

Architecture in Matsya Purāṇa

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The Matsya Purāṇa, one of the earliest of the series consisting of 290 or 291 chapters, deals with various subjects in an encyclopaedic manner¹. Besides the five original topics of Purāṇas, namely *sarga* (creation), *pratisarga* (re-creation), *vaṃśa* (genealogy of gods or sages or kings), *manvantaras* (cosmic cycles) and *vaṃśānucarita* (accounts of the royal dynasties), it also includes chapter on *varṇāśramadharmā*, *vratas*, *sadācāra*, *rājadharmā*, *śrāddha*, *tīrthas*, *dānas*, *prāyścittas*, *vāstuvidyā* and *prāsādalakṣaṇa* etc.² Most probably its compilation was started in the Gupta period and it was revised at least upto c. 1100 A.D.³. As far as the architectural material of the **Matsya Purāṇa** is concerned, it is believed that most of its part was written in Gupta period but a lot of details were also interpolated later on. Particularly, it represents an advanced stage of temple architecture which must be developed during the early Medieval period. (2. 9th-10th cent. A.D.).⁴

Matsya Purāṇa contains many Chapters related to architecture, sculpture, iconography and iconometry.⁵ This paper is a revised and expanded version of a previous article, "*Matsya Purāṇa and Early Medieval Temple Architecture*" written by Dr. Tahsildar Singh and co-authored by me which was published in the '*Purāṇa* research journal.⁶ Here, almost all the various aspects of residential buildings as well as temple architecture which are provided in the different chapters of **Matsya Purāṇa** are discussed. At some places a comparison has also been made with the architectural material of other Purāṇas, **Bṛhatsamhitā** and Vāstu texts.

Matsya Purāṇa gives an account of the eighteen *vāstuśāstropadeśakas* (expounders of the Vāstu-vidyā) and the birth of *vāstudeva* in chapter 252 of '*Vāstuprādurbhāva*' where the names of Bhṛgu, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvakarmā, Maya, Nārada, Nagnajit, Viśālākṣa, Purandara, Brahmā, Kumāra, Nandīśa, Śaunaka, Garga, Vāsudeva, Aniruddha, Śukra and Bṛhaspati are referred to. Some of these names are of earlier sages or legendary artists. As Purāṇas are mostly compilation of the old texts or short summaries of the lost texts, it appears that like other Purāṇas and **Bṛhatsamhitā**, **Matsya Purāṇa** also lended its material from earlier sources as Varāha Mihira clearly indicates that he has borrowed from the old works of the authorities like Maya, Viśvakarmā, Garga, Vasiṣṭha, Manu and Nagnajit.⁸

In Chapter 253 (*gr̥ha-kāla-vinirṇaya*) **Matsya Purāṇa** deals with the influence of different months and asterisms on the construction of houses with various methods of soil testing and creation of *vāstumaṇḍala*. Purāṇa says that after testing the soil of the plot the ground plan should be divided into 81 *padas* (squares) by drawing ten lines from east to west and ten others from north to south.⁹ Then by installing thirty two deities in the outer compartments and thirteen in the inner squares, in total 45 deities

should be worshipped.¹⁰ In the centre of the diagram Brahmā occupies nine squares and eight deities are situated on the circumference around Brahmā with four other deities Āpaḥ, Savitr, Jaya and Rudra in the corners. One group consisting of five deities Āpaḥ, Āpavatsa, Parjanya, Agni and Diti should be worshipped in the north-eastern corner. In the same way there should be five deities in the remaining three corners. Other twenty deities in the outer compartments should be installed in two squares each.¹¹ The names of thirty-two deities occupying outer squares are Śikhī, Parjanya, Jayanta, Indra, Sūrya, Satya, Bhṛṣa, Antarikṣa, Vāyu, Pūṣā, Vitatha, Bṛhatkṣata, Yama, Gandharva, Bhṛngarāja, Mṛga, Pitṛgaṇa, Dauvārika, Sugrīva, Puṣpadanta, Jalādhīpa Asura, Śoṣa, Pāpa, Roga, Ahi, Mukhya, Bhallāṭa, Soma, Sarpa, Aditi and Diti.¹² The names of eight deities surrounding Brahmā are Aryamā, Savitā, Vivasvān, Vibudhādhīpa, Mitra, Rājayakṣma, Pṛthivīdhara and Āpavatsa and the names of four deities around Brahmā occupying three squares each are Aryamā, Vivasvān, Mitra and Pṛthivīdhara.¹³ The whole setting of the *Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* of 81 squares is given below in the fig. 1.

