The rise of devotional Hinduism

While the Gupta period marked a high point in Buddhist art and architecture, the most innovative ideas were connected with the rise of the Hindu temple, a product of Bhakti or devotional Hinduism. Not only Buddhism, but orthodox Brahmanism too faced a new challenge from Bhakti, which swept across India in about the first century CE. The new Bhakti deities, such as Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, made their appearance in the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata in around the first century CE, even as their images were being fashioned. The ascendance of Vishnu, Siva, and Devi, the Great Goddess, heralded the fall of the Vedic gods, who were now reduced to the level of mythological figures. From now on, the three great deities of Hinduism would be solely responsible for human redemption.

A striking feature of Hinduism is the aesthetic vision of the divine as embodied by Siva, the first dancer who sets the universe in motion by dancing [16]. Indian classical dance, a form of offering to the gods based on Bharata’s Natyasastra (second century BCE--second century CE), the key treatise on dance, music, and drama, closely corresponds to Siva’s iconography, from the graceful lalita dance to the ecstatic caturanga, and ultimately to Siva’s dance of death (sundara). The temple dancers (devadasis) enjoyed a central but ambivalent position in society.

In contrast to the social subdivision of women in ancient India, the feminine principle embodied in Devi, the Great Goddess, has enjoyed primacy in Hinduism [17]. The subversive undercurrent in the cult of Siva/Sakti will be discussed later.

The sheer numbers and names of Hindu deities are confusing, a reflection of the fact that this dense pantheon is the product of a long evolution, accommodating an enormous variety of religions, cults, and sects. Thus bloody animal sacrifices exist side by side with extreme vegetarianism. The Hindu process of assimilation is a form of syncretism: whenever a local folk or popular deity was politically powerful enough to threaten Brahmanism, it was accommodated within the high pantheon. The syncretic process named the particular deity as an aspect of Vishnu or of Siva/Sakti according to its character [18].
feel the ‘unmanifest’ presence of the deity. From this luminous source flow streams of energy outwards in all directions, a dynamic concept that is central to temple design, as we shall see. The further one moves away from this centre, the less sacred does the space become. Thus depictions of the deity on temple walls are his/her ‘manifest’ forms

The Hindu temple

The Hindu temple is a public institution like a Buddhist caitya, but the different priorities of the new Hindu patrons—who did not form a coherent body as did the Buddhists—demanded a different organization of the sacred space, in keeping with the Hindu belief in mystical kinship with God. The temple is literally the beloved deity’s dwelling (devakalya), a resplendent palace (prasadastana) where his or her needs are faithfully catered to by temple priests. Hindus are not obliged to attend temple services. Nonetheless, the temple is a holy site (stambha), where they can perform circumambulation (pradakshina). They also perform the pious act of gazing at the deity (darshan) and offer prayers, flowers, and food (puja). Even though the temple is never a meeting place for a congregation, in the south especially it came to be a focal point of the community, publicly maintained by land grants, which were often furnished by the ruling powers.

The heart of the temple is the dark, mysterious garbha griha (literally ‘embryo chamber’), evoking the mother’s womb, where one is meant to
Hindus are divided into two rival, but not necessarily hostile, sects. The followers of Vishnu (the Vaishnava branch) consider him as a life-affirming, solar god. The earliest expression of Bhakti is Vishnu's epiphany in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna, Vishnu's incarnation, assures his devotee, Arjuna, of the power of devotion in attaining salvation without the need for Vedic rituals. Later, Krishna becomes associated with the cult of Radha/Krishna and the love between Radha (human soul) and Krishna (God). Vishnu's icons show his consorts, Lakshmi and Bhudevi, on a smaller scale in comparison with him, reflecting Vishnu's origin in the Vedic patriarchal pantheon. By contrast, the Saiva branch is centred on the Siva/Sukti dualism of two equal partners represented by their sacred coitus. Unlike Vishnu, Siva is almost totally faithful to his wife, Sakti, the Great Goddess. She is the active, sakti meaning energy. Siva, the god of paradoxes, is phallic incarnate, but also its opposite, the fiery celibate, underlining the binary opposition between 'indulgence' and 'renunciation'. Siva's sexuality represents life's energy but he is also the lord of death (not lord of the dead, who is Yama, a lesser god). Siva and Sakti are often represented by the linga and yoni, symbolizing their respective sexual organs; the linga and yoni together represent their sacred coitus.

The relationship between these three supreme deities and the devotee is mystical. Unlike the Jaina-Christian God, who is the absolute Other in relationship to humans, these deities, even though transcendent, manifest themselves in human (and animal) form, a paradox that enables us to relate to them. As arbiters of salvation, they are legitimized by the following formula in the Puranas (sacred texts): the Vedic gods, Indra, Brahma, and others, are periodically threatened by their wicked cousins, the demons (asuras). In desperation they seek the help of either Vishnu, Siva, or Devi according to the particular Purana. The saviour deity secures righteousness in the world by crushing that particular demon.

