



Indian Art based on Hindu shilpa texts Sutracharana

(Academic Script)

INTRODUCTION

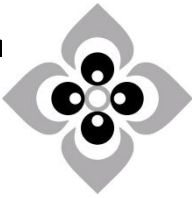
Indian Art based on Hindu Silpa Texts Sutracharana

Sutra is literature and Charana is school, so sutra Charana together means Indian schools of literature. Sutra Charana includes various ancient texts such as Shastra, sutra, Upanishads and Vedas etc. each Charana or school developed its own rules and fundamentals most of these texts were Vedic and Brahmanic in nature. These Shastras offer a vast knowledge and provides information on different subjects like arts, literature, poetry, Music, Dance and Drama and much more.

The subject expert is Ms. Sana Afreen and I am...

Gradually with time these texts were divided into sub branches by different scholars, the topics were researched and presented in more details hence one text got divided into prominent categories, developing separate theories for each topic, centuries later some of the texts got recognition and others got scattered almost losing their significance, later again the scholars re-collected various sutras, they rearranged them into proper texts.

The Sutra Charanas are a re-collection or re-compilation of the ancient and medieval Shastras and Vedas that formed the basis of Hindu cultural and religious atmosphere. The Sutra Charana not



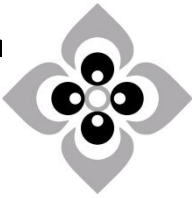
only comprised of Hindu iconographical characteristics but they also include Buddhist and Jain ideological aspects.

India is a country of ancient literature and Kavya, once it began and it spread rapidly all over India, hence India witnessed a flood of sutras, Vedas, Shastra and Kavyas, texts on arts, such as Vishnu Dharmottara Purana, Natyashastra, Vastu Shastra and much more. Then various rhetoricians, scholars and philosophers presented commentaries and researches on various subjects, which are still in use.

The term Shilpa means an art whether it's fine or mechanical, the arts in ancient India categorized into sixty four types. Shilpa Shatsra also includes Vastu Shastra, which is extensively researched and studied by later scholars. Under the text of Manasara, topics are well catalogued. "Mana" literally means measurement and "Sara" means essence, hence Manasara is the essence of measurements.

The Shastras are anything but a coherent set of manuals; in fact they are a widely varying collection of sacred texts in which the various rules are established (most of them concerning iconographic matters and attitude towards the object) which are necessary in order to create in accordance with divine ideals. The Shastras were sacred manuals, divinely dictated, which could only be accessed by the Sthapatis or priests. The consensus among current scholars is that they were collectively established in the 10th and 11th centuries by priests, copyists and transcribers on the basis of the oral tradition passed on for centuries by the Sthapatis.

Reading them allows us to understand the unique mix of technique and magic (which even today are difficult to separate in some regions) that characterizes Indian architecture. These Shilpa Shastras have been studied in detail as part of the history of art and have been used to support certain models for the theoretical justification of Hindu art



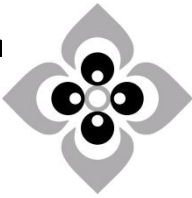
As far as architectural construction is concerned, the Shastras establish criteria for designing and building temples and other buildings. The well-known chapter of the Manasara devoted to columns is a good example of this.

One of the prominent texts on the art and architecture of ancient India is the Samarangana Sutradhara. It contains a vast collection of classical Indian architecture (Vastu Shastra). Vastu Shastra was composed by Paramara King Bhoja of Dhar during the 1000–1055 Century AD. In 83 chapters, subjects treated are town planning, house architecture, temple architecture and sculptural arts together with Mudras (the different hand poses and the poses of the body as well as the postures of legs), the canons of painting, and a chapter on the art of mechanical contrivances, the yantras.

Here are some verses from Samarangana Sutradhara, which describes characteristics a "Sthapati" i.e. architect (based on translation by Punya Mishra).

- The architect should be well-versed in the science involving the significance of objects to be created and their specifications.
- That person is said to be an expert in workmanship who knows how to sketch the ground plan, draftsmanship, the horizontal and vertical measurements, the details of ground work of the plot, the 14 kinds of sketch lines, the cutting of the logs and stones etc., and seven kinds of circular sections; well finished joinings of the joints and proper demarcation of upper, lower and outer lines.
- A sthapati should know eightfold workmanship, the draftsmanship and sketches of various kinds, and variety of carpentry, stone-masonry and gold-smithy.

