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ORIGIN AND ANTIQUITY OF BHUMIJ TEMPLES



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We are well aware that Malwa was the land where Bhumija style temple architecture was born. It is from Malwa that the style spread towards east, west and south and become one of the prominent styles of temple building during the medieval times. The styles of medieval Indian temple building are classified by some northern Indian texts (like the Aparajitaprccha and the Kshirarnava) as fourteen and by others (like the Aparajitaprccha again, but in its second list) as eight. The Bhumija occurs prominently in both the lists but stands apart in the distinctiveness of its attributed origin. It is purely secular, whereas others owe their origin to various gods, demigods and demons.

Unlike others, it seems to have had no ancient traditions behind it and had arisen within the living memory of the compilers, patronised by some royal dynasts. This style was first noted by Stella Kramrisch.¹ The outstanding feature of the style is the Shikhara with four spines (latas) decorated with chhaitya-arches on the central rathas and a distinctive grouping of miniature shikharas of diminishing heights on the four quadrants between the latas. These miniature shikharas (called as kutastambhas) vary in number—from three to five rows vertically and five to nine rows horizontally. A prominent sculptured medallion within a large chaitya-window (surasenaka) at the base of the lata on the three sides, is another diagnostic feature. On the front face of the shikhara, the same feature is repeated a bit higher up as. sukanasa

in a larger and more elaborate manner. The temples of this class are invariably nirandhara. The texts-Samarangan-Sutradhara and Aparajitaprccha also issue directives for the style regarding the proportions of the doorway, pitha and the elevational features, with which the extant examples generally correspond. The extant monuments of three varieties viz. chaturasra, vrta and astasala also follow closely the texts in respect of the plan, design and elevation, but differ in details of measurements and proportions.

As regards the antiquity of the style, the earliest dated examples are the Udayeshvara temple at Udaypur (Vidisha District, M.P.), recorded to have been completed in A.D. 1080 : and the Ambarnatha temple at Ambarnath (Thana District, Maharashtra) dated A.D. 1060. Among the undated temples the earliest is the original nucleus of the Amareshvara temple at Omkar Mandhata (Distt. East Nimar, M.P.). Bhumija is a form of Indian temple architecture. Etymologically, Bhumija means “earth-born” or “country-born”. Stella Kramrisch² took the term in the literal sense and interpreted it as the native style of Malwa, which incidentally has the largest concentration of Bhumija temples (Rajasthan and northern Maharashtra have also a fair number). In this context, it is worth mentioning that no Sanskrit text mentions Malwa Bhumi, but the Bharat-Bhumi. However, the shilpa-text of Malwa, viz., the Samarangana-Sutradhara describes this particular type of temple in more detail which obviously, supports to its nativity to be in Malwa. Similarly, other shilpa texts

like the Aparajita Pracha and Lakshanasamuchchya, which were compiled out of Malwa, also mention this particular type of temples.³ Thus, the literal meaning of ‘country born’ may not, however, be accepted with certainty. Some of the scholars refer to its secular origin. Interestingly, the Bhumija class has been the only style attributed to human kings by Aparajita. The rest of thirteen types either have a divine or demonic origin. M.S. Mate has expressed that the technical term used in the shilpa-texts are far from easy to interpret and thus, it could be called ‘proper names’ given to a type of temple or a part thereof. It might have been derived from its functional position or from resemblance in shape with other objects. Thus, he opposed the interpretation of Krishna Deva and Stella Kramrisch regarding the word Bhumija and has further suggested that the latas and the typical arrangements of the miniature shikharas create shade and light patterns which result in alternate vertical bands of shade and light. Each of this band originates with the pitha or the ground and reaches up to the aamalaka in a continuous upward sweep.

This particular characteristic is absent in other varieties of Nagara temples. These bands and lines create the visual effect or impression that the structure has just broken the crust of the earth, is rising out of it, is born of it, is ‘Bhumija’. Thus, according to them the proper appreciation of the aesthetic scheme involved easily leads us to understand the term ‘Bhumija’. Stella Kramrisch is credited to have first recognised the extant Bhumija style of the temples in Malwa and expressed that it is the ‘Native Style of Malwa’⁴ which later on, spread in the neighbouring regions, viz., Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and even in Karnataka. Further, Dhaky’s opinion in this context may be more convincing that Bhumija is the form which, if not originated, atleast perfected and was favoured in the Malwa country; it was also adopted and widely employed in the adjoining territory of the Yadavas of Seunadesha who were in their early stages, vassals now of the Paramaras of Malwa, and now of the Chalukyas of Kalyani. Interestingly, the form is entirely unknown in Tamilnadu and the vastuworks of

