

7 ICLLCE 2017-055 Nikita Manvi

Continuum of Hindu Worship Culture –Through the Living Temple of Mahakuteshwara

Nikita Manvi
Nitte Institute of Architecture
(Constituent College of Nitte University),
Karnataka, India
nikimanvi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Hinduism, the realization of spiritual fulfillment is achieved through various stages of progression. The movement conceived in the temple is similar, where it is considered as a place of transit, a ford or a crossing place. Also the rituals taking place, plays a vital role in determining the movement of the worshipper. The dynamism associated with the living temple of *Mahakuta* Complex i.e. the *Mahakuteshwara* temple is parallel on those terms. The sacred *tirtha* - *Mahakuta* temple complex comprises of a walled center nestling in an attractive valley fed by natural spring and shaded trees. Isolated from the other temple conglomerates of Early Western *Chalukyas*, the *Mahakuteshwara* stands as one of the few *Chalukyan* living temples among the landscape of *Malaprabha* river valley. *Mahakuteshwara* is an outcome of the combination of the universal space and inner essential space. It is the relationship between the two which is responsible for the manifestation of physical space which is now apprehended as the temple complex. The paper will showcase the dynamics of Hindu worship portrayed in the complex today, which is a legacy of heritage passed over 1400 years. The emphasis will be laid on the worshipping rituals followed, the participation through various cultural fairs and festivals and how the universal architecture of the temple complements it all along.

Keywords: Experiential realm, symbiotic, cultural landscape, multiplicity, conglomerate

Introduction

Though the movement in architecture is usually discussed in terms of how people progress in a building or how their eyes conceive it, but equally important is to understand how the elements of the building tend to epitomize the movement. The Indian Temple architecture is successful expressing such crusade by means of splitting, multiple projection of interpenetrating elements or by staggering of elements and hence epitomizes the rituals associated with Hinduism.

From the 7th century, two main traditions of *Dravida* temple architecture took root in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (regions which from that time and for centuries after would be rivals for paramount power in Southern India), and that, despite a common heritage and early interchanges, the two traditions were distinct from the start and became ever so more. Neither tradition was monolithic: both comprised various schools and idioms, and the *Dravida* architecture that spread through the whole of Southern India can (until the disruption of the *Karnata Dravida* schools at the end of 13th century) to be linked to one or other of these traditions, or sometimes to both.

The simplest shrines contain a *vimana* alone, or with a porch sheltering the doorway. Usually in temples the *garbagriha* is adjoined by a hall or *mandapa* for worship and

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performance of rituals. Between *mandapa* and *vimana* there develops an antechamber called *antarala*. The most usual place for a doorway into a *mantapa* is opposite the *garbagriha*, on the longitudinal axis of the temple. Doorways, as places of transition to a more sacred realm - most sacred in case of the sanctuary door - are important symbolically and are embellished accordingly (Apart from 'overdoors', doorway design, with its decorated bands (*sakhas*), is not treated in any detail in this study, as it is not an important part of Dravidian language). The doorway in the exterior wall is generally sheltered by a porch (*ardhamandapa* or *mukhamandapa*). The whole temple is raised on a molded base (plinth - *adisthana*), lifting it above the level of the mundane. The *mukhmandapa* is therefore entered by flight of steps. It usually hosts functions like recitations, sermons, discussions, devotional music or sacred dance.

Shiva temples are fronted by a free-standing Nandi *mandapa*, sheltering an image of the bull Nandi, Shiva's *vihana* or vehicle. Occasionally a temple is surrounded by *prakara* (enclosure wall), with a gateway (*pratoli*) on the longitudinal axis.

Objective

The objective of the research is to understand the dynamics associated with an ancient living temple complex and how the architecture complements the culture of Hinduism. The idea was to understand how the rituals, sustained within the religion, are carried out portraying the universal space of the temple which has been witnessing them over the generations.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

To understand the continuum of Hindu worship culture, the idea was to select an ancient living temple which renders the pristine attributes of idyllic temple architecture and how all the elements of the complex function in rhythm in response to the rituals associated with the religion.