(human and animal), his/her cosmic play (lila), less potent than the main icon in the garbha grha, and usually combined with other deities. The concept of the 'unmanifest' complements the doctrine of the 'non-dual' in Indian thought. As an 'unmanifest' godhead, the central image is invariably either abstract or 'unbeautiful', revealing the otherness of divinity. The installation rituals of Hindu deities go back to the late Gupta text the Brhatshambha. The development of the Agamas, ritual texts, and especially the Pancaratra (Tantric) system in the fifth century CE, led to elaborate rituals with metaphysical interpretations, which went hand in hand with the rise of Tantric esotericism, a major movement that rivalled Bhakti (see chapter 4).}

Gradually, more functional buildings such as pillared halls (mandapa) and porticos (ardhamandapa) were added to the garbha grha, which was surmounted with a tower (sikhara). Hindu temples are broadly classified into northern and southern types. The earlier racial classification, Aryan for northern and Dravidian for southern, has now been discarded in favour of indigenous labels, Nagara and Dravida respectively. The distinction rests on the main features: the tower surmounting the sanctum, the ground plan, and the elevation or external walls. The Nagara tower (sikhara) has a gently sloping curve,
Vishnu

**Standard image**
- Human frontal figure holding four weapons or emblems (discus, lotus, mace, and conch shell).
- Larger Pancaratra tomb elaborates on the four-headed (main, boar, lion, and horse) Vishnu as Vasuvartha, a half-figurine, and a horse-headed incarnation, Hayagriva.

**Emblematic animal**
- Garuda, a vulture-like eagle.

**As saviour god**
- Ten incarnations in ascending order: 1. Matsya (fish); 2. Kurma (turtle); 3. Varaha (boar); 4. Narasimha (man-lion); 5. Vamana (dwarf); 6. Parashurama (Rama of the Axe); 7. Rama, hero of the epic Ramayana; 8. Krishna (of the Bhagavat Gita, regarded as the only full incarnation or God on earth); 9. Buddha, 10. Kalkin (the future equestrian incarnation before the world's dissolution).

**Other forms**
- As creator, sleeps, shaken by the serpent of time (Kali/Ananta = mindless) on the waters of oblivion after the universal flood. Brahma, the first man, who springs from his navel, is actually the creator with Vishnu's permission.

**Dancing forms**
- Natraj (King of the Dance) as creator danced to the end of time as the world collapses in a configuration before its renewal.
- Dancer of Kaliyug and Lakshmi, measured dances.
- Tantric dancer (violent dance).

**Sakti, the Goddess, or Devi,** Siva's partner as saviour deity
- The Goddess as Durga Mahisasuramardini, the destroyer of the Buffalo Demon; rides on a lion.
- The Goddess as Parvati, the beautiful daughter of Himalaya.
- The Goddess as Kali, the fierce black one.
- Devi has her fierce Seven Mothers as her companions.

**Family**
- Two wives: Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (goddess of learning) or sometimes Bhudevi (earth goddess).
- The smaller human size of the wives in relation to Vishnu indicates their lesser importance.
- The most famous legend is the love between Vishnu's incarnation Krishna and Radha (human soul).

**Siva/Sakti**

**Human form holds the trident (jhaurla) or occasionally a battle axe or bow and arrow**
- Ardhanarishvara (Androgynous image)
- Kalpavrajaskhara or anugraha murti (beneficent, graceful image)
- Samhara murti (fierce forms such as Bhairava)
- Aniconic Anga (either a phallicus with 1-5 faces carved on it or the sacred coil of Siva/Sakti (jina-jani) as in the Siva temple at the holy city of Banaras)

**As saviour god**
- Siva Andhakasuramurti/Gajasuramurti (destroyer of the demons Andhaka and Gajas).
- Siva Triparakalakarnamurti (destroyer of the Demon of the Three Cities)
- Siva Ravanaparashurarnamurti (Siva forgives Ravan)
- The Descendent of the Goddess Ganga (Ganges)
- Lingodbhava (a southern form in which Siva emerges out of a massive linga whose extent cannot be fathomed) by Vishnu's bear incarnation or Brahman in the form of a goose.

**Other forms**
- As creator, sleeps, shaken by the serpent of time (Kali/Ananta = mindless) on the waters of oblivion after the universal flood. Brahma, the first man, who springs from his navel, is actually the creator with Vishnu's permission.

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- The most famous legend is the love between Vishnu's incarnation Krishna and Radha (human soul).

**Siva and Devi's children**
- Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), emblematic animal: cow
- Saraswati (goddess of learning), emblematic animal: peacock
- Karttikeya (general of the gods, called Subrahmanya in the south), emblematic animal: peacock
- Ganapati (the elephant-headed god), emblematic animal: rat

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Brhat stotis and their genealogies.

with a fluted disc (amalaka) at the pinnacle. The Dravida tower (vimana) follows a dome and cornice pattern like a pyramid with diminishing tiers (talas), crowned by a square, polygonal, or round dome. The Nagara elevation consists of a series of projections (shikha) and recesses, whereas the walls of Dravida temples are superficially similar to European buildings in being broken up by images within entablatures at regular intervals [20, 21]. However, temples in a number of culturally distinct regions, such as Kashmir, Bengal, and Kerala, evolved their own variations on the canonical form. The temple is orientated in eight cardinal directions, each direction presided over by a deity (dikpala), though this is not always depicted. It is separated from the mundane world by a high, often richly moulded plinth. In South India, the temple is enclosed by protective walls with gate towers (gopuras) marking the entrances. The architectural texts (vaastusastra) from the fifth century onwards tend to use the metaphor of the body of the temple, while the tower is imagined as the cosmic mountain Meru or, in temples to Siva, as his mountain fastness, Kailasa.

**Architectural materials**
Among the appealing aspects of Indian architecture is the use of a wide variety of materials, such as wood, brick (many examples of both being

THE HINDU TEMPLE 39
Principles of architecture

Canons of Hindu architecture came to maturity around the tenth century in the great temples of the north and the south. Western norms are so deeply entrenched in art history that they are taken to be universally applicable and any deviations from them are regarded as aberrations. Hence we need to be clear about the actual principles governing the design and construction of Hindu temples, so that we can appreciate their aims and achievements based on their own criteria, rather than on extraneous ones. The Indian outlook on architecture was so different from the European that art historians have found difficulty in categorizing its forms. When scholars complain that Indian architecture is un inventive, they tend to confuse the 'language' of Indian architecture with its application. In western architecture, the language is often a given, as for instance, the Graeco-Roman language of orders, which hardly changed over millennia. Yet much rich architecture came out of this vocabulary in the West. Similarly, within the conventions adopted by Indian architects, there was a great deal of novelty and development even though a conscious ideology of progress did not inform their work.

