

The evolution of Maratha temple architecture tradition in Maharashtra

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Abstract - The Maratha tradition of temple architecture flourished between the 17th and 19th century evolving in phases with response to the political development. The indigenous and revivalist type temples are the outcome of distorted tradition of Maratha architecture. Indigenous type temples are authentic offerings to temple architecture in India. The ancestral tradition for grand stone temples, a result of patron's desire, evolved the Revivalist type. The architectural characteristic of Maratha temples is a blend of styles leading to a balance within the bond of India's cultural identity. This paper focuses on the development of architectural characteristics of temples and elementary principles of composition, creation of forms, elements formal characteristics and evolution.

Key Words: Temple architecture, revivalist style, indigenous, Maratha temples

1.INTRODUCTION

The part of Deccan which lies in Maharashtra with a history of Buddhist rock cut architecture, like the Ajanta and Ellora caves, has been focus of architectural activity. Temple building phase began during the reign of Yadavas in 11th century which was only in relation to the rock cut architecture. This phase of temple building flourished until the Yadavas were superseded by the Muslims in the early 13th century. In Maharashtra after initial continuance of Yadavas, the impact of Islamic architecture began encroaching. Under the leadership of Shivaji Maharaj, the rising powers of Marathas challenged the Islamic rules. The Marathas gradually established their rule in the region, ruling over most of Maharashtra from mid 17th to early 19th centuries. The religious activities dominated the skyline of Maharashtrian towns by the rising temple shrines.

The Maratha temple tradition differs than most of the Indian temples which were built before the Muslim invasion which were organic in form. This is the reason for discontinuous in nature, being a restoration after 300 years of Islamic domination. The Maratha temple architecture underwent certain transformations while some new forms were created keeping in view the regions artistic and religious tradition.

2.NATURE OF MARATHA TRADITION

The basic characteristic of Maratha tradition is "Discontinuity", which was brought into existence through a renewal of architectural traditions and craftsmanship. The Maratha sentiments of Hindu were

exhibited by the temples as icons of political and religious power.

The difference between the earlier temples and Maratha temples is the unaffected continuous tradition. Architecture of these temples can be understood with formation, decoration, techniques corresponding to the political development over the time. Hence, temple architecture acts as a prominent means of expression with the cultural, religious and socio-political impacts.

3.HISTORY

The last tradition of Hindu temple architecture was practiced by the Marathas during their rule of 150 years. The classifications of the phases are based on the evolution of architectural pattern. The transformations in the political history of the Marathas shaped the development in every sphere of Maharashtrians life including temple architecture in phases.

3.1. Early Phase – 1650 AD – 1719 AD

In 1674, an independent state was proclaimed by the Marathas with the coronation of 1st king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The backing for the restoration and repairs of Hindu religious buildings gained momentum. This included the dilapidated Yadavas monuments and new temple construction. Due to lack of political stability and civil war like situation lead to unfavorable conditions for temple sponsorship in between end of 17th and beginning of 18th century.

3.2. Middle phase – 1719 AD-1763 AD

In this phase, Maratha politics underwent major changes with handing over the administration to the Peshwas. The Peshwas embarked multiple grand successes and expansion of territorial limits. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Maratha- Mughal relationship improved and the Marathas promoted their approach with Rajput which led to cultural and artistic exchanges. The developing relations with the Mughals brought major changes in Maratha outlook and lifestyle. The migration of craftsman in Maharashtra influenced the craftsmanship of temple architecture. An innovative combination of Islamic and Yadava tradition defined the architectural vocabulary in this phase. The manifestation of power, prosperity and grandeur lead to the construction of stone temples. This phase witnessed constructions of various temples, palaces of wealthy

Marathas. The manifestation of this prosperity is exhibited through the temple architecture spread by the patrons in major cities of Maharashtra. Such influences are seen in the temples built by patrons in Nashik, Nagpur, Pune, Toke, Satara and many other places.

