

Temple Architecture in India

[UPSC Notes]

Temple Architecture styles

The temple architectural styles in India are of three types:

1. Dravida architectural style
2. Nagara architectural style
3. Vesara architectural style

Dravida architectural style

Dravida's architectural style was developed in the 7th – 8th century AD. Pallavas and Cholas in South India created this special temple style. The attraction was the compound walls and pillars that enclosed this style of architecture. The vimana stories were decorated by sculpting the images of Dwarapalas. The uniqueness of this style is that within an ambulatory hall, the temple is situated. Some of the temples of the Dravida style are:

1. Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram built by Narasimhavaram II
2. Nayakar rulers built Meenakshi Sundareswara temple at Madhurai

Nagara architectural style

Nagara architectural style temples are developed in North India. This style of architecture is complex, and not enclosed. The top of this temple style has Amalarka, which is a stone-like structure. This structure comprises two buildings, the taller one is the shrine, and the mandapa is the smaller one. Some of the famous Nagara architectural style temples are:

1. Chandela rulers built the Kandariya Mahadeva temple at Khajuraho.
2. Sun temple at Madera, Gujarat, built by Solanki rulers.

Vesara architectural style

Vesara architectural style was a Deccan style found in Deccan regions. It is a hybrid style formed by combining the features of Dravida and nagara architectural style temples. The structures are finely finished, and also they are well polished. Some examples of this architectural style are:

1. Kailashnatha temple at Ellora was built by the Rashtrakuta empire
2. Hoyasalesware temple at Halebid was built by the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhan

Temple Architecture In India

In India, there are many ways in which the temple architecture differs from each other, and each has some prominent features. The Dravida in the southern region and Nagara in the Northern region are the two broad temples of the country. The following are some of the fundamental components of a Hindu temple:

1. Sanctum or garbhagriha made use of the house as the main icon.
2. The entrance to the temple is the portico which allows worshipers to come through it and worship, and it is known as the mandapa.
3. Freestanding temples have a mountain-like spire.

Many people ask: What are the different Hindu temples in India? The Hindu temples in India are situated in different regions of India: North India temples, Central India temples, Western India temples, Eastern India temples, Hill temples, South India temples, Deccan architecture, Buddhist architectural developments, and Jain architectural developments. Let's have a look at each temple.

North India temples:

The Northern temples are built with stone platforms with steps leading to them. The north temples are mostly made up of Nagara architectural style. Presently in northern India, temples have several temple heads; earlier, it used to be only one. The different names are given to different temples of northern India, and each has its History.

Nagara style temple

The temples are constructed on the North side of India. This type of temple is built on a stone platform with steps going up to it, and north temples are usually built in this manner.

These temples don't have any elaborate boundary walls or gateways. It is complex and is not enclosed.

- Amalaka has a disc-shaped stone structure at the top of the temple.
- Garbhagriha is the tallest tower located under the temple.

Depending on the shape of the shikhara, there are many subdivisions of the nagara temple like Rekha Prasad, Phamsana, and Valabhi. Antarala or vestibule are transitional way that connect mandapa and garbhagriha.

Jagati is a raised floor on which the nagara-style temples are built. God has its vahana, which is depicted in these styles of the temple. Some of the examples of nagara style temples are:

1. Kandariya Mahadeva temple at Khajuraho.
2. Solanki rulers built a Sun temple at Modhera, Gujarat.
3. Ossian temple at Gujarat

These styles of the temple are further divided into three broad sub-schools, which are:

1. Odisha school
2. Chandel school
3. Solanki school

Latina is one of the most famous names for a nagara-style temple. The second most common architectural form is Phamsana which is broader and shorter than the first. Valabhi type is the third type of nagara style building, and these are rectangular buildings different from the other two.

Central India temples:

The temples in central India are mostly made up of sandstones. In Madhya Pradesh state, some old surviving temples were from the Gupta period. Amalak and Kalash are the two crowning elements found in all temples of that period.

Western India temples:

The temples in this region are large in numbers, primarily situated in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western Madhya Pradesh. Different colors and types of stones are used in building temples. Samlaji in Gujarat is considered the western region's most important art historical site.

Eastern India temples:

These temples are found in Northeast, Bengal, and Odisha. Bengal used terracotta is used as its primary building material for carving Buddhist and Hindu temples. Eastern India has several temples, but one of the most well-known is the Kamakhya temple in Assam, constructed in the 17th century and devoted to the goddess Kamakhya. Also, Siddheshvara Mahadeva temple is situated in Barakar in the Burdwan district.

Hill temples:

It is developed in Kumaon, Garhwal, Himachal, and Kashmir hills. India's hill temples have a tradition of having wooden structures with pitched roofs. Pandrethan, was built during the 8th and 9th centuries.

South India temple:

The Dravida-style temple is found in the south Indian temples. These temples have compounded walls, unlike the nagara-style temple. Gopuram is the entrance gateway in its centre in temples of south India. The most famous temples in south India is in Tamil Nadu. These are Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Madhurai, and Kumbakonam.

Deccan architecture:

In a state like Karnataka, many different architectural styles from temples of north and south India were used. Most of the experimental hybrid styles of architecture are found in the Deccan region, i.e., in Karnataka. Temples like Lad Khan temple at Aihole in Karnataka and Hoysaleswara temple are famous Deccan architecture temple which was made inspired by wooden roofed temples in the hills and also in dark schist stone respectively.

Buddhist architectural developments:

Bodhgaya is a pre-eminent Buddhist site. King Ashoka constructed the Bodhi Tree, which is known as the first shrine in Buddhist architecture. The design of these temples is neither Dravida nor Nagara; they are different from all. Kumargupta I led the foundation of monastery in the 5th century CE. Nagapattinam, Lalitagiri, Vajragiti and Ratnagiri are some of the famous Buddhist monasteries.

Jain architectural developments:

Except in hills, the Jain architectures were found across the length and breadth of India. Just like Hindus, Jains were also prolific builders of the temple. In Bihar, there is the oldest Jain pilgrimage, and in Ellora and Aihole, some most important Jain architectural sites can be found. The famous rich heritage of Jain structure is located in Karnataka. Vimal Shah constructed the most famous Jain temple at Mount Abu.

What are the Architectural Principles of Indian Temple Architecture?

In Simple Shastras and Vastu Sashttras, the principle of Indian temple architecture is described.

- The architectural temples in India are made in different styles.
- They are situated in different parts of India, and each has its history and structure that differ from the other.
- They are mainly influenced by India's geographical, racial, ethical, and historical diversities.