As the use of western art historical terms is inappropriate to Indian architecture, scholars have begun using Indian terms derived from indigenous texts. However, some western terms remain in use in the face of difficulties, partly because Indian terms differ according to the region. Secondly, discrepancies between theory and practice in indigenous texts may escape our notice. One architectural treatise classifies the soil on which houses should be built: white soil for Brahmans, red for Ksatriyas, yellow for Vaisyas, and black for Sudras. Such impractical advice was given not by architects but by Brahmanical theoreticians, as part of social control.

In Hindu architecture, the beauty and complexity of geometric design, whose underlying principle is harmony, comes into play. Buddhists prefer the circle, but in Hindu temples the square is the perfect shape for the ground plan. The Bhatasambhat mentions rare cases of circular and octagonal temples [22]. This compendium, which dates from the sixth century CE and is the earliest text on temples and images, selects two ideal ground plans, based on the grid systems of 64 (8 x 8) and 81 (9 x 9) squares. However, the ultimate choice of auspicious proportions for the Hindu temple depended upon further astrological calculations that left a remainder of a fraction. Finally, the underlying connection between sexual rites and fertility in Hindu architecture is emphasized during the consecration of South Indian temples.

The role of ornament

The most striking feature of the Hindu temple is its external ornamentation, which is mainly confined to towers and elevations. In
designing a building, the architect has to face the problem of breaking up the wall surface, usually with windows and decorations. In a Hindu temple, the three walls other than on the entrance side are decorated as part of an integral plan, the architect being guided by the Hindu texts, which describe these three sides as blind doors (ghana dwara), symbolic exits marking emanations of the deity. The ghsana dwara is often visualized as a niche shrine containing a deity.

Ornament plays a central role in Indian civilization. Classical Sanskrit delighted in similes, metaphors, puns, ironies, alliterations, and other literary effects. The Sanskrit verb alambhā, to decorate, literally means "to make enough. Ornament was a sine qua non of beauty in India, and things lacking in ornament were considered imperfect or, more precisely, incomplete."

Temple ornamentation ranges from narrative reliefs to animal, floral, foliate, and geometric designs, all forming a coherent part of the relief stonework. And none is more germane to temple design than repetitive motifs based on architectural details, particularly the myriad patterns derived from the Buddhist caitya window (grosaka). In the north, the grosaka was transmuted into intricate honeycomb patterns, creating a rich lace-like surface texture. The south used variations on the grossaka known as kutas, nais, and pañjara as well as profiles of barrel-vaulted caityas (sala). In the north, two further motifs, derived from the sikharas and the amalaka capstone, were used to considerable effect.

These repetitive motifs, be they kutas and salas in the south or sikharas and amalakas in the north, obey clear geometric rules. Western classical architecture's emphasis on the façade contrasts directly with the Hindu temple, which is conceived three-dimensionally. It is a curious paradox that temples such as the Kandariya Mahadeva at Khajuraho [208] can only be fully appreciated today by being viewed from the air. Also, the Hindu decorative motifs are not merely surface configurations, but are themselves conceived three-dimensionally, so that they emerge out of the very core of the sanctum in a series of cascading forms [23]. The symbolism behind the Hindu temple is
The sikharas of Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho, eleventh century CE.

The sikharas incorporate a clustering of 84 smaller towers, embedded at the bases of projections, providing a summit for each of the wall projections beneath. Sharp projections and deep recesses create a dazzling interplay of light and shadow under the strong Indian sun. The Kandariya represents the apotheosis of architectural 'self-imaging' in an orderly interplay of fractals.

explained by Stella Kramrisch, who argues that it is a manifestation of the deity in which divine energy radiates in different directions from the garbhha grha. The fragmentation and proliferation of motifs on the elevation may be characterized as the external expressions of this emanation, embodied in the niche shrine mentioned above. [26]

Hindu designers developed a system which can best be explained by the concept of 'self-imaging' developed by modern chaos theory. To offer an analogy, if one slices a cauliflower into two, the cross-section of the florets will resemble a series of miniature cauliflowers. These so-called fractals are 'self-same' in that they will look the same on every scale. Many of the greatest Hindu architects develop this geometric principle of nature with remarkable virtuosity [26].

Hindu temples were products of invention and experiment, of conscious choices, problem solving, and accumulated technical experience. They were the collaborative work of many individuals, led by chief architects and master sculptors who ran workshops and were well versed in the different arts and in the vastusastras and silpasastras, and under whom there were numerous non-literate assistants and ordinary labourers.

Full-blown Hindu temples, incorporating the principles described above, took many centuries to evolve. The process can be divided into two conceptually self-contained periods: an experimental period from the fifth to the eighth centuries CE, when there was an absence of consensus about the canon, and when rock-cut temples vied with structural ones, the former developing complex narrative sculptures; and a period of consolidation from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries, when the widely disseminated canon became the essential template for builders and patrons. This was when narrative art gave way to cult icons, as structural temples totally superseded excavated ones. Within this broad framework, architecture developed differently in different regions, each producing its own chronology of temple development, each providing different bits of the great chronological jigsaw.