3.3. Late phase – 1763 AD – 1818 AD

Until the invasion of another crisis for Marathas, the temple construction continued to flourish in Maharashtra. The invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali, bought humiliation and disaster of Maratha at the battle of Panipat and the defeat resulted in huge losses. After the loot of Ahmad Shah Abdali, he left and the Marathas regained their position to reckon with. Another phase of achievements began under the leadership of Peshva Madhavrao. The new positions lead to conquer of distant territories and brought ore prosperity which reflected through a fostered temple sponsorship that continued even after the death of Peshva. In this phase bankruptcy and British rule marked the end of Maratha tradition of temple architecture at large.

With minor changes the temple construction continued by the patrons in Maharashtra. This phase witnessed a longer duration of stone temple construction.

4. ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

4.1. From 11th century- 14th century

The discontinuous nature was the most significant aspect of Maratha temple tradition. The temple exhibits two trends in design. One tradition is where the construction techniques and use of elements intimate to Mughal architecture. The other trend resembles the Yadava tradition of stone temples.

The Yadava style of temple architecture resembles to the Northern Indian temple style with regional variety. Forms like bhumiya, shikhara, latina, phamsana and vallabhi are contemporary. The plan formations are octagonal in shape. Blends of Latina and shikhara modes of Nagara style were also seen.

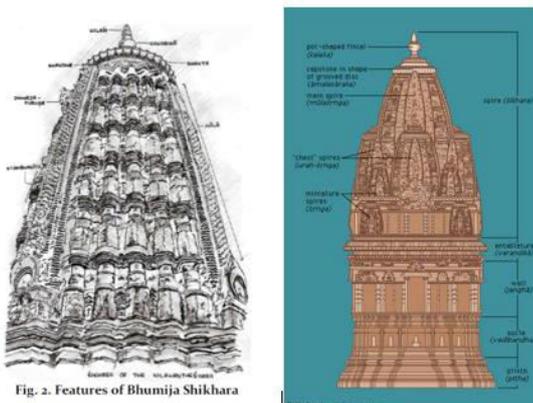


Fig -1: Shikhara style - Bhumija

In Maharashtra, the Yadava Shikhara temples are of all basic nature. Few examples following this style are – Shiva temple at Anwa, Gondeshwar temple at Sinner, Shiva temple at Jodhe, Ayeshwara temple at sinner, Shiva temple at Anjanari, Shiva temple at Vaghli.

4.1.1. Materials and construction techniques



Fig -2: Khandoba Mandir, Pali

Under the Yadavas, structured temple architecture began to flourish.

The column and beam type of construction of dry masonry system supported the super structure. The columns and beams supported the roofs of porches and the mandapas with stone slabs spanning between them, corbelled into domes. The shikhara above the garbhagriha has a flat or domical ceiling.

4.1.2. Plan form

The geometry of plan presents two predominant types, the stellate and out-numbered by orthogonal. The stellate type consists of a square rotated around its centre creating three – five projections in plan. Parallel surfaces with projections moving forward from edges to centre of elevation are seen in orthogonal plans. In case of three projections, in each quadrant, of stellate type, is constructed in star shape of sixteen points in which every fourth projection is hidden by a basic principle. The five points in every quadrant type is a twentyfour point star and has every sixth point hidden.

Example – Gondeshwar temple at sinner, temple no.10 at Anjaneri.

The complexity in the plan outline is reduced from middle 12th century. Minimal or no use of projections and recesses. The stepped star planning converted into projecting surfaces and in few cases turned into flat elevations.