Talamana paddathi is the system of measurements by Tala, the palm of hand (from the tip of the middle finger to the wrist). It plays a central role in the creation of temple icons and images.



Iconometry (the doctrine about proportions) was an integral part of the Murti shilpa, creation of the idols.

Taalamana

Two systems of iconometry seem to have existed; and both were called taalamana.

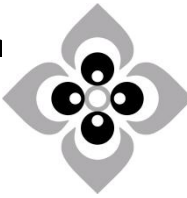
In the first system, the tala, measured by the length of the palm (from the wrist to the tip of the middle finger) of the shilpi or the yajamana, the one who sponsors the project, is taken as an absolute unit of measurement (and the image-face is made equal to that length). That tala is subdivided into twelve angulas; and such an angula becomes a fixed-length. In practice, the angula (literally 'finger') is a finger's width and measures one quarter of the width of the shilpi's fist). The value of the angula so derived becomes a fixed length (manangulam). And, all other measurements of the image are in terms of that unit.

The second is the system of derived proportions (deha labdh angulam). Let me explain. The stone or the block of wood selected for carving is divided into a number of equal parts. In case the selected piece is divided into ten equal parts, the division is known as dasatala (ten face-lengths) or in case it is divided into nine equal parts then the division is known as navatala (nine face-lengths) and so on.

There are obvious differences between the two systems.

The manangulam system relies on a fixed set of measurements; while the deha labdh angulam is a system based on derived proportions. In the former system, the measurements are related to the size of the palm of the shilpi; and if the image is navatala, it would mean that the height of the image is nine times the size of the tala or the palm of shilpi; and the size of the image-face is one tala or one-ninth of the total height of the image.

Dwarf figures were therefore made by adopting the four "taala" system where the total height is only four times the face length.



The madhyama navatala (standard length of nine-face lengths) is normally used for images of celestial beings such as Yakshas, Apsaras and Vidhyadharas.

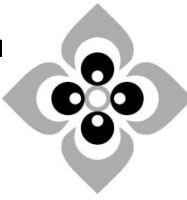
Image: Buddha, Sarnath 500 A.D.

This pre-Pallava Buddha figure is in Madras Museum. The face length is divided into three equal parts. This is in accordance with the Silpa Sastras and human anatomical proportions as far as nose length is concerned.

“In Indian art the important figures in a group are often represented as taller figures and inferior beings are represented as smaller figures. To such smaller figures a lower tala is often prescribed. However, if both the larger and the smaller figures were to represent deities of equal rank (say Siva and Vishnu) then strictly speaking they should be made in the same proportion, or in other words in the same tala.

As per the norms that are commonly in use, the animals and birds are depicted in four or less talas. For instance, tortoise and fish are depicted in one tala; crocodile and rabbit in two tala; and the dwarfs, the kinnaras, the birds and the vahanas of the deities are depicted in three or four talas. Humans and demigods are depicted in five to eight talas; Vamana an incarnation of Vishnu in seven talas.

The relative height of goddesses is eight or nine talas, while children are six talas high. The consorts of the deities and minor goddesses are depicted in eight talas. The talas from nine to twelve are meant for images of deities. But, again, there is no unanimity among the texts in this regard. Nine tala (nine face-lengths) is largely taken as the height of certain gods and celestial beings. According to some texts, the Uttama dasatala is applied to major deities like Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, Rama, Buddha and Jina; so that they might look tall and majestic..



The madhyama dasatala is applied to the images of Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Uma and other major. The rest are depicted in Adhama dasatala, in accordance with the importance assigned to them. The extra ordinary deities like Trivikrama or Narasimha or the huge demons are at times depicted in twelve talas.

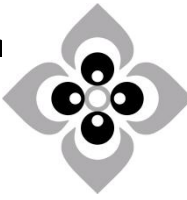
The gods of higher hierarchy are adorned with elaborate crowns in order to emphasize and enhance their majesty and grandeur. The height of the crown might often exceed the height of the face. The head together with the crown atop would form one sculptural unit. The elaborately crowned gods thus exceed the proportions of the human body and stand out with a super natural appearance.