The age of experimentation (fifth to eighth centuries CE)

The Gupta beginnings
The Gupta period (320–467 CE) stood at the intersection of two traditions: the maturity of Buddhist art and the genesis of the Hindu temple. Professional builders, assigned the new task of creating Hindu edifices, turned their knowledge of Buddhist architecture to advantage. Not only the caitya window motif (garbha-grha) but the rock-cut shrines themselves inspired some of the finest Hindu excavated temples and narrative art as late as the eighth century, even though structural temples were assuming increasing importance. The first
Hindu monument was discovered at Bheraghat, a pillar dedicated to Vishnu, the god of knowledge and the savior. It is located in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India. The monument is a 12th-century AD. The inscription on the monument records the dedication of the monument to Vishnu by a king named Bheraghat. The inscription also mentions that the monument was built to commemorate the victory of the king over his enemies.

The monument is a large, monolithic structure made of sandstone. It stands approximately 20 meters tall and is 10 meters wide at its base. The monument is a temple dedicated to Vishnu, and it is one of the largest monolithic temples in the world.

The monument is surrounded by a large courtyard and is accessed by a series of steps. The structure is divided into three parts: the base, the shaft, and the capital. The base is a square platform that measures 20 meters on each side. The shaft is a tall column that rises from the base and is decorated with intricate carvings. The capital is a large disc-shaped structure that sits on top of the shaft.

The monument is an important example of early Hindu architecture and is thought to have been built during the 12th century AD. It is considered one of the finest examples of its kind and is a significant cultural landmark in India.
temporal and spiritual undertakings, marks the commencement of the pilgrim’s ritual circumambulation in a Hindu temple. In this unconventional west-facing temple, however, Ganges is on the south side, which suggests that pilgrims would circumambulate in an anticlockwise direction.18

Regional art after the Guptas (sixth to eighth centuries)
The Gupta empire, which had offered temporary political cohesion to North India, rapidly disintegrated in the wake of invasions made into the subcontinent by the Huns from Central Asia, although Harsha (606–47 CE), the last North Indian emperor, maintained some semblance of unity during his lifetime. The political fortunes of North and South India diverged, bringing to the fore the regions and their art. While Buddhism was shrinking elsewhere, it remained important in Bihar and Bengal, where enormous monasteries thrived until the thirteenth century.

The next stage in the evolution of the Hindu temple took place in what was the south of the Gupta empire, namely the Deccan plateau, where four rival dynasties competed for hegemony in the seventh century, but none could maintain a permanent hold over the region. The Kalachuri dynasty dominated the coast around Maharashtra, the ‘Early Western’ Calukyas of Vatapi controlled Karnataka and the Deccan, while the Pallavas from Tamilnadu in the south–east periodically threatened their more northerly neighbours, the Calukyas. Finally, in the eighth century, the Rashtrakuta kings enjoyed a brief supremacy over the region.

During this period, monuments to Vishnu gave way to Saiva ones (dedicated to Siva) in large parts of India, partly because of the influence of the saint Lakulisa, founder of the Pasupata sect. Born in Gujarat in around the first century BCE, Lakulisa soon emerged as the most important Saiva saint.19 Pasupata iconography drew upon stories of Siva as the saviour god in the Linga Purana, a major Saiva text. Craftsman who had worked at Ajanta during the Vakataka ascendancy emigrated southwards as the demand for Hindu art and architecture expanded there. Rock-cut monuments continued to hold their own alongside structural temples.

Ambitious temples built in these different kingdoms in the Deccan and Tamilnadu have many common features as well as differences, which raises questions of transmission of styles. The prevalent explanation is that the rulers adopted each other’s styles, sometimes in admiration, but often the appropriation of a style symbolized victory over an adversary. However, the diffusion of styles through interactions between rulers has been challenged as being simplistic. The suggested alternative is the spread of styles via craftsmen who moved from one regional workshop to another in search of work.20

The Early Western Calukyas of Vatapi
The first temples in the Deccan were built in the four capitals of the Early Western Calukya dynasty, founded in 543 CE. Aiholi, Vatapi (modern Badami, in Karnataka), Pattadakal, and Alampur were all embellished with sacred buildings and bathing tanks made of locally quarried sandstone. The setting of the Badami temples on an artificial lake and with a massive bare boulder as a backdrop is particularly arresting. The very earliest temples were the excavated royal shrines at Aiholi and Badami, which can be linked to earlier rock-cut monuments in the Deccan. In the seventh century, a large group of Calukya structural temples were built with a wide variety of tentative ground plans, revealing the designers’ uncertainty as to where to place the garbhagriha. At Aiholi, the first capital, for instance, the experimental Lad Khan temple (c. seventh century) is a square pavilion resembling a thatched village hall, with the sanctum added as an afterthought. Although attractively decorated, it conveys the overall impression of heaviness, its massive walls carrying the weight of the stone roof.[27].
The final Calukya capital, Pattadakal, exhibits the maturity of this style. Despite seven temples out of a hundred being lavishly endowed by members of the royal family, no ruling monarch directly commissioned a temple. The Calukya kings seem to have been reluctant to declare such public institutions as their personal property. Two major temples, Sangameswara and Virupaksha, express architectural self-confidence, by now clearly enunciating the main features of a Hindu temple, namely the sanctum and the front hall preceded by a portico. They were commissioned as thanksgivings by the queens of Vikramaditya II, the two Kalacuri princesses, on the occasion of the king’s victory over the Pallavas. The grandest, Virupaksha, was dedicated by Queen Lokamahadevi in c. 740 CE in celebration of Vikramaditya’s third conquest of the Pallavas. Not only do we know the name of the architect, but even the sculptor signs his work, a rare expression of artistic individualism in ancient India.