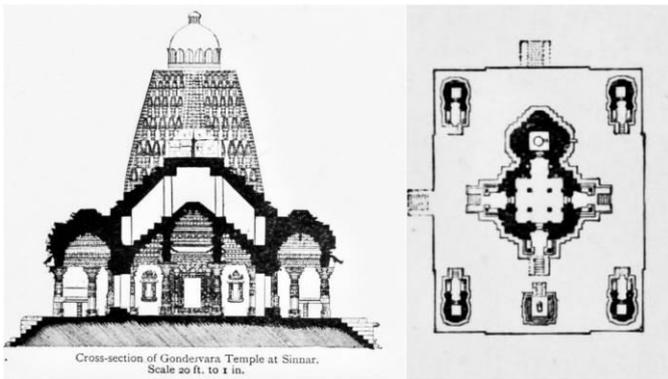


Fig -3: Geometry of plan



Fig -4: Balsane temple II

(Free-standing pillars, pyramidal form leading to the shikhara)

The pyramidal form over the sanctuary is the “shikhara”. It is either straight or sloping as it inclines to top. The shikhara outlines correlates with the projections of stellate, orthogonal or stepped diamond, plans, stambha or pillar elements rise up in each quadrant of basic projection of sanctuary plan. A miniature replica of shikhara or kuta placed above stambha forming kuta – stambha. In the form of smaller kuta or stambha, the shikhara rises in storeys. The distinguishing feature of bhumiya architecture can be seen in the vertical bands of projections above the eaves with shallow carvings. Gavaksha (a horse-shoe arch element) holding a kalasha or diety seen between base of the band and just above the eaves. Amalaka is the topmost element of the entire composition. The composition of stepping kutas of main shikharas is the roof of Antarala.

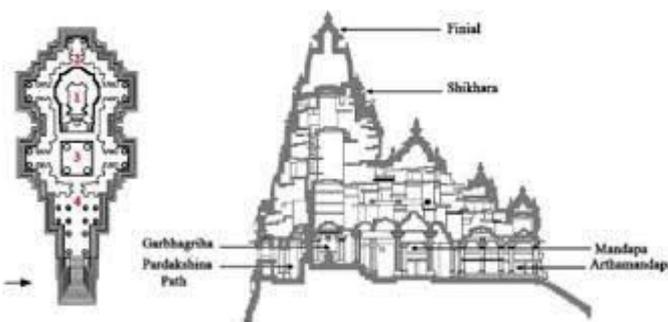


Fig -5: Geometry of plan, mandapa, kutas, Shikhara

A closed mandapa, enclosed within the walls and an open mandapa with pillars are the two basic

types of mandapas. A closed mandapa can be added to the open mandapa.



Fig -6: Gondeshwar Mandir, Sinnar

In the Yadava temple style, along the central axis of the temple, a detached porch with Nandi stands in front of the temple. The closed mandapa is typically of square type enclosed within the walls with a hall composing a central square of four pillars. Equal bays are formed by the surrounding pillars; few mandapas have ornate corbelled domes.



Fig -7: Temple at Anjaneri
(orthogonal plans of parallel surfaces)

In the case of porches, they are on the sides and outside the front entrance. The roofs of the porches are similar type of mandapa roofs with supporting pillars and beams. The open mandapa may have equal sized bays projecting from the sides with a central square bay of four columns. The ceiling of open mandapa is supported by free standing pillars. The ceiling type may be flat with a parallelogram arrangement of beams. The edges of mandapa form galleries with stone seating with backrest.

4.1.3. Plinth:

The powerful rhythmic bond of horizontal mouldings forms the plinths and parapets. The moldings are of greater function than modulations, following a typical sequence in different styles defining symbolic meaning to each layer.



Fig -8: Typical moulding plinths of Yadava temple

Variations in mouldings can be seen starting from lowest where an overall sloping effect is given by mouldings receding inwards. At plinth level, mouldings terminate into the wall. Variations in decorative treatment like sculptural and geometric motifs occur at different levels. A shift from animal and human sculpture ornamentation to geometric shapes seen from the mid of 12th century. By the beginning of 13th century, plinths as an architectural element lost its prominent character and were reduced to plainly masoned element losing its height.

