): temple

Garbhagriha ('womb' or seed-room) the inner sanctum where the divine manifests

Mandapa: hall or antechamber, differentiated by their different functions and relationship to the *garbhagriha*

Shikhara (mountain peak): tower or crowning member over the *garbhagriha*.

Jangha: exterior walls (wall frieze) of the temple, between the lower moldings and the *shikhara*

Ratha(ka) (chariot): stepped bay-like projection or offset of the temple exterior and plan, holding niches with deities and, especially in the Nagara temple form, reflecting relationships to the *garbhagriha*

Worship in the temple:

Pradakshina: ('to the south') the ritual clockwise circumambulation of the temple

Darshan: the mutual gaze between worshipper and deity

Puja: worship; giving offerings to the deity and receiving blessings, done in both temples and homes

Symbolism of the temple:

Central world mountain, axis mundi (Mt. Meru or Kailasa)

Vedic square brick sacrificial fire altar

Cave and hut to shelter an ascetic

Royal palace (*prasada*)

Body of god

Regional temple types:

Nagara: North Indian, characterized by a curving shikhara

Dravida: South Indian, characterized by a pyramidal shikhara

Vesara (mule, mixed): found in the Deccan region under dynasties including the Hoyshalas and Later Chalukyas, characterized by a blending of Nagara and Dravida forms

Regional stones used for temple:

Sandstone: western India, northern and central India, Orissa, Deccan

Granitic stone: south-eastern India (Tamilnadu)

Metamorphic rock (phyllite, schist, gneiss): eastern India, Deccan, occasionally for special images in western and central India

Marble: occasionally in western India

Wood: especially in Kerala (south-west)

A few of the temple sites/regions that will be shown:

Harshanatha, Sikar, Rajasthan

Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

Rewa, Madhya Pradesh

Kota region, Rajasthan

Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Mount Abu (Dilwara), Rajasthan

Osian, Rajasthan

Somnathpur, Karnataka

Thanjavur (Tanjore), Tamil Nadu

Udaipur region, Rajasthan

Readings:

Unfortunately there is no single text that surveys Indian temple sculpture of c. 700-1400 in context, nor a recent work exploring sculptural 'style' across the subcontinent. Below are some selections looking at particular regions. This talk will focus in particular on the northern part of the subcontinent (western and central India).

Darielle Mason "Reintegrating the Cosmos: North Indic Temple Fragments" in Fashioning the Divine: South Asian Sculpture in the Ackland Art Museum, edited by Pika Ghosh (Chapel Hill: Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill): 75-93.

Gods, Guardians and Lovers: Temple Sculpture from North India, A.D. 700-1200, Darielle Mason and Vishakha Desai eds. (New York: The Asia Society, 1993), see especially catalogue entries and essays by Michael W. Meister and B. D. Chattopadhyaya.

Crispin Branfoot, "'Expanding Form': The Architectural Sculpture of the South Indian Temple, ca. 1500-1700" Artibus Asiae, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2002), pp. 189-245.

Although somewhat dated, for a fairly in-depth survey of temples and sculpture by region you might skim James Harle, The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent, (Penguin Books, 1986) pp. 136-354.

For a taste of Stella Kramrisch's work without diving into The Hindu Temple (1946), see "Wall and Image in Indian Art" reprinted in ed. Barbara Stoller Miller, Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch, pp. 253-260.