Virupaksha’s portal shows how temple entrances had undergone further elaboration since the Gupta period, giving a new prominence to the door guardians. The crowning beauty of its southern, tiered tower is a sukumaras with a dancing Siva, which serves as a crest in front of the tower and provides aesthetic relief to the symmetry of the tower. The exterior walls of the temple contain 35 niches with sculptures based on myths of Siva. It is finally enclosed by a high wall in the southern fashion, with 30 sub-shrines and an incipient gopura. The nandi mandapa, an elegant pillared pavilion which shelters a sculpture of Siva’s bull, Nandi, was yet another southern invention.

The Pasupata rock sanctuaries at Ellora and Elephanta
By far the greatest Hindu narrative sculptures of the experimental period were completed in the rock sanctuaries of Ellora and Elephanta in Maharashtra. A major pilgrimage site since the early Buddhist period, Ellora shared the same artistic tradition as Ajanta, as is suggested by its pillar capitals and figure sculptures. From the seventh century onwards, the same artisans were employed by Hindu patrons at Ellora. Although some outstanding Vaishnava art exists at Ellora, the greatest narrative projects were inspired by the Pasupata worshippers of Siva from the surrounding regions. Stories of Siva the redeemer, chiefly based on the Linga Purana, gave rise to a highly dramatic form of sculpture.

An outline of the evolving themes in Kalacuri, Calukya, and Pallava monuments might help us grasp the underlying structure of early Hindu narrative art as well as throw light on Pasupata patronage. These were, first, Siva’s four saviour personae, as seen in his destruction of the demons Andhaka and Gaja and the demon of the Three Cities; his granting of grace to the demon Ravana; and his assisting the descent of Ganga (the river Ganges). Secondly, there were scenes from Siva and Parvati’s domestic life, namely their marriage and the game of dice. Thirdly, there were Siva’s dancing forms, which are the most ubiquitous in India, and can be found in Caves 14, 15, 16, and 21 at Ellora. The myth that tested the artist’s skill and imagination to the utmost was Siva’s destruction of Andhaka. In Cave 15, the power and frenzy of the eight-armed Siva, who impales the demon on his trident, is evident even in its damaged state.

In 540–55 CE, on the island off the coast of Mumbai (Bombay) named Elephanta by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, a Siva temple, displaying a remarkable unity of artistic conception and execution, was completed. The Kalacuri, the reigning dynasty, were Pasupatas but there is no direct evidence of their involvement in Elephanta. This ancient site may have originally contained images of perishable material but because of its great sanctity this ambitious and durable temple complex was eventually built. The temple adapts the Buddhist vibhara of the Ajanta type, with a central hall and a shrine placed against the rear wall. Unlike Ellora, where the sculptural panels are treated individually in the caves, here at Elephanta the temple and its iconographic programme form part of a coherent whole.

There is a strong suggestion that the plan was provided by a Pasupata patron.

If Elephanta offered a compelling vision of Saiva mythology, the Kailasanatha temple (known as Cave 16) at Ellora was an edifice of great power and nobility, an architectural wonder. The designers fashioned an entire temple out of the living rock, in emulation of Siva’s mountain fortress, Kailasa. To sustain the Kailasa illusion, they even carved under the temple the scene of Ravana being trampled by Siva under his mountain seat.

A project that necessitated the organization of resources on such a
grand scale was intended by the short-lived Rashtrakuta dynasty to be a political statement, as an inscription on the temple makes clear. In 756 CE, Danidunga made Ellora his capital soon after asserting his supremacy over the Calukyas. His successor, Krishna, who humiliated the other great power, the Pallavas, celebrated his triumph by commissioning this Siva temple, an undertaking that took 15 years and was completed just before his death. Craftsmen from neighbouring Calukya and Pallava regions enriched Kailasa with their expertise.

The interplay of the temple’s massive yet simple forms and delicate reliefs is remarkably effective [32]. The architects carved the temple out of a huge boulder, first separating it from the surrounding rocks and then possibly working from the top downwards, thus avoiding the need for enormous scaffolding. Its unusual design was prompted by the desire to create a powerful visual effect within a confined space. In order to prevent the temple from being perceived all at once, a lofty and solid front screen conceals it from view, forcing one to enter through its modest central opening. Once inside, pilgrims found themselves in an excavated area shut in by sheer rock faces and cave temples. To enhance the effect of grandeur, the whole temple is placed on a 57-foot-high base with the actual temple laid out on the upper level. The king personally engaged a sculptor named Baladeva to contribute to the project, though his work cannot be isolated from that of other sculptors. Among the wealth of sculptures, one in particular engages our attention: the myth of the goddess Durga destroying the Buffalo Demon is one of the most animated treatments of the theme [33].
The Pallava temples of Tamilnadu

The earliest temples in Tamilnadu in South India were built by the Pallava kings, who originated in Andhradesa. They sent expeditions to Sri Lanka and traded with China and South-East Asia. Their capital, Kanchipuram, a major cultural centre, was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang in the seventh century. Royal patronage in Tamilnadu was systematic and ideologically oriented. Pallava monarchs sought to legitimize their rule by naming specific royal temples after themselves and declared their allegiance to Siva by adopting the Somaskanda iconographic type (showing Siva with his wife Sakti and son Karttikeya) as their dynastic emblem. Gradually, a complex relationship grew up between temple, king, and community.

The first Pallava temples were cave shrines near the seaport of Mamallapuram, which had been a centre of trade since Roman times. Among them, the 'Dunga and the Buffalo Demon' cave is one of the most accomplished. The first structural temple, known as the Shore Temple, was built by Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha in 625 CE [34].