4.1.4. Wall surfaces:

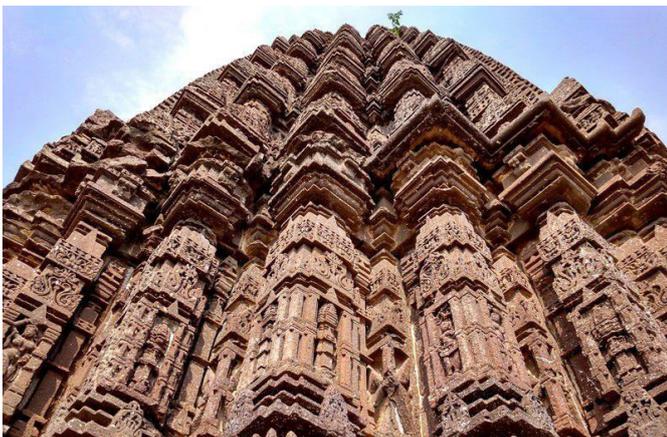


Fig -9: Gondeshwar temple, Sinnar

Decorative treatment on the walls of the mandapas and sanctuaries appear distinct in plan formation. The sanctuary wall surfaces are based on pillars of the temple which are projection in plan. The horizontal bands of the pillar mouldings are transferred by the vertical layers of the pillars on the wall surfaces. A topmost element of this basic pillar type has narrow and pointed capital. The plainness of the surface was eliminated by the addition of geometric or floral motifs. A formation of projected mouldings in the central area corresponding to stellate or star shaped or orthogonal in

plan. The perimeter of the temple and mandapa walls follows the same composition of the mouldings and sculptures. The mandapa also follows similar style of stellate or orthogonal plan with wall treatments. The projections appear prominent and the wall decorations are of small and shallow horizontal bands.



Fig -10: Shiv temple at Ambernath

4.2. From 14th -17th century

The Islamic influence increased from 14th to 17th century with amalgamation of architectural forms, techniques, murals, tile works etc. this era produced finest artifacts. Few popular features are cusped arches, cypress order and bangle roofs, domes, vaults.

4.2.1. Material and construction techniques:

The Islamic introduced the wet construction system or lime masonry. The previous Yadava style of construction system raising layers upon layers of masonry without cementing agent was replaced.



Fig -11: Ganesh temple, Tasgaon

The features like large span arches, vaults, vaulted or domical ceilings were introduced. A varied system of decoration and sculptured work lime stucco or plaster work on brick or stone surfaces were followed. The

improvisation in stone façade decoration with floral and calligraphic patterns, carve grills in stone. The openings were decorated with stucco design work in geometric, floral pattern with fine craftsmanship.

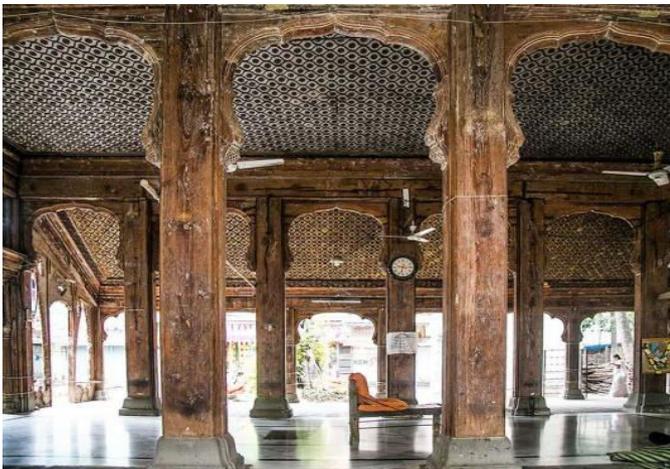


Fig -12: Tulsi Baug temple, Pune

4.1.2. Plan form:

The influence of Islamic plan forms on the temple's space requirements was minimal. The fundamental difference in Hindu temples and Islamic buildings were based on values of spaces settings beauty and aesthetics.