The Dhyana Slokas also provide the details of the flexions - slight, triple, or extreme bends; the details of the number of arms and faces that endow a super-human quality to the idol; and also the descriptions of its ayudhas the weapons, the ornaments etc. They also specify whether the image should be dynamic or static, seated or standing; and they also detail the hand gestures and poses.

Nine Postures

Different postures (sthanas) or stances are referred to in the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana, Samarangana Sutradhara, Manasollasa, Shilparatna and also in a few Agama texts. All these texts agree that the major stances are nine. These nine postures are (stated in the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana, : (1) rjvagata (2) anrju (3) sacjkrta sarira (4) ardhavilocana (5) parsvagata, (6) paravrtta (7) prstthagata (8) parivrtta, and (9) samanata.

Both the Manasollasa and the Shilparatna propose five varieties of principal stances and the names of the stances, noted in both the texts, are practically identical. In the Manasollasa they appear as rju, ardharju, sachi, ardhasi and bhittika; whereas in the Shilparatna the principal stances are noted as rju, ardharju, sachika, dvyardhasi and bhittika. The Silparatna also adds that



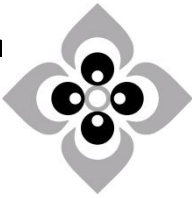
apart from these five stances there are four other types of paravrtta or dorsal poses. Thus it appears according to the Shilparatna that the total number of stances is nine. Among them five are frontal and the rest four are dorsal or back view, and this also agrees with that of the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana.

After discussing the different stances, the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana ; in the same chapter (39, Verses 38-46), deals with the principle of Ksaya Vrddhi or foreshortening, which is also universally recognised as one of the fundamental rules of drawing an object. This aspect of drawing, stated as ksaya-vrddhi (principle of diminishing and increasing), appears only in the Vishnu Dharmottara. Indian artist uses the principle of ksaya (diminishing) and vrddhi (increasing) in his composition and makes his figures smaller or larger according to their relative importance in the subject. Therefore visual perspective is almost absent in his drawing. It is the multiple perspective or better to say the mental perspective which regulates the drawing of his composition.

The ksaya and vrddhi are applied for showing different parts and limbs (of a body) with which thirteen sthanas or sathsthanas are said to be composed. These thirteen samsthanas are: (1) drstagata (2) onrjugata (3) madhyardha, (4) arddhardha (5) sachikrtamukha (6) nata. (7) gandaparavrtta (8) prstthagata (9) parsvagata (10) ullepa (11) chalita (12) uttana and (13) valita.

It is said that these are to be done according to the need of different compositions and mandalas. The mandala is a distinct physical movement of the body that is to be shown through the movements of legs.

In the face half-eye is shown and the other half is not shown (or dropped), so also the eye-brows. The contracted forehead should be of one matra or one angula. The essential part of the body, which is to be shown, should be exhibited little. The cheek should be measured one-half of an angula and the other half is



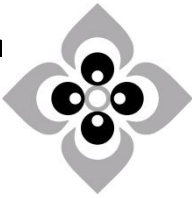
diminished. The line of the neck should be shown one angula, while the chin should be exhibited one yava, ie., one-eighth of an al).gula. Half of the front part of the chest should be shown and the (other) half should be omitted. Similarly, one angula should remain from the navel cavity. The waist and whatever else are to be shown half. The adhyardhaksha is recognized by its very shape. This is also called chayagatam.

The laws of proportion, stances and foreshortening prescribed in the Shilpa texts, are found to be utilized by the Indian mural painters at Ajanta, Bagh, Badami, Sittanavasal, Ellora, Tanjore and other places. The dancing damsels that appear in the court-scenes at Ajanta, or in the feast scene at Bagh or at Tanjore or other places would show how different poses and bends of the body are beautifully rendered applying the canonical formulae of proportion, stances etc. and the artist's own ingenuity. In actual execution of painting, mixed stances and frontal poses are generally found; complete dorsal pose is hardly seen in mural painting, though in sculpture it is not completely unknown.

The Pattachitra

These fundamentals also helps the art historians in dating sculptures; and the art students in studying the iconometrical values of different Schools, across different periods and regions; and to ascertain the variations within a given set of stipulated proportions.