Hence, the *Mahakuteshwara* temple was selected considering its location and timeline; where not many temples contemporary to it are necessarily living in today's juncture.

The notion was to understand how the architecture and dynamics of the conglomerate function as *tirtha*, and how accomplished is the temple to carry forward the culture and rituals associated with *Hinduism*. Facets of spaces within the temple complex, the sacramental customs followed on daily basis and how does the same temple behave during annual fairs and festivals are certain important concerns which have been addressed in detail as the research progresses. The research was progressed through conducting multiple visits to the temple complex, where in each visit the temple presented with a new dimension to explore. It was through conversations with the priests of the temple that actually helped me understand a clear timeline of events and festivals celebrated across the temple over the year.

Research Questions

What is the role of Temple Architecture in creating a synergy between the spaces of the living temple and the rituals that are associated with Hinduism which are followed within its premises?

Literature Review and Discussions

The Early Western *Chalukyan* temples concentrated at *Badami*, *Mahakuta*, *Aihole* and *Pattadakal* are among the most fascinating of India's sacred monuments. This realm is mainly confined to a valley, about twenty five kilometers long, through which the

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Malaprabha river flows in a north easterly direction. Little more than eight kilometers wide at its broadest point, the valley is fringed with sandstone bluffs, some with dramatic cliffs and spectacular ravines. Another advantageous feature of the *Malaprabha* valley are the Water sources trapped just beneath the level top of the surrounding cliffs. These result in number of waterfalls and natural springs that feed rocky cisterns and manmade tanks known as *kollas*. Such well-watered locales never dry, even in the hottest months, and for this reason many have become *tirthas*, or holy pools, sacred to Hindu cults. Among these are *Mahakuta* (reached by road or foot from *Badami*), *Siddankolla* (on the outskirts of *Aihole*) and *Huligemmanakolla* (also known as *Bhadranaiyikan Jalihaal* near *Pattadakala*).

Located fourteen kilometers from *Badami*, the sacred *tirtha* - *Mahakuta* temple complex comprises of a walled center nestling in an attractive valley fed by natural spring and shaded trees, including the great banyans. The *Mahakuta* complex consists of temple structures and small shrine pavilions, which are surrounded by a high enclosure wall. In the middle of the complex is a constructed masonry tank for which the water is supplied from a natural spring. The spring originates within the precinct of the enclosure. Its main and the original gateway faces east. The water is channeled and made flow out to the nearby fields and plantations. However, by following the link of the water channel in the map, it eventually joins the *Mallaprabha* River. The tank houses a pavilion with a four faced *lingam* in it.

The two main large temples are *Mahakuteshwara* Temple and *Mallikarjuna* temple. Both these temples portray similar characters in terms of their layout and style. The other two smaller yet important in terms of architectural styles are the *Sangameshwara* and *Mahalinga* temples. There are other smaller structures but are still nameless. Majorly all the temples face east. Even the walls of the enclosure seem to be of later addition. Also, the covered areas and raised platforms adjoining the outer wall are recent addition to the complex.