In contrast to this tentative building, in his capital at Kanchipuram Rajasimha built the majestic Rajasimhesvara temple, popularly known as Kailasanatha. The royal temple was not only named after him in accordance with a growing practice, but the legitimizing process can be discerned in temple inscriptions that made public pronouncements on the ruler's interests and personality. The most ambitious temple of its time, it so charmed the monarch's Calukya enemy that he spared it and may even have introduced its advanced style into his own capital [35]. The temple's base is granite, but the superstructure is of sandstone and brick covered in plaster. It is difficult to imagine today what the temple looked like originally, when it was richly painted and contained a wealth of frescoes. The arrangement of the subsidiary deities and the guardians of the directions shows the spread in the south by this time of architectural treatises and iconographic texts, their importance endorsed in this royal edifice. [36]

The canonical period (eighth to eighteenth centuries CE)

The final phase in the development of the Hindu temple, that of structural temples, occurred between the eighth and eighteenth centuries in North and South India, with the tenth century providing the defining moment. Now a perfect balance was struck between scale and aesthetics at three of the greatest temple sites, Tanjavur in the south, Bhubaneswar in the east, and Khajuraho in central India. In temple decoration, icons incorporated within an overall conception of
Durga, slayer of Mahisa, Kailasanatha temple, Ellora, eighth century...

The youthful goddess rides into battle on her mount, the lion, bearing the weapon given to her by the gods who had created her. Artists interpreted the myth in two different ways: the common one shows the vanquished Buffalo Demon lying prostrate at Durga’s feet. The more dramatic approach presents the actual battle scene when the outcome is as yet uncertain. No relief matches the dramatic intensity of this scene with bodies slumbering in the battlefield while the young goddess confronts her proud adversary.

Ranganathaswamy/Kailasanatha (Siva) temple, Kanchipuram, eighth century ...

Built on a developed Dravidian plan, the rectangular walled enclosures contains other typical southern features: a water tank, ratha mandapa, early gopura towers (gopura), and numerous subsidiary shrines along the enclosing walls. The power of the Siva temple is marked by closely layered tiers (rathas), which shelter a central linga, behind which are sculptural reliefs, marking the dual identity of the southern tradition. The southern elevation is distinguished here with plastered entablatures containing monumental sculptures, including elephant and lion sculptures. Siva figures and ramayana lions...

the sacred space replaced the narrative mode of the experimental period. This may reflect the greater use of ritual texts, such as the Agamas, and possibly the decline of outdoor ambulatory. In the early period, pilgrims read the sculptures as they circumambulated outside, rather than inside, the temple. Finally, the Agama texts themselves are proof of the widespread influence of esoteric Tantric cults from Kashmir in the north to Tamilnadu in the south.

Southern temples (eighth to eighteenth centuries)

The imperial Colas and their successors

Few Indian rulers matched the Cola kings in their political use of art. Not only did they ritualize desecrate their rivals’ temples but they used their own temples to make unequivocal statements about political hegemony. The greatest imperial power in South India, by the tenth century the Colas had reached the borders of the Rashtrakuta kingdom in the north, replacing brick temples with granite stone ones as they went. Rows of temples were built on both banks of the Kaveri river to mark their growing power.

Crowned in 983 CE, Rajaraja I (‘King of Kings’) was the only Indian monarch to carve out an overseas empire, establishing his second capital at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka. Cola art and architecture in South India was the product of a prosperous,
highly efficient empire during the period of its greatest territorial expansion.

Rajaraja I built the royal Rajarajeswara temple, known today as the Bhradisvara temple, in his capital at Tanjavur. Its many inscriptions make clear the triumphalist nature of the edifice [21, 36, 37]. It was recently identified as a royal funerary monument but the weight of evidence seems to go against this hypothesis.²⁰ The temple took 15 years to build (985-900 ce) though Rajaraja did not live to see its completion. Its construction was partly funded by war booty and tributes from Sri Lanka. It also received gifts from the emperor, his queen, and officials. The numbers of architects, accountants, guards, and functionaries and the names of numerous temple dancers, as well as details of the land revenue allocated towards its maintenance, were engraved meticulously on the temple walls and formed a public record of the affairs of this institution central to the Cola capital.²¹ As in Pallava architecture, the richly moulded granite base of the vimana holds up brick upper storeys to reduce the overall weight. The elevations of the handsome two-storeyed, corniced sanctum contain six deep niches flanked by pilasters, within which are heroic Siva figures. The interior is equally imposing. The two-storeyed sanctum, lit up by central openings, shelters a massive linga, surrounded by a profusion of sculptures and murals—the earliest depictions of classical dance poses (karanas).²²

By common consent, the finest Cola masterpieces are the bronze images of Siva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance), admired by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, among others, as epitomizing Hindu civilization.²³ They were carried in procession during festivals as surrogates for the fixed image in the sanctum, reflecting the importance of festivals in South India from as early as the second century BCE, the ‘golden age’ of the Sangam period [38, see also 16].²⁴

After the Colas three tendencies dominated South Indian temple building until the modern period. First, temples increasingly turned into sacred sites, demonstrating the growing importance of the temple as the pivot of the Tamil rural community. These vast precincts are worth studying as much for their spatial organization as for their social and economic roles in society. The temple-cities had a powerful impact on rural hinterlands, with money and land being donated to priests, who as large landholders invested in village irrigation works centring on tanks.²⁵ Secondly, dance assumed an even greater importance in temple sculpture, underlining the importance of temple dancers. Finally, gopuras overtook actual temples in size and importance. The sacred city of Cidambaram, a complex of multiple
Dvarapala culture created a recognizable ideal of beauty, which consisted of slender bodies and narrow elegant faces, as exemplified by Siva’s consort Parvati. Although this ideal appeared in stone sculptures early on, it reached perfection in the free-standing Cola temples. These portable metal icons, cast by the “lost wax process” in conformity with ritual manuals and ritual texts, belonged to temples.

shrines and halls, sanctified by the legend that Siva danced there, attained its present form in the thirteenth century. The temple compound expanded greatly to become a 35-acre rectangle enclosing four precincts, their streets oriented towards the temple as the symbolic heart of the universe. The reliefs at Cidambaram offer an encyclopedia of dance poses accompanied by literary quotations.