In the typical style of Pattachitra, the faces of characters have long beak like noses, prominent chins and elongated eyes. They are distinguished from each other by facial features, hairstyles, clothing etc. Central focus of the painting is the expression of the figures and the emotion they portray, the strong colors only reinforce them. "Patta" literally means "cloth" and "Chitra" means "picture". Most of these paintings depict stories of Hindu deities. The Gita Govinda composed by Jayadeva is one of the popular themes in the traditional patachitra paintings of Orissa.



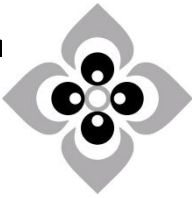
In Orissa the Tala Pattachitra is done on the palm leaf, the leaves are dried to become hard. The images are etched by using a pointed tool, once the etching is done, the 'Kaajal' or 'Kohl' paste is used to color the etching black, and tamarind is used as a binding medium with this kohl. This kohl is applied on the etching and rubbed to fill the etching on rows of equal-sized panels of palm leaf that are sewn together. These panels can also be easily folded like a fan and packed in a compact pile for better conservation.

The colors used in the Paintings are natural and mineral, the paintings are made in the same old traditional way by Chitrakaras.

The chitrakara of Orissa uses buffalo hair to make brushes for the thick lines while rat or squirrel hair is used for making brushes meant for finer line work. According to the text, 'Manasaullasa', the crayon for initial sketches or 'vartika' is to be made by mixing lamp black with boiled rice paste and rolled into sticks. According to yet another text, 'Shilparatna' 'kitta lekhani' or the writing/drawing instrument was a wick made out of the dust of bricks and dried cowdung made into a paste.

This old tradition of Oriya painting still survives in the places like Puri, Raghurajpur, Paralakhemundi, Chikiti and Sonepur. Since beginning of Pattachitra culture, Lord Jagannath who was an incarnation of Lord Krishna has been the major source of inspiration. The subject matter of Patta Chitra is mostly mythological, religious stories and folk lore. Themes are chiefly on Lord Jagannath and Radha-Krishna, different "Vesas" of Shri Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra, temple activities, the ten incarnations of Vishnu basing on the 'Gita Govinda' of Jayadev, Kama Kujara Navagunjara, Ramayana, Mahabharata.

The Gupta Age marked the advent of a vibrant period of building and sculpting activities. The texts of this period such as the Arthashastra of Kautilya and Matsya Purana included chapters on

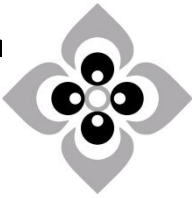


the architecture of the way of summary. By the end of the period, the art and craft flourished; and branched into different schools of architectural thought; but all based on common underlying principles. These principles are now part of Vastushastra, the science of architectural design and construction. . It is explained that the term Vastu is derived from Vasu meaning the Earth principle (prithvi). This planet is Vastu and whatever that is created is Vastu and all objects of earth are Vastu.

The texts that are collectively called Vastu Shastra have their origin in the Sutras, Puranas and Agamas; besides the Tantric literature and the Brhat Samhita. The Vastu texts classify the temple into three basic structures: Nagara, Dravida and Vesara. They employ, respectively, the square, octagon and the apse or circle in their plan. These three styles do not pertain strictly to three different regions but are three schools of temple architecture. The vesara, for instance, which prevailed mostly in western Deccan and south Karnataka, was a derivation from the apsidal chapels of the early Buddhist period which the Brahmanical faith adopted and vastly improved.

These three schools have given rise to about forty-five basic varieties of temples types. They too have their many variations; and thus the styles of temple architecture in India are quite diverse and virtually unlimited.

Among the many traditions inherited (parampara) in India, the tradition of Vishwakarma is unique. The mode of transmission of knowledge of this community is both oral and practical; and its theories construct a holistic universe of thought and understanding. The rigor and discipline required to create objects that defy time and persist beyond generations of artists, has imbued this tradition with tremendous sense of purpose, and zeal to maintain the purity and sensitivity of its traditions; and to carry it forward. This has enabled them to protect the purity of the art and skills without falling prey to the market and its dynamics.