that region- “the Kamkagama included, likewise do not have to say any thing about this form.” The Bhumija form has been adequately defined in the Aparajita and the particulars on Bhumija temples given in the Samarangana leave no doubt about its identification. Accordingly, a Bhumija-shikhara consists of storied arrangement (latina shaped) kutas or srngas, (latina shaped) placed over miniature stambhas, arranged in rows, creating an illusion of vertically thrown necklaces of gigantic beads (srnganam-malika-kramah). There is no venukosha of the nagara form but the madhyalata receives a strong central emphasis in the shape of the mala. The sukanasa invariably has a trivalli surasena front and the mala has at its root a surasena made of a single chaitya-dormer. The crowning member is the aamalasara of a peculiar non-Nagara kind, where its serration follows the plan of the shikhara.

The chandrika (moon-cap) which tops the aamalasara and comes under the kalash-finial in Latina and Sekhari temples, is here replaced by padmachhatra, a sort of schematized triple-umbrella. The temples of Bhumija class are invariably nirandhara, for a sandhara plan is incompatible with a Bhumija-shikhara. The Samarangana and Aparajita prescribe exclusively the rules for the proportions of the doorway, the pitha (socle) and other elevational features which the extant monuments generally follow. Both these texts devote a chapter exclusively to a detailed description of the ground plan, elevation and ornamentation of the Bhumija temples of three varieties of plan, viz., Chaturasra (orthogonal), vrta (circular) and ashtashala (of eight bhadras or principal off-sets). The known examples follow the texts closely in varieties of the plan and generally in composition and elevation but differ in details of measurement and proportion. The only epigraphic reference of this specific style is noticed in the inscription (1231 A.D.) in the Kaitabheshvara temple from Kuppatur modern Kubbatur, Sorab Taluq, Shimoga District, Mysore).⁵ While eulogizing the ancient agrahara of Kuppatur the inscription says that within “that village, with Kailash, stood the temple of Kotinatha, built by Vishvakarma and carved with com-

plete devotion, planned in perfect accordance with the many rules of architecture and freely decorated with Dravida, Bhumija and Nagara.⁶ The Kaitabheshvara temple exhibits excellent Chalukya-Karnata style of about A.D. 1100, anticipating in many respects the Hoyasala style; and although there may be a distant similarity between the Karnata and Bhumija modes in the rendering of the shikhara and in the embellishment of the Jangha with the design of tall pilasters crowned by what looks like a Nagara-kuta, there is nothing characteristically Bhumija about this type of temple. The inscription only indicates that its composer was a learned person, familiar with the idea that Bhumija was one of the types of temple architecture. This is not surprising, in view of the fact that by the early 13th century A.D. Bhumija was popular in Maharashtra, the southern boundaries of which are not far from Kuppatur situated in north Mysore. The inference drawn by Acharya and Mankand from this reference that Bhumija may stand for Vesara is, however, ingenious but not much convincing.⁷

Apart from these, Dhaky has noticed some of the early shrine models of Bhumija form in Karnataka which appear on the Kashivishvashvara temple. Lakkundi (circa 1008-10 A.D.) the Siddheshvara temple at Haveri (circa 1067 A.D.) and the Amrteshvara temple at Amritpur, (Karnataka) (1196 A.D.).⁸ Among these the Kashivishvashvara exhibits a tribhuma-model with three Kutastambhas in each quadrant while the Siddheshvara has a shrine model of four stories with seven horizontal Kutastambhas. The model of the Amrteshvara temple is also four storeyed but with only three Kutastambhas. It is worth mentioning that the most complete and true surviving temples of Bhumija form are Ambaranatha temple at Sinnar (District- Thana, Maharashtra) (1060 A.D.) and slightly later is Udayeshvara temple at Udayapur (1059-80 A.D.). Dhaky has further mentioned more earlier examples from Rajasthan, viz., Mahavira temple at Ghanerao (circa 1020 A.D.), District-Pali). Similarly, Krishna Deva has noticed the evidence of Bhumija temple at Omkara-Mandhata in Malwa assigned to late 10th century. Thus, the lower-most limit to which the

Bhumija temple can be pushed to. The scientific analysis of Bhumija form reveals that its origin may be due to legacy of the South Kosala forms of late Panduvanshi period over the Nagara traditions of the late Pratihara- Kachchhapaghata traditions of Central India.⁹ But the actual example of the superstructure over the temple is not earlier than 1060 A.D. or in any case prior to 1020 A.D. Two most faithful representations of Bhumija-shikhara on the walls of Kashivishvashvara temple at Lakkundi, incidentally prove that by 1010 A.D. the Bhumija form was already established with its full vocabulary, embracing its known standard elements and components. The Siddheshvara temple at Haveri (circa 1067 A.D.) exhibits the complete model with the pitha, jangha over the niche of the north wall of the Vimana. Interestingly, it is panchanga (navaratha), a plan not known for the Bhumija form from any existing example.