Although Siva seems to have inspired the finest art and architecture in South India, the Ranganatha at Srirangam—the largest temple complex in the south, which was completed in the seventeenth century—aptly reminds us of the importance of Vishnu worship in Tamil Nadu. The sacred city, built on a north-south axis and occupying three times the area of Cidambaram, was designed in seven concentric rectangles as prescribed in the texts. It is dotted with 21 gopuras, including the four incomplete ones, which would have been the largest.  

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THE NAVAK PERIOD

The last major temple-building activity took place during the rule of the Nayaks, who enjoyed primacy in the south after the fall of Vijayanagara in 1565. (Vijayanagara is discussed later, in chapter 5, because although late Hindu architecture cannot be fully appreciated without taking note of Islamic forms.) Temple complexes on an ever grander scale were built under Tirumalai Nayak (1623–59), familiar to us from his life-like portrait sculptures. The most elaborate Nayak temple was the twin-temple complex at Madurai; the better-known one, dedicated to Minakshi, the Great Goddess, is known for its gopuras.\[40]\n
The outcome of advanced technical skill, these majestic towers are the considerable achievements of a civilization whose artistic taste is so different from the European that colonial historians, led by James Fergusson, have felt impelled to condemn them as products of cultural decadence.\[41\] The unanswered question is, why do gopuras increase in size the further they are from the sanctum, completely dwarfing it?

A tentative explanation, based on the notion of purity versus pollution that is central to the Brahmanical religion, may be offered here. In a temple, the cult image in the garbha griha is surrounded by a hierarchy of deities, with minor ones at the outer periphery, all arranged according to a scale of purity. The aim is to protect the sanctum from worldly pollution. If these gateways, which are accompanied by high walls, are to serve as symbolic barriers to pollution, the higher they are, the greater the chance they have of being effective.\[42\] The other characteristic Nayak structure was the gallery of ‘a thousand pillars’, first introduced in Vijayanagara, whose most operulent instance is the seventeenth-century corridor at Rameswaram at the southern tip of the subcontinent, decorated with royal donors in poses of supplication.

Northern temples (eighth to thirteenth centuries)

ORISSA

From the eighth century CE, Nagara styles in the north began evolving in parallel to the Dravida styles in the south. Orissa on the east coast and an area covering Gujarat/Rajasthan and central India represent two related but distinct styles. We know virtually nothing about Orissa until the seventh century CE, except for Asoka’s conquest of the area, followed by the exploits of the legendary king Kharavela. Gupta temple art arrived there in the wake of a dynastic marriage between Orissan and Western Cañukya rulers in the eighth century.\[43\] The Pusapata sect, which had inspired Karnataka-Dravida monuments, had spread to Orissa by this time, inspiring major temples.\[44\] Unlike those of much of the north, Orissan temples have largely survived, so that their evolution can be clearly mapped, especially in terms of the progressive richness of architectural divisions, mouldings, and sculptures.

While working with northern elements, Orissan architecture developed its own typical features: gopura nets, languid female figures (alasa kanyai), love-making couples, nyulas (decorative ‘lion-monsters’ trampling elephants), and, above all, the bho. Two unique additions to the Orissan temple design, dating from around the tenth century, were dictated by social needs: the hall for dispensing consecrated food (bhoga mandapa), and the hall for temple dancers (nata mandapa), the latter becoming an integral part of temple ritual and sacred sexuality.\[45\] Even today, Orissan temple dancers at the Jagannatha temple in Puri, who are called ‘slaves of god’ (devadasis), are ritually married to the deity and to his living incarnation, the god-king of Puri.\[46\] This social practice, which made devadasis sexually available to kings and priests, came under the disapproval of the British Raj, which sought to save them from their ‘depraved’ lives.

Blubaneswar was the major site of the Pusapata temples. The eighth-century Parasurameswara temple introduces typical Orissan
The contrast between the elaborately decorated sanctum (sankhta) and the plain front hall (jagamohan) with a pyramidal roof of diminishing horizontal bands is dramatic. The sankhta’s finial is an ‘Orissa’-fluted amalaka capstone not its multiple projections are closer to the Gujarat-Rajasthan style (see 24). The temple is enriched with two bands of elegant finial sculptures, including erotic ones, and a complete set of guardians of the eight quarters, a rare feature. The sanctum and its central image niches are now empty.

features: the elaborately decorated sanctum contrasts with a plain front hall; horizontal bands (pilda) decorate the roofs; and amalaka and gajaksha segments at the corners of the sikara do not disturb its plain sloping contours. Orissan temples attain self-confidence in around the eleventh century CE. An intimate style informs the gem-like, red sandstone Rajarani temple (1000 CE) [41]. With the twelfth-century Lingaraja temple the Orissan style acquires a solemn grandeur. The use of grey stone, rather than the more common red sandstone, emphasizes the austerity of the Pasupata shrine [42]. Unlike other major temples, the surprisingly sparse embellishments of the sanctum’s outer walls make the tower all the more imposing. The roof of the front hall (jagamohan) has now evolved into two levels of pilda tiers with a recess in the middle, while its fluted, bell-shaped finial (ghanta) has acquired considerable elegance. The temple, originally containing only the sanctum and the pillared hall, gradually incorporated two more structures, the hall for consecrated food and the dancing hall, indicating the growing complexity of temple rituals. The Lingaraja’s importance is reflected in the numerous shrines within a walled enclosure, in the southern fashion.