4.1.3. Plinth:



Fig -13: Kashi Vishwanath temple, Mahuli



Fig -14: Shiva temple, Shikar Sh ingnapur

The plinth consists of a moderate stone platform on which the wall structure is raised. There are three to

four layers of stone slabs with geometrical and floral decorated mouldings or even plane surfaces. The plinths usually are projected outside the wall structure. The entire structure rests on this plinth. The plinth's projecting portion creates podium with access by stairs and follow the exterior decorative patterns. The entrances to these levels have blind and/ open arches with doors. Each level is treated distinctly in frames, panels of arches.

4.1.4. Wall surfaces:



Fig -15: Shiva temple, Mahuli

Symmetry seems to be followed on all sides of wall surfaces. The openings cut within the walls are as large as an arch that holds in between the columns. Prominent wall surfaces with small panels were the repeated grid followed. These panels are outputs of openings in square or rectangular form. The decorated scheme can be in a single or more colored of stone or plaster work. Arches can be of various types – circular, pointed, sloping pointed, cusped. The stone eaves are projected on brackets from the termination of walls.



Fig -16: Ganpati temple, Theur

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4.1.5. Roof structure:



Fig -17: Ganpati temple, Tasgaon

Dome construction gains importance and was constructed out of bricks and plaster. The basic principle of rotated square was used in dome construction. A network of columns, arches, vaults and ribs supports the projecting points of square. A ring beam connects these points from where the dome rises. External treatment of the ring beam is of a simple mouldings.

5. GENERAL OR BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MARATHA TEMPLES

The understanding of Maratha temple tradition evolution is the basis of socio-political and cultural aspect during 17th -19th century of Maratha Empire. With the influence of different rulers, the temple tradition experienced changes in temple architecture from its size and scale infusion of foreign styles and elements. Indigenous and Revivalist types are the result of contrasting influences of contemporary movements and architectural traditions in Maharashtra.

Indigenous type is attached to the Islamic construction technique and decoration with conscious absorption of Yadavas architectural principles. A plinth structure of dressed stone and plane cemented walls dominate indigenous style. The Islamic influence of construction, decoration and aesthetics can be seen in the roof or the Shikhara. Other influences are seen in geometric and configuration of elements like domes, vaults and arches.

The Peshvas promoted the Revivalist temple type with an influence of North India, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Malwa and less of Islamic. The Revivalist type was inclination towards monumental form of structural stone temples with cemented masonry of lime and stone. Temples with stepped plan of sanctuaries can be seen at temples at Nashik and Trimbakeshwar.

Indigenous types are crafted with a combination of Yadava and Islamic architectural principles with an extensive use of Islamic architectural vocabulary. After well establishment of indigenous type, Revivalism took place at later stage.

6. CONCLUSION

Indian civilization has witnessed three political influences, viz. Hindu, Muslim and British of which Muslim domination was for a longest span. This combined influence led to a hybrid culture at varied stages with Islamic influence. A cultural phenomenon of survival and revival accommodated the socio cultural, religious and political ideologies and with differences growing between them.

One of the examples of this manifestation is the Maratha temple architecture which is a blend of Hindu and Islamic architectural traditions, from its formulation to its extinction. The Maratha era witnessed economic prosperity and political stability which resulted in backing of Maratha temple tradition grow. Morphological transformations with a combination of political, religious influence led to creation of new elements and temple compositions.

The Yadava temple tradition lost its substantial influence due to Islamic invasion on the Deccan. This influence did not rule out Yadava craftsmanship but underwent modifications to match with the Islamic architecture.

The indigenous type temple is a result of survival of Yadava tradition from Muslim invasion. The indigenous type vocabulary is incorporation of bhumiya features with Islamic building techniques and craftsmanship and use of materials like bricks and stucco. Some elements of the bhumiya forms were used as substitute in the Islamic architecture. These influences led to further revival in the revivalist form of temples. The Maratha temple tradition is a harmonious amalgamation of the survival and revival type traditions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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