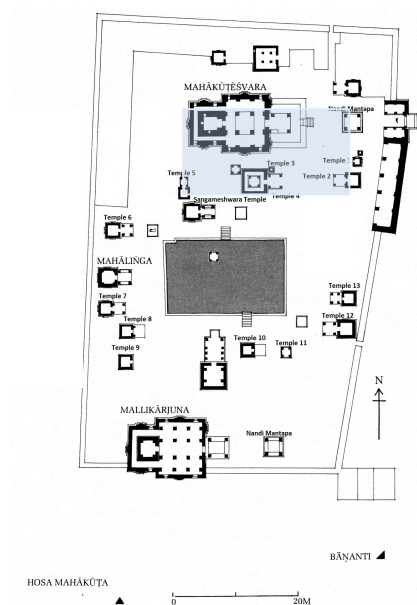


Figure 1: The Mahakuta Complex plan

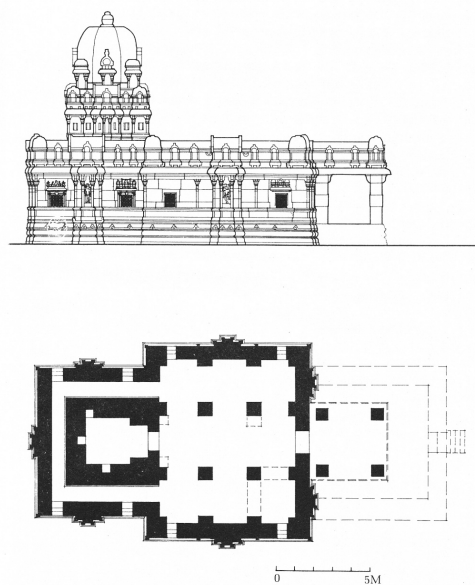


Figure 2: Plan and Elevation of Mahakuteshwara temple

The Hindu temples abound in sacred places, the potent sites where gods reside or where they might divulge themselves. Many ancient texts specify that God always play where there are rivers, lakes and springs, places with groves or pleasure gardens (Readings of books by scholars like George Michell, Stella Kramrisch and M A Dhaky reflects that for the criteria for the site selection the natural setting of the place played an important role).

Temples are built at places so that they could gain the complete benefit of the resident deities. On the completion of their construction the potential sacredness of the site manifests itself and the distinction between the natural and the manmade spaces disappears. *Tirtha* is the name attributed to the place of pilgrimage on the bank of river, the sea shore or a lake.

At *Mahakuta* complex the principle features associated with the sites are the natural spring, shade of the banyan grove and seclusion. The importance attached to these features signify that the devotees have come to the object of worship. It is because the place is sanctified as a whole, the complex becomes the supreme principle of knowledge, hence proliferating the devotion and helping people to attain control over their minds and their actions so that they have sapience.

The Shiva *pushkarni* acts as a *tirtha*, where one bathes. It is *symbollic* to the mind whose purity and clarity represents truth and metaphysical knowledge. A dip in the water implies that one can see the true principles, the true nature of things (Kramrisch, Stella. *The Hindu Temple volume:1*; refers 'Mahabharata', Anusasanaparva - While 108 chief places on Earth, etc., and in mind, are spoken of in the 'Matsyapurana', chapter CII. Enjoins that three and half times ten millions of the *Tirthas* in heaven, earth and the atmosphere should be conceived as in the water where one takes the ritual bath by realizing within it, in a square of four cubits, the sacred Ganges, the most holy of all *tirthas*). The tank at *Mahakuta* also signifies renewal and enlightenment. Water here is necessary for the successful functioning of the temple as it is required for the ritual ceremonies. The shaded location in the shadows of the Banyan grove demonstrates how the complex provided a place where meditation is feasible and hence association with the divine is successfully achieved.



Figure 3: The sacred Vishnu tank



Figure 4: The mandapa at tank housing mukhaliga



Figure 5: View of Mahakuteshwara

The tank in the complex not only bears symbolically replenishing values but is also added with sacredness with the *mandapa* in the center which structurally has a five tiered *pitha* with four, square adorned columns on top of with rests the multi-tiered parapet. This structure enshrines within itself a delicately carved *mukhalinga* phallic images, a product of the sensible carver of deep imaginative fervor, whose zeal gave and humanizing aspect to the than regular *Shiva Lingam*. One might also observe the multi directionality the shrine housed in the *mandapa* offers, again literally translating the dialogue where the configuration of elements can be sensed as several times, evolving and proliferating at different stages. The dynamism is conceptual and an expression through elements which is reflected in front of our eyes before our minds can reflect them. One enters the complex purifies his body and soul by taking a dip in the holy water, offers prayers to the *Mukhalinga Mantapa* and proceeds his accent towards *Mahakuteshwara*.

In Hinduism, the realization of spiritual fulfillment is achieved through various stages of progression. The movement conceived in the temple is similar, where it is considered as a

place of transit, a ford or a crossing place. Also the rituals take place, plays an important role in determining the movement of the worshipper.