Although Orissan style reached its pinnacle in the twelfth-century Lingaraja temple, our study of the style cannot be complete without considering the thirteenth-century temple to the sun at Konarak, situated near the coast, the late, stunning achievement of the Nagara style.6 Young Nrsimhadeva I (1238–64 CE), who undertook the project at his mother’s behest, decided to surpass all previous achievements. According to the Mughal historian Abu’l Fazl, many thousands of workers were engaged on the construction of the temple, which took 12 years. Although Surya is not one of the great saviour gods, the continuing strength of his cult since Vedic times is demonstrated by
the spectacular temples built in his honour. It is intriguing that he is the only god to wear boots, high ones made of leather, a polluting substance in the eyes of Hindus (southern versions are barefooted). Perhaps his cult had a Parthian or Kushan connection?

One may infer Konarak’s political importance in the extensive portrayals of Nrsimhadeva in the temple, including that of his spiritual initiation, which hints at the legitimizing function of such a temple. The increased use of the dance hall for spiritual discussions, as well as the growing importance of the temple dancers themselves, was turning Orissan temples into the focal point of communal life. However, tensions between royal ambitions and the temple’s role in society were often just below the surface. It is significant that the king never speaks of his great project at Konarak; we know it only from his descendants.

As with other examples of Indian architecture we have encountered so far, the temple’s actual scale is far less important than the monumental conception realized by means of proportions. In fact, from a distance, the five-projection Jagannathas looks rather squat. But as one gets closer, the building slowly unfolds itself at each stage until we reach the entrance doorway. Above the austere portal is a panel representing the nine planets. The three diminishing tiers of the roof pyramid consist of separate and elaborately developed horizontal bands (pisahas). It is significant that the recesses between them have now been enlarged into wide terraces, where over life-size, free-standing sculptures of women musicians and dancers have been placed at regular intervals. These, some of the most powerful in Indian art, celebrate the temple dancers. Three Surya icons are housed in the central niches of the damaged sanctum, enabling us to guess what the bronze deity in the garbha grha looked like. The profusion and variety of sex acts on the ‘Black Pagoda’ shocked Victorian sensibility.

**Khajuraho**

Some 25 temples in the remote village of Khajuraho, known to tourists for their erotic sculptures, constitute the crowning achievement of the western and central Indian style. After the emperor Harsha’s demise in 647 CE, North India splintered into numerous small kingdoms, as the three great powers, the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan, the Pala of Bengal (770–1182), and the Gurjara-Pratiharas (710–1022) of north-central India, began to cast a covetous eye towards his capital at Kanauj. The Gurjara-Pratiharas, whose dominance was brought to an end in the eleventh century by the Turk-Afghan invader Mahmud of Ghazni, are known for their open pavilion temples. However, the greatest development of the Gurjara-Pratihara style took place not in their territory, but at Khajuraho, the capital of the small Candella kingdom of Bundelland. Khajuraho was a flourishing cultural centre where poets, grammarians, and playwrights rubbed shoulders with affluent Jain merchants and court officials. Extensive monastic establishments exercised considerable social power, encouraging lavish spending on temples.

Between 900 and 1500 CE, some of the finest Nagara temples were constructed in Khajuraho. The first major royal edifice, the Laksmana temple (954 CE), was built by Yasovarman to celebrate Candella’s independence from its Gurjara-Pratihara overlords. The image installed by him in the garbha grha, and consecrated by his son Dhanga Deva, was a metal four-faced Vishnu (Vakratunda) image brought from Kashmir, which was later replaced by a stone one. Khajuraho was a centre of various Tantric sects, and the icon in Laksmana suggests the spread of the Pancharatra Tantric rites, which influenced the placement
of images in the temple. The deities that occur both in the interior and the exterior of the temples were interpreted, we know, as emanations of the main icon. Khajuraho developed a symmetrical iconographic programme that arranged the emanating deities in different hierarchical orders as well as in complementary pairs in conformity with ritual texts. The temple testifies to the primacy of the new iconographic imperative over monumental narrative throughout India by this period. The Agamas, which endorse Tantric rituals, give a new gloss to the sectarian Puranas. In this system, Vishnu and Siva/Sakti clusters of deities often coexist in pairs. But at the same time, in a Vishnu temple such as this, although there is a plethora of Siva deities, they would ultimately be subordinate to Vishnu, the final arbiter of redemption here. Siva in his turn will be supreme in a temple dedicated to him. The temple interior is sumptuously sculptured and the doorway attains a great richness here. The two main registers between the tower and the base contain the main figure sculptures, among them scenes of everyday life, 'linguid women' disrobing or admitting themselves in the mirror and, finally, erotic scenes.

The Kandariya Mahadeva temple, built nearly a century after Laksmana in the reign of Vidyadharai (977–99 CE), has many similar but more developed features. Where this Siva temple differs is in its tower, which rises above a seven-projection (saptapada) shrine. The interior contains over 200 figures, their iconography conforming to the Siva Siddhanta, the more orthodox Tantric sect, as compared with the Kaula Kapalika cult (see chapter 4). In contrast to the unmanifest linga in the sanctum, the 'manifest' forms of Siva and other gods are arranged hierarchically on its three interior walls along the ambulatory. The most enigmatic of the images is a phallic form of Siva with six heads and four legs. Outside, the sculptures in the middle registers are of women in various poses and scenes ranging from love-making couples to group sex and bestiality. Scholars disagree over the significance of the erotic scenes, since many of them cannot be identified as Tantric.