

Re-thinking Temples: Silpa and Agama shastra and everyday Indian Experiences

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The Indian civilization is not only a great cultural system but also an immense religious effort of the human spirit. A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, and its ruling passion. So, the origin and development of the architecture and sculptural art arise in India from conditions and necessities quite different from those prevailing in other forms of culture. According to ancient scriptures on art and architecture pronounces that, "Spirituality is the secret of art". The Hindu temples are the signs, the architectural self-expression of our ancient spiritual and religious experiences.

All Indian artistic works precede from an act of Dhyana or Meditation, not really an intellectual idea or a splendid imagination, these are only mental translations, a direct intuition of some truth of life or being, some significant form of that truth, some development of it in the mind of the artist.

Therefore, the task of art is to represent the significant form of spirituality in the sensuous shape and seeing that work of representation has its value and dignity in the correspondence and the unity with the inner vision and its material embodiment. In this way, the sensuous aspect of art is spiritualized, since the spirituality appears in art as made sensuous. According to Indian thought, ideal art is a spiritual discovery than a creation.

Silpa Sastras: There were thousands of Silpa Sastras about architecture, sculpture, and paintings, but only a few are available to our generation. In the southern part of India, the following texts are used by traditional families- Kasyapa Silpa Sastra, Mayamata, Manasara, and Sakaladhikara etc., the verses are not only considered as a description or a prescription for construction but also considered as Dhyana Mantras. The Viswakarma tradition cultivated unique systems of approach towards the Silpa Texts. The comprehensive and holistic approach of the Viswakamas towards temple construction and town planning must be analyzed.

Agamas: Hindu Dharma is said to comprise of two major cultural streams viz., Nigama and Agama. Nigama covers the literary and ritual tradition of Vedic culture, on the other hand, Agama represents enshrined image-worship and the social life governed along with it. It is also known as Temple Institution. There are three Agamic schools, viz., the Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakta and they have common features. All these Agamas comprise four sections in general Jana Pada (deals with the philosophical doctrines and metaphysics) Yoga Pada (deals with spiritual practices and meditation) Kriya Pada (deals with architecture) and Carya Pada (deals with festivals and ritual worship).

Every step towards a temple is considered as a pilgrimage. To enter a temple is to enter in a microcosmic world. All the geometrical ground plans, architectural elements, decorations, temple rituals, a traditional method of worship leads to giving any devotee an experience of new religious and spiritual experience. The outer periphery of the temple, also having vibrant temple related different festival activity. This session is an attempt to discuss the temple architecture, rituals, Utsava and active participation of devotees.