The model is four-storied instead of five, exhibiting an odd look, probably, because of short space under the eave etc. Dhaky has further referred to the case or model over the same-niche on the southern wall of the Saraswati temple at Gadag (circa 11th century A.D.). Sun temple at Ranakpur, (Rajasthan), where rare feature of the Uruhsrangas was noticed. In the present context, it is to be noted essentially that Donald M. Stadtner has recently discovered some proto-Bhumija forms from Dakshina-Kosala region. These structures are assigned to circa 7-8th century. The close examination of these monuments do indicate that stellate plan of Nagara tradition was experimented under the late Panduvanshis during 7-8th century A.D. and hence Dhaky has presumed that the origin may possibly be due to the legacy of south Kosala forms of the late Panduvanshi period over the Nagara temples traditions in north India.¹⁰ The shilpa-texts like the Samarangana, Aparajita, Lakshana-samuchchaya, and the Ksirarnava provide the lists of different forms of temples which include the Bhumija form invariably. The Samarangana and Aparajita contain full chapters giving the details of the ground plan, elevation and also the decorative schemes of Bhumija temples. Further, these texts also

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mention in full length about the sub-varieties of this form, for instance. Chaturasra (orthogonal), Vrtta (circular), astasala (of eight bhadrās or off-sets) etc. In the Samarangana, the Bhumija style is well defined and hence we may, however, presume that it was well established architecturally as substantiated by the word Kramagata- well established and traditional. Krishna Deva has expressed that the style may have had its beginning sometime in the second-half of the 10th century A.D. and has suggested that it was a period which witnessed the efflorescence of both the Anekandaka and the Bhumija - modes. According to him the earliest temple of Amareshvara at Omkara-Mandhata (Malwa), ascribed to the second-half of the 10th century A.D., is the nucleus of Bhumija mode and thus he advocated Malwa as the origin place of this style.¹¹ As mentioned above, the only epigraphic reference to the Bhumija occurs in the Kaitabheshvara temple inscription (dated 1231 A.D.) from Kuppatur (modern Kuppatur in Sorab Taluq, District Shimoga, Karnataka); the inscription only indicates that its composer was a learned person, familiar with the idea that Bhumija was one of the types of temple architecture.

M.A. DHAKY has further quoted some more temples noticed in Rajasthan and Karnataka which represent either model form of Bhumija mode or stamped by this mode to a greater extent.¹² He has further referred to the Hoyasala examples which have resemblance of Bhumija, for instance, the temple at Kikkeri, Amriteshvara temple at Amritpur and the Channakeshvara temple at Mosale.¹³ On the basis of these temples Dhaky has presumed that the Karnata architects might have had the essential know-how of the building a Bhumija temple. He adds further that a highly personalized interpretation of Bhumija temple occurs in Hoyasalanad in circa 13th century as substantiated by the temples of Sadashiva at Nugihalli (circa 1294 A.D.). Mule-Sankareshvara temple, Tiruvekere (circa 13th century A.D.) etc.¹⁴ Perhaps the real Bhumija form of Malwa underwent decadence and change in Karnatadesh etc. Further, it was, probably, encountered at Lakkundi then a pure Bhumija

model was noticed depicted on the western wall of Santeshvara temple Tillevelli which is a temple of Kadamba idiom built under the Seuna rule who patronised the Bhumija form. Most-probably, the Karanatan artists were again introduced with the Bhumija form which was the last revival of this form of temples as suggested by M.A. Dhaky. The Paramara kings of Malwa ruled over extensive territories from about the middle of tenth century to the end of thirteenth century A.D. Their achievements in the field of art and architecture as distinguished as in the domain of literature. The great king Bhoja has been eulogised in Udaipur-Prashasti as one who covered the world all around with the temples dedicated to Keddra, Rameshvara, Somanatha, Sundiral (?), Kala, Anala and Budra.¹⁵ He is also credited with composing the Samarangana-Sutradhara - an outstanding treatise on the art and architecture. Besides these, a good number of epigraphic records of this period are also available which refer to the munificent grants made by the kings and individuals for the maintenance of temples to meet the expenditure of Brahmanas residing in the temple complexes.