The dynamism associated with the living temple of *Mahakuta* Complex i.e. the *Mahakuteshwara* temple is parallel on those terms. The center of the sanctuary, the *Shiva linga* of *Mahakuteshwara*, functions as the focus of other dynamics which are realized through a process of symbolic association. The radiation sensed is outwards from the center in the four directions. It is the sacredness related with the lingam in the womb of the temple, expresses itself as a powerful force, whose influence expands outwards. Hence, the *avataars* of Shiva are aligned with these forces, which are hence positioned in the centers of the North, West and South sanctuary walls. These sculptures are given prominence by being set within projecting and elaborately decorated *sala* aedicules.



Figure 6: Kuta aedicule with jali window on left



Figure 7: Vertical course of narratives of war scenes, *mithuna* couples and female attendants



Figure 8: Jali windows on North and South walls

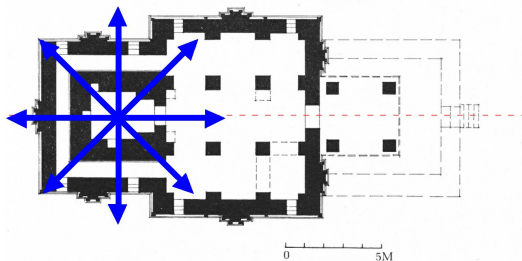


Figure 9: Outward radiation of the energy from center of the sanctuary. Along these lines are positioned important secondary images of *Shiva* housed within the *Salas*.

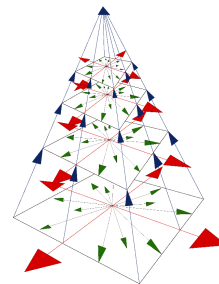


Figure 10: Main directions of the movement expressed by the exterior projections of a *shikhara*

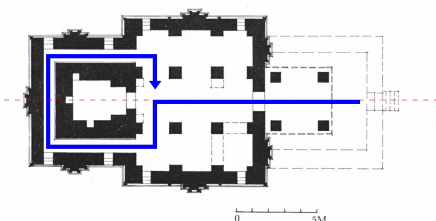


Figure 11: The dynamics of Temple worship, the approach to the *garbagriha* and the *pradakshinapatha* around it depicting the movement in clockwise direction

Inside the temple, the symbolism of the passage through the doorways is connected with the idea of transition from temporal to eternal. However, the most significant aspect of

devotional dynamism is the circum-ambulation (*pradakshinapatha*) which proceeds in a clockwise direction around a sacred *prasada*. This passage way takes the architectural form in commemorating the sacred rite constituting a bodily participation in movements and prayer.



Figure 12: View of
pradakshinapatha from *mantapa*



Figure 13: Doorway of
garbagriha



Figure 14: Ratha of Mahakuta

Progress towards the inwards and center of the sanctuary, is conducted along the East-West axis. As this movement is of great importance for the worshipper, the architecture of the temple responds to it with the similar magnitude. The interior spaces of the temple are arranged to promote the movement of the devotee from outside towards the sanctuary through a series of *mandapas* which become increasingly sacred as the *garbagriha* is approached. At the final stage of the progression, where the doorway of the *garbagriha* is reached, the priests take over from the worshipper and conduct offerings to the image of the deity inside the sanctuary. This is undertaken on behalf of the worshippers, who waits at the doorway, but follows the priest's movements accompanying their actions symbolically. A further expression of the energy of the *garbagriha* is radiating outwards and is in upwards movement. Though the worshipper cannot participate physically in this ascent, the symbolism attached to the parts of the temple permits him ritually to undertake such movement. The dynamic is like that of a complex system with multiple feedback flows each giving access into the whole system of metaphysical vision. The temple offers means of engagement in the nuances of the mystery, depending on the stage of development of the pilgrim.

