

TEMPLE CULTURE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Brijesh Chandra Rawat

Department of History,

UPVU Dr. Shakuntala Misra University lucknow-17 U.P. India

Introduction/ Problem statement

Temple is not only a place of worship; it played a dominant role in the cultural, social and economic life of the people. Of all the constructional activities of the early medieval society in India, temple building was the foremost. The money, the energy, the skill, the education and the art of land were exhibited in this singular religious activity. Temple is not only an abode of god, it became a symbolic representation of the various social and cultural activities. Here, not only the religious, but also the political, social and cultural aspects of history are preserved on stones. There was hardly any village without a temple. When new villages were constructed, the architects invariably made provision for a temple by leaving proper site for it.¹ There is no doubt that many of the old temples are in ruins or disuse.

Temple culture has been a major dimension of Indian culture². Generally, temples are public institutions and they involve social organization. They are built by collective effort and sustained by collective interest. In all the ancient literature 'temple' is referred to as 'Devalaya', 'Devayatan', 'Devakula', 'Devagiriha' etc. which indicate that the ancient temple was 'house of the God' The earliest temples in India are assigned to the second and first centuries B.C. The Brahmi inscriptions of the second century B.C.

found at **Besnagar** which commemorates the erection of a religious column in honour of the 'Vasudeva' by the **Heliodorus**.

The earliest group of Gupta temples dating from fifth century A.D. were of a single celled sanctum with a portico-**'Mandapa'**, resting on four pillar e.g. **Temple No.17, Sanchi, Tigowa** (Distt. Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh), **Eran** (Distt. Sagar, M.P.), **Bhitargaon** (Distt. Kanpur, U.P.), and **Dasavatara temple** at Deogarh. Afterward, in the period of Chalukya, Pallava, Rastrakuta, Chola, Pratihara and Parmara etc., temples were constructed huge, lofty and magnificent.

Employment to number of architects and craftsmen who vied with one another in bold planning and skilful execution. The making of icons in stone and metal gave scope to the talents of the best sculptors of the country. The daily routine, especially of the larger temples gave constant employment to number of priests, choristers, musicians, dancing girls, florists, cooks and many other classes of servants.

As a cultural centre, the temple witnessed the evolution of different schools of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance in different parts of the country, which brought out a variety of systems in plastic and performing arts, although all of them

stemmed from the same spiritual stock.

The temple was originated and developed as a religious centre. It continued to be the main centre of public worship among the Hindus. All section of society visit and offer their prayers and worship to the deities ritually. The construction of a temple and a tank considered as an act of religious merit. Naturally worship in temples was elaborate and ostentatious. It was roughly of two kinds namely 'Anga-Bhoga' and 'Ranga-bhoga' where **Anga-Bhoga** was probably related to daily routine of worship of main deity and **Ranga-bhoga** was probably worship associated with other functions. Various kinds of endowments were received by temple for the worship, **Anga-bhoga** and **Ranga-bhoga** of the deities³.

The temple continued to be an educational centre. 'The recitation of the **Puranas** which spread Hindu doctrine and culture among both literates and illiterates continued to be a special feature of temple activities. Adult education was provided throughout the country by endowments in temples for the recitation and exposition of the epics and **Puranas**⁴. Many of the temples were well-known centre of learning, some of them universities (**Maha-ghatika-sthana**), imparting education in the traditional lore⁵.

The **Matha**, which conducted to temples, were also a centre of learning where pupils were taught the arts and sciences. Gifts of land and money were made to them frequently for the purpose of imparting education⁶. Monasteries in fact played an important

role in the promotion of education. The **Saiva Mathas** attached to the temple were also educational institutions.

On occasions of festival, these become more important than ever, and attracted large crowds to the temple⁷. While the 'Devadasi' system and the institution of professional dancers and musicians in the service of the temple were not universal or wide spread, it was customary to hire them occasionally, however, the temple had on its payroll-pipers and drummers as their services were required in several sequences even of daily worship.

There is two aspect of temple, religious and administration. The temple, as a religious institution, is the place where worship is conducted for the benefit and well-being of the entire community. Another, the aspect of administration temple required huge income to play its all pervasive role in the society. Generally, temples were richly endowed by royal patrons, wealthy devotees and others such as **village grants, land grants, various dues** and taxes, money grants, and **miscellaneous grants** including with the **grants of animals, oil mills** and others.

There was numerous servants in temple complex which broadly classified in to three categories such as those engaged in the purely spiritual services, those employed in the administration of temple and those appointed to render various kinds of other services. 'Besides the regular employees, the temple also provided job opportunity to large number of people indirectly. Many persons were also hired by the

temple temporarily or on part-time basis⁸.

The administration was another significant aspect of temple which can be classified into two systems public and private broadly. The village assemblies, it is interesting to note, used to manage temple affairs either through direct involvement or through a full time manager duly appointed by it. The priests were also allowed to take part in the management of the temples. The main duty of the temple managers were the disbursement and allotment of temple finances for various activities of the temple and supervising the activities of the temple.

Objectives of the paper

The objective of the research paper entitled "Temple Culture in Ancient India" is to compile a vast treasure of information scattered in different historical sources in order to highlight a chronological development of Temple Culture and bring out its importance at National and International level.

Research Methodology

A thorough study of the original Texts, Manuscripts containing photographs and distinctive modern Scriptures related with Temple Architecture will be done and for the purpose the relevant libraries and various organizations working in this field will be visited personally. Besides information gleaned from Gazetteers, different journals and periodicals of various organizations, relevant research articles of distinguished Scholars will also be incorporated in the paper. A personal visit to actual temple sites brought to light through excavations

shall be made in order to bring forth the authentic knowledge about Temple Culture.

Results/ Discussion/ Conclusion(s)

The temple played a dominant role in the medieval Indian society, besides being a religious centre. There was no one in a village or town who was not directly or indirectly involved with the temple respectively. The main items of expenditure of the temple included those incurred on daily worship, offerings, celebration of various festivals, cloths, ornaments, flowers, perfumes for the deities, maintenance of **Sastras** where free boarding and lodging were provided to the ascetics, pilgrims, travelers and other strangers and **Mathas** or **Ghatika- sthanas** where free lodging and boarding were provided to the students, wages and free living quarters for various categories of the temple staff, maintenance of the temple property such as cultivation of temple lands and other contingent expenses including the repairs and renovations of the temple.

The **musicians, dance masters, dancing girls, scholars, goldsmiths, masons** etc. were connected with temple management as a permanent or part-time employees. The deities of temple were the source of spiritual and devotional inspiration for the poets, scholars, writers and others. It was also the centers of service activities. It was provided hospitals, **Mathas** etc. for ascetics, priests and others. In fine, temple was a hub of the society where the religious, social, economic and cultural lives were reflected. In this way, gradually, temple culture was flourished richly in India.