The earliest record (dated V.S.1036/980 A.D.) of the Paramara king Vakpatirajadeva alias Munjuadeva was found from Ujjain. It records the donation of a village by the King himself to defray the expenses of worship and repairs of the temple of Bhateshvari at Ujjain.¹⁶ Most-probably, when Ujjain was recognised as the capital of the Paramaras in circa 10th century the donation was made by the King Munjadeva (circa 97 A.D.-995 A.D.) at the place. Similarly, perhaps, one of the earliest temples of Dhaneshvara was built in the precinct of Mahakala by Dhanika, a member of the royal Paramara house of Vagada (Banswara region), who was kinsman of the Malwa Paramara house, as mentioned in the Panaheda inscription of 1059 A.D.¹⁷ Likewise, the inscription on the pitha of Vagdevi on Saraswati, dated V.S.1091/1033-34 A.D. of the period of Bhoja-I, represents the best sculpture of the period, and was enshrined in the temple at Dhara.¹⁸ Next to it is the Mandhata inscription of Jayasinha, dated V.S.1112/1056 A.D., it records the donation made in

favour of the Brahmanas residing in the temple where Shiva was enshrined. The most outstanding temple of the Paramara period is Nilakantheswara temple of Udaipur (Dist. Vidisha). The inscription on the eastern gate tells us that King Udayaditya (1050 AD-1080 AD) hoisted a flag-staff on it in V.S. 1137/1080 A.D. on the 7th day of the bright half-of-Vaisakha, obviously, this shows the completion of the temple. The later inscriptions of the Paramara Mahakumaras like Trailokya-Varman (V.S.1216/1159 A.D.). Devapala (1218-1232 A.D.) and Jayavarman-II, have been found in the temples of different places of their domain which are generally damaged or reconstructed. Besides these, the structural remains at Ashapuri (Dist. Raisen) and also at Modi (Mandsaur) are noteworthy. At modi three shrines of Vaidyanatha, Ajayeshvara and Ekalladeva are mentioned in an inscription of V.S.1314/1258 A.D. These shrines formed a group of the temples of the Paramara period.

Undoubtedly, these epigraphic records prove their great zeal for building temples but no inscription of this region mentions about the specific mode of Bhumija temples which has been elaborately described in the contemporary shilpa-texts like the Samarangana and Aparajita. The deep concentration of Bhumija temples of Malwa had its second homes in Seunadesha (Maharashtra) and Rajasthan; and it had further reverberations in Gujarat, Karnataka and other neighbouring regions. In the present context, the epigraphic reference of Bhumija-mode occurring in the Kaitabheshwar temple inscription (dated 1231 A.D.)

from Kuppatur (Shimoga District) is noteworthy. The inscription says that “within that village, with Kailash stood the temple of Kalinatha, built by Vishvakarma and carved with complete devotion, planned in perfect accordance with the rules of architecture and freely decorated with Dravida, Bhumija and Nagara.¹⁹ Krishn Dev has described the major features of this temple as follows :- “The Kaitabheshvara temple is a structure in typical Chalukya-Karnata style of about 1100 A.D. anticipating in many respects the Hoyasala style, and although there may be a distant similarity between the Karnata and Bhumija modes in the rendering of shikhara and in the embellishment of the jangha with the design of tall pilasters crowned by what looks like a nagarkuta, there is nothing characteristically Bhumija about this type of temple.

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R E F E R E N C E

1. Kramrisch, S. : The Hindu Temple, Vols. I-II, Calcutta, 1946, pp. 217-19 and 389. 2. Ibid. 3. Henceforth the texts will be mentioned in abbreviated forms as the Samarangana and Aparajita. 4. Ibid., p. 389. 5. Epigraphia Carnatica : Vol. VIII, Pt. I, Sorab Taluq, No. 275. 6. Ibid. 7. Acharya, P.K., Manasara : An Encyclopaedia of Hindu Architecture, London, 1946, Vol. p. 226 and Mankad, Aparajitaprechha, p. xxxi. 8. Dhaky, M.A. : Indian Temple Forms (In Karnataka Inscriptions and Architecture), New Delhi, 1977, pp. 18-20. 9. op.cit. 10. Ibid. 11. Dev, K. : 'Bhumija Temples', Studies in Indian Temple Architecture, (Edits Pramod Chandra, Bombay, 1975), pp. 92-93. 12. Dhaky, M.A. : op.cit., pp. 19-20. 13. Ibid. 14. Ibid. 15. Trivedi, H.V. : Corups Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. VII, p. 81. 16. The Identification of the temple is controversial, however, the deity Kalika locally known as Gadhakalika, situated in the ancient site of the city, seems to be identified with the ancient Bhatteshvari. 17. The temple is not identified, still it may be one among three shrines situated in southern side of Mahakala temple at Ujjain. 18. No intact temple of Saraswati has been noticed instant at Dhara (District Dhar MP). The identification of Saraswati has also been controversial. 19. Epigraphica Caranatica : Vol. VIII, part I, Sorab Taluq, No. 275. 20. Deva, K. : op.cit., pp. 94-94.