The *Mahakuteshwara* temple juxtaposes relative time sequences and cosmic eras as the key to inner mechanics of universe. This overlapping of cycles of time and repetition is seen in visual expression in the form of temple, where the sculptural motifs repeatedly appear in different proportions in different parts of the building. The finial placed in the summit of the temple symbolizes the absolute and timeless principle beyond repetition and relativity, and is intended as a reminder of the ultimate goal of the journey that human embarks upon.

Even today, the Pooja ritual is performed at an elaborate scale three times a day. The ritual commences by reciting the prayer (mantra), generally led by a mediating priest. Once that's done, it's assumed that the deity has arrived presided at the place dedicated for him. The priest washes the deity symbolic to the gesture of offering the seat with utmost respect. These honors are offered to the deity like he is physically present in front of the worshipper. Followed by the bathing ritual the deity is adorned with various offerings supplemented by other worshippers like flowers, fruits, sandal paste, incense, oil lamps, food and water which is all along accompanied with recitation of Mantras with an idea to enhance the positive state of mind. Following all these steps of ritual, the worshipper has endeared himself to the deity with deep devotion and gratitude.

From time immemorial the temple has been the focal point of all the social activities in India. This can be fairly seen at *Mahakuta* even today. The closer scrutiny of the festivals in the complex shows how tradition have been maintained for ages without change and how the deity is considered as a living embodiment and as an important personality of *Malaprabha* valley. The participation of one and all in the tasks handed down from generation to generation to celebrate the festival reflects the harmony and understanding the individuals of the community have for one another. It also shows how a life based on mutual cooperation and respect and love for each other was in practice. Many of the festivals are the result of the historical happenings of *Mahakuteshwara*. They remind every generation about a great event that the complex must have witnessed, also resulting in keeping the local history alive. Celebrations at *Mahakuteshwara* are a great relief from the daily drudgery and a valid reason for the local population to enjoy themselves here in the present, and also feel a sense of satisfaction of having gained something of the life beyond.

At *Mahakuteshwara* this continuum of traditions is observed at various occasions throughout the year. The Amavasya (No Moon) days of *Magha Maasa* (Month during Jan-Feb), *Ashwini Maasa* (month between Sept-Oct), *Phalguni Maasa* (month during Feb-March) and *Karthik Maasa* (Month during Oct-Nov; Also the night of *Deepavali*) we observe a spectacular tradition of *Deepotsava* followed every. The legend goes like it Spirits of Heaven approached *Mahakuteshwara* (Shiva) to prevent them from evil rakshasas or *Asura* (demons). Each of the *deepotsava* celebrated at *Mahakuteshwara* represents the victory of Shiva over *Simhasura*, *Vatapi*, *Shatasura* and *Narakasura* respectively. The tradition followed in today's scenario is symbolic. Devotees visit *Mahakuteshwara* during daytime and adorn him milk, curd, purified butter, wheat and rice; reciting the mantras in appraisal of Lord Shiva. During the evening at the time of onset of sunset, they start lighting the *diyas* (oil lamps) and vacate the temple premises completely, signifying the fight between Lord Shiva and *Asura*, where Shiva is trying to protect the people from the misdoings of *Asura*. The story is of course mythical, but it is the gesture of people coming together and celebrating in their own symbolic manner which keeps the spirits of the complex alive.

The Shravan *maas* (between July-Aug) is synonymous with auspicious festivals and events. It is the best time to conduct all-important religious ceremonies, as almost all days in this month are auspicious for *shubh arambh*, i.e. good start. Shravan *maas*' ruling deity is Lord Shiva. At *Mahakuteshwara*, apart from regular rituals conducted at the temple, the devotees perform extra rituals like *Baasinga*, *Taale Mande*, *Javala* and *Deedha Namaskara*. On the third Monday of the month the dynamics of the temple are extended over a larger traverse, where the Abhishek of *Mahakuteshwara* is carried by devotees to the *Kalakaleshwara* temple at Ron (about 30km from *Mahakuta*) and the Abhishek of the other temple is brought here, signifying the sense of togetherness and the common thought of religious beliefs that connects the people together.

Across few Hindu temples, images of the deity's worshipped in the temples are carried on large wooden chariots called *rathas* and drawn in a pageant by the devotees. The chariots are generally 5–6 m in height and weigh several tons. At *Mahakuteshwara* the *Rathotsava* or car festival of the Lord Shiva is held every year on the full moon day of *Vaishaka* (between April-May) in which the temple deity is taken in the chariot (a movable shrine) in a procession along the lanes of *Mahakuta* starting from the temple gate. The *Rath yatra* is witnessed by thousands of people, irrespective of their caste and creed from across the state. To see this cultural and religious extravaganza, people from adjacent villages come in colorfully decorated carts.

Huge wheels of solid wood are fixed to the chariot. The chariot is pulled by specially trained men. The chariot appears like a mini temple or shrine as it invariably has figurines of

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gods and goddesses carved on it. The chariot is heavily adorned by beautiful flower garlands and a contributed effort of the devotees to bring in life in the traditions of Hinduism followed at *Mahakuta*.



Figure 15, 16, 17: Fairs, festivals and rituals observed across *Mahakuteshwara*

The temple and the deity are two inseparable entities. The temple stands meaningless without its *murti*, which is the life line of the temple. Though residing in the dark recesses of *garbagriha*, the divine presence radiates all over the temple, signifying the omnipresence of the symbolic spirit that pervades in the universe. And it's the Hindu temple - the miniature universe - which embeds within its fold all the worlds, the planets and all forms of life (both flora and fauna). The *Mahakuta* temple complex lies no back in manifestation of this conception and well articulation. Nurtured in this tradition, the sculptures of the temple complex reflect the sentiment and solidify this idea in their noble creation. The meaningful patterns perceived, depict a deeper philosophy behind it, which here is seen in its experimental phases and is thus carried further as heritage and seen in the further temple structures in an evolved format.

Mahakuteshwara portrays the unending carvings of creepers or floral petals, meandering and sprouting throughout the periphery of the temple. Group of *hamsas* or swans strutting about just below the parapet level and the mythical *makaras* guarding the doorways or framing the panels are important depictions observed in the temple. Even the elephants and horses depicted as narratives of war scenes form a major sculpturally articulating element of the temple elevations. The human life is portrayed in all its richness and diversity as kings and queens, saints and devotees, the young and amorous couple, the court jester and the *gana* figures in sculptural forms in the temple again revolving through the periphery in form of narratives representing the entire drama of life.

The sculptures in the temples epitomize the rich heritage of iconography and mythology. The *Mahakuta* complex realizes the various iconographic forms of Shiva in all their splendor. Though in the sanctum, *Shiva* is shown as *linga* but the outer walls of *pradakshinapatha* depict *Shiva* enshrined to provide a variety of concepts and themes enshrined in the literature (like *Jatbaarashiva*, *Karmamahakushiv*, *Ardhanareshwara* and *Shivmoorti* at *Mahakuteshwara* temple; *Ardhanareshwara* and *Urdhvarateshwara* at *Sangameshwara*; *Harahara* and *Ugraharashiva* at *Virupaksha* temple; *Mulkhalinga* in the *mantapa* located inside the spring and similar representations on other temple structures).

The sculptures found at *Mahakuteshwara* also throw light on the dress, costumes and fashion of the bygone times. One can observe variety of head dress, crowns, *haras*, *nupuras* and *mekhalas*. The richness in the sculptor's art are beautifully blended. The temple sculptures also stand as an eloquent testimony to the great *shilpis* and *sthapatis*, most of them largely anonymous. The icons and sculptures found in the temples are not mere art pieces to provide feast for the eye; but they reflect the deeper yearning of the spirit and therefore outlines the quality of the *stapati* very elaborately. It was considered essential to create images of God because of which the *stapati*s and *shilpi*s were considered divine.