Construction of a temple was always considered a sacred activity. The timely completion of these Abodes, along with attention to the minutest details, required strict hierarchy of commands. On top of the hierarchy was the person who wished to build a temple for his Lord. He was Yajmana, Karta or the Patron.

The Temple

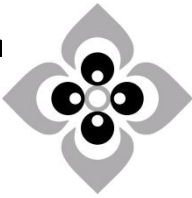
Most of the time, Yajmana was a king, a queen or a rich businessman and used to choose the Mukhya Sthapatyapati or the Chief Architect. Mukhya Sthapatyapati was expected to be the master of Shilpa Shastra, Vaastu Shastra, Dharma Shastra, Agnipurana and all mathematical calculations. He was the person responsible for converting Karta's dream into an architectural draft.

He was empowered to select his chief engineer, the Sutra Grahini, who was responsible for converting the architectural draft into geometrical design and dimensions. In order to avoid confrontations, ego clashes and to work in perfect synchronization, Sutra Grahini was usually the son of Mukhya Sthapatyapati. They were assisted in their task by Murtikar (the sculptor), Sangatarash (the mason) and the painter. These were the senior technical specialists who then commanded many others to get the job done.

Those higher in command, besides being knowledgeable, were also expected to be the man of characters and were believed to lead a pious life especially during the construction period. It is not uncommon to hear lores where Karta's vanity led to obstructions in construction, till he realized his mistake.

Two such lores are of Ranakpur temple in Pali district of Rajasthan and that of the temple of Orchha in Madhya Pradesh.

The Jain temple of Ranakpur was constructed by Seth Dharna Shah who was a minister in Maharana Kumbha's court. Maharana Kumbha was a great patron of art, architecture and music. When



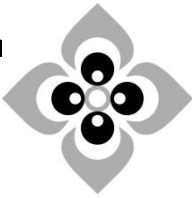
the minister approached him and sought his permission to build a temple of Adinath Bhagwan, Maharana wholeheartedly agreed and even donated land for the temple and the town.

Uniqueness of this temple is 1444 columns, exquisitely carved with none of the two being alike. According to the lore, Maharana Kumbha decided to construct Kirti Stambh in the temple. When it was about to complete, Maharana started to feel that it was going to be the best among all. However, soon it started to collapse again and again for no apparent reason. The recurring incident made Maharana to introspect. He realized that his ego could be the reason behind the strange occurring. He paid penance and apologized to god and instructed to leave it incomplete as a reminder that egos and prides have no place in God's Abode.

Similarly, in Orchha, Raja Madhukar Shah built grand Chaturbhuj Temple for Lord Rama's idol that was to be brought from Ayodhya. On its completion, king's boastful pride for the imposing temple was conspicuous.

In the second incident the King sent some people to Ayodhya to bring the idol. When they reached Orchha, it was already dark and the idol was temporarily kept in the modest Puja ghar of the Palace. The plan was to consecrate the statue in Chaturbhuj Temple next day, at an auspicious time. However, the next day, people realized, it was impossible to budge the statue from its position. God had chosen His Abode. The immobility of the idol shattered the king's ego and brought him to the righteous path. Today the palace is worshiped as Raja Ram kaa mandir and Chaturbhuj Temple is a ruin. According to ancient mythological and religious texts God sometimes follows strange ways to correct and bless its devotees, as Rabindranath Tagore states in his composition 'Geetanjali'

(Rabindra Nath Tagore, Geetanjali)



Coming back to the sequence of temple construction, once the hierarchy of command was finalized, it was turn to choose a sacred place for the construction. The important criterion for selection was that the piece of land needs to be free from any Vastu Dosha. It preferably should be higher than its surroundings. This is one of the reasons why it is common to see a temple shrine on hill or a hillock. Proximity to a water body was also preferred as it helped devotees to cleanse themselves before entering the temple. Before starting the construction, all tools and implements were worshiped. It was important that all articles used for construction were new and unused.

Today we learnt in brief about some of the key topics and fundamentals described by scholars in their theories of ancient India. There are many more theories and texts and it becomes challenging to cover them in a single episode of a limited time and word limit.

I hope that you liked the episode and found the information helpful in your understanding of Fundamentals of Indian Art based on Hindu Shilpa text of Sutracharana.