N.E.		East					S.E.	
Śikhī	Parjanya	Jayanta	Indra	Sūrya	Satya	Bhṛṣa	Antarikṣa	Vāyu
Diti	Āpaḥ	Jayanta	Indra	Sūrya	Satya	Bhṛṣa	Savitra	Pūṣā
Aditi	Aditi	Āpavatsa	Aryamā	Aryamā	Aryamā	Savitā	Vitatha	Vitatha
Sarpa	Sarpa	Pṛthivīdhara	Brahmā	Brahmā	Brahmā	Vivasvān	Bṛhatkṣata	Bṛhatkṣata
Soma	Soma	Pṛthivīdhara	Brahmā	Brahmā	Brahmā	vivasvān	Yama	Yama
Bhallāṭa	Bhallāṭa	Pṛthivīdhara	Brahmā	Brahmā	Brahmā	Vivasvān	Gandharva	Gandharva
Mukhya	Mukhya	Rājayakṣmā	Mitra	Mitra	Mitra	Vibudhādhīpa	Bhṛngarāja	Bhṛngarāja
Ahi	Rudra	Śoṣa	Asura	Jalādhīpa	Puṣpadanta	Sugrīva	Jaya	Mṛga
Roga	Pāpa	Śoṣa	Asura	Jalādhīpa	Puṣpadanta	Sugrīva	Dauvārika	Pitṛgaṇa
N.W.		West					S.W.	

Matsya Purāṇa again speaks of another type of *Vāstumāṇḍala* which consists of 64 *padas* (squares). Purāṇa says that Brahmā has enjoined the *maṇḍala* of 64 squares for the *prāsādas* (temples). In this *maṇḍala* Brahmā occupies over four squares at the centre; and the eight deities i.e. Āpaḥ, Āpavatsa, Savitrī etc. are situated along the diagonals in the corners near him; in the outer corners eight other deities Agni etc. are placed and the remaining forty squares are located by twenty deities occupying two squares each.¹⁴

Thus, **Matsya Purāṇa** describes two types of *vāstumāṇḍalas*, one consisting of 81 squares and the other of 64 squares. **Br̥hatsam̥hitā** also provides the details of these two types of *vāstumāṇḍalas*, almost in the same pattern.¹⁵ **Hayasīrṣapāñcarātra** says that the *maṇḍala* of 64 squares is for the construction of shrines and a *maṇḍala* of 81 squares is for the residential buildings.¹⁶ **Matsya Purāṇa** also gives the description of *vāstumāṇḍala* of 81 squares in the context of the construction of houses where as *vāstumāṇḍala* of 64 squares is for *prāsādas* (temples), which approves the version of **Hayasīrṣapāñcarātra**.

Chapter 254 (*gr̥ha-māna-nirṇaya*) of **Matsya Purāṇa** provided the names, characteristics, measurements and locations of *catuḥ-śālā* (four halled), *tri-śālā* (three halled) and *dvi-śālā* (two-halled) residential buildings which are made for kings, yuvarājas, commanders, ministers, feudatory chiefs, nobles, king's officers, astrologers, preceptors, physicians, Br̥hmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras and other classes like craftsmen and courtesans etc. Here separate measurements are given to each class of buildings.¹⁷