The *Mahakuta* complex can be conceived as a vessel, which has a potential of containing infinite things. The complex provides rooms for the other forms by virtue of its formlessness. The complex as a whole sets limits but at the same time envisages as a congregate of intangible spaces. The configuration surrounding the natural spring seems endless with temples and *mandapas* surrounding in all directions but at the same time forms as the essential system which comprehends the temple complex as *tirtha*. The complex can be perceived to be an all pervasive entity, a macro-cosmic phenomenon too vast to grasp as a whole. It cannot be adequately described by words because it lies beyond the realms of senses on which our words and concepts are based. It cannot be reached through logic or reason because the regions are beyond the reach of perception. The temple structures exist within the consciousness of the beholder. It is not just a physical entity but a property of mind. Hence it is not an object of reasoning but of pure experience. It is the consciousness that links existence and experience of space. *Mahakuteshwara* is an outcome of the combination of the universal space and inner essential space. It is the relationship between the two which is responsible for the manifestation of physical space which is now apprehended as the temple complex. It is not just the space inside the temple that defines the attribute but equally important is the space inter linking between them which plays a crucial role in defining the dynamics of movement in the complex. However, the inner and outer space are formed according in co-relation to each other and though being distinct, are inseparable and interrelated. Each one is affected by and is the outcome of the other. Thus the complex are a whole comes into play and the elements contained within it at a certain point are indistinguishable from each other.

The Hindu temple is based on the square because it is conceptualized as a perfect form. The proportions derived from the human body with arms outstretched to the sides also form a square. The square is conceptualized as the perfection of the order of creation which encompasses the circles of time. The circle involves motion, while the square stands for the balance of dualities. Thus, because of these ancient associations, the square is the prominent symbolic shape in architectural forms, as Stella Kramrisch and others have pointed out. That being understood, the exploration for the meaning of the typical floor plan, the *Vastupurusha* grid of 64 or 81 squares, and the cosmic person's outline within the over-all square shape.

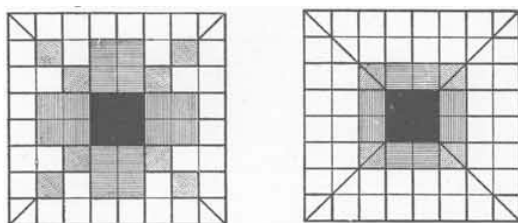


Figure 18: Two *Vastupurusha* mandala plans from architectural texts

Analyzing the plan of *Mahakuteshwara* temple on the basis of *vaastu*, the *garbagriha* is divided into 16 squares (Numbers like this is considered perfect, and it that square of squares is marked out in the *Vastupurusha mandala*. However, the square of 8 units is also significant in the measurement calculation of the temple). The inner width of the *garbhagriha* being 2 and that of the outer is 4. Thus the ratio being 2:1 for inner and outer width. Also the height of the *garbhagriha* is 4units from the ground forming a perfect cube. However the height of *shikhara* is 6 squares (1.5 times of *garbhagriha*) instead of being 8 squares (which would have been proportionate as 1:2 in terms of *vaastu*).

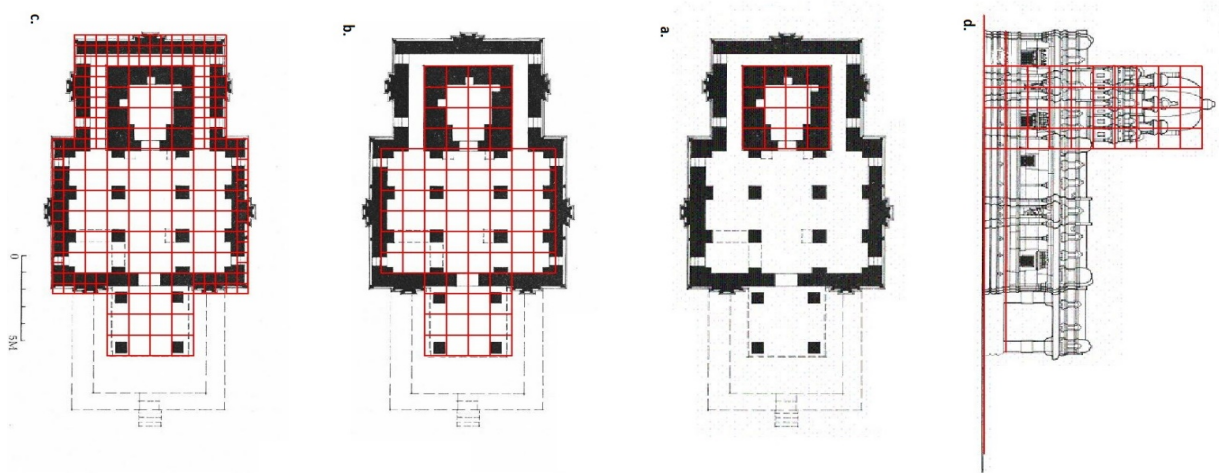


Figure 19: Showing the *vaastu* analysis in Mahakuteshwara temple; a) The *garbagriha* being divided exactly into sixteen squares; b) Extension of the same units to *mantapa* and front porch (the width ratio being – *Garbagriha:Mantapa:Entrance porch* :: 1:1.5:1); c) Deriving the outer dimensions of the *prasada* from the fractals of the same unit; d) Applying the proportional system to the elevation of the temple (The height ratio of *garbagriha: shikhara* :: 1:1.5)

But again coming back to the plan the width of the *prasada* (including the walls of *pradakshinapatha*) no proper proportional system could be established. However dividing the square to further fractals the geometrical progression: width of *Prasada* to the width of *garbagriha* is 7:4, which again follows no proper proportional system.

A similar ratio of widths could be established for; *Mandapa: Prasada: Garbagriha* :: 9:7:4. A possible conclusion that could be derived is that the *Mahakuteshwara* temple belongs to an experimental phase where the rules of construction were yet in a status of being established. Though not entire but the plan of the temple makes an attempt to follow the proportional system. Even though the outer dimensions do not follow the main square unit established but they do make an effort taking the fractals of the main unit as their measurement system. Thus, reflection on the fractal qualities of the architecture makes the temple grasp the Hinduism's vision, more comprehensible.

Also, the repeated motifs carry associations with the cyclical time scheme of Hindu worldviews. This resonance of self-similar geometry and multiple cycles of time is another reason for recursion in Hindu designs.

Thus, in the experimental phase of the *Chalukyan* school of architecture there is been made an endeavor to attain holistic progression towards the goal of Hinduism, involving the whole person, eyes envisioning, mind devotedly intent, legs taking steps, hands in prayers, and so on.

Conclusion

In the shelter of the grove, deep within the curves of a small hill, the genius of some monarch sited *Mahakuta* group of temples and shrines in an idyllic spot, reached at the end of a difficult approach road. The complex of *Mahakuta* consists of a number of temples and small shrines surrounded by a high enclosure wall entered through a gateway to the East. In the middle of the enclosure is a masonry tank fed by a natural spring of fresh water which is then channeled into the adjoining fields and gardens which finally flows in the *Malaprabha* River. It's the natural setting of the sacred grove which makes it a renowned pilgrimage site.

The *Mahakuteshwara* temple possesses the intangible qualities of the space making. The boundary between the individual temple and its immediate surroundings dissolve so effortlessly making the complex to be conceived as a whole. The spaces both inside and outside evoke senses beyond the description of words. It was the symbiotic association between the textures of natural setting and the built structures that draws the attention to this isolated complex and makes one more sensitive in approach towards temple architecture.

In India we find that all aspects of human activity from birth to death have been interwoven into the religion that one follows. Religion is basically an attitude one develops towards a particular faith and deity and follows a set of procedures called ritual which brings some sort of satisfaction to the individual. Whereas festival is a collective expression of the people who profess the same faith or religion. Even now, irrespective of one's faith or belief people do participate and help in all festivals of the temple complex, where all contribute their mite to make it a success and also enjoy it collectively. Festival is the time when the devotee comes to see his deity, it is the time when the joy of the spirit overflows from the temple to the streets and into the houses. It builds up a sense of kinship between the temple and the society that surrounds it.

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