In chapter 255 (*stambha-māna-vinirṇaya*) five kinds of pillars and the influence of *vedha* (hindrances) is given. A pillar that has four sides (square) is called *rucaka*; one that has eight sides (octagonal) is *vajra*; one with sixteen sides or ṣoḍaśāra is *dvivajra*; one with thirty-two sides is *pralīnaka* and a round pillar is named *vṛtta*.¹⁸ The **Br̥hatsam̥hitā** also provides the same description of pillars.¹⁹ These five types of pillars should be decorated with *padma*, *patravallīs*, *latās*, *kumbha* and *patra* etc. The thickness of the *tulā* (main architrave) should be equal to that of the pillar; above this there should be *upatulā* (beams and minor beams), whose thickness should be three-fourth of the preceding *tulā* or *upatulā*.²⁰

Chapter 268 (*prāsāda-vidhi*), chapter 269 (*prāsādānukīrtana*) and chapter 270 (*maṇḍapa-karaṇa*) highlight the details of temple architecture, particularly the method of pacification ceremony of the *Vāstupuruṣa* (*vāstudoṣopaśamana*), the types, names and characteristics of *prāsādas* (*prāsādalakṣana*) and the various names of *maṇḍapas* with their distinctive features. **Matsya Purāṇa** provides four kinds of proportionate measurement (scale) of the temples and their general characteristics :

(i) Sāmānya Prāsāda

According to **Matsya Purāṇa** after pacifying the *Vāstudeva* by sacrificial ceremony (*bali*) and offerings, the *vāstu* (selected plot) should be divided into sixteen parts (squares). Out of these, the four central *bhāgas* (parts) should be used for the creation of *garbhagr̥ha* and the remaining twelve *bhāgas* should be used to construct *bhittis* (walls). That means the border of the twelve outer squares should be occupied by the thickness of the walls. The height of the *bhittis* should also be equal to the length of these four parts. The height of the *śikhara* should be double of that of *bhittis*. The width of *pradakṣiṇā* should be commensurate with the one-fourth of the height of the *śikhara*.²¹ According to this scale if the width of a square is one unit then the width of the *prāsāda* is four units, the height of the *janghā* (wall) is four units, the *śikhara* is eight units and the total height of the temple is twelve units.

The *maṇḍapa* attached to the *garbhagr̥ha* should be double of the latter. The *bhadra* on three sides of the *āyata* i.e. sanctum should be equal to one-fifth of the *garbhagr̥ha*. The *prāgrīva* also should be erected on an area measuring one-tenth of the *garbhagr̥ha*. The *mukha-maṇḍapa* should be equal to the length of *garbhagr̥ha*.²² These general features of common temples are also described in **Garuḍa Purāṇa**, **Agni Purāṇa** and **Viśvakarmāprakāśa** with minor differences.²³

(ii) Liṅgamāna Prāsāda

The *liṅga* or image enshrined in the *garbhagr̥ha* serves as the scale (*māna*) of the measurements of various limbs of this type of temple. The height of the *liṅga* or cult image should be equal to its *pīthikā*. The height of *bhittis* (walls) should be equal to its outer length. The width of the sanctum should be two-thirds, of its own height. The height of *śikhara* should be double of that of *bhittis* and the width of *pradakṣiṇā* a quarter of that of *śikhara*. The width of the *maṇḍapa*, in front of *garbhagr̥ha* should be double of that of latter. The *kapālas* (*kapilīs*) should be projecting forward commensurating with the measurement of the *garbhagr̥ha*. On the *bhittis* of these *kapilīs* should be constructed the *mañjarī*. The *śukanāsa* should be raised upto half of the *mañjarī* and above it the *vedī* should be erected. The remaining portion over the *vedī* is occupied by *kaṇṭha* and *āmalasāraka*.²⁴

Thus, in this type, the *śikhara* is divided into 4 parts of which the two lower are known as *mañjarī*, half, of whose height is covered by *śukanāsa*. Above the *mañjarī*, is the *vedī* surmounted by *kaṇṭha* and *āmalasāraka* of one part each. **Viśvakarmāprakāśa**, **Garuḍa Purāṇa** and **Agni Purāṇa** also provide the same scale of *liṅgamāna prāsāda* for the plan and elevation.²⁵

(iii) Garbhamāna Prāsāda

In this type of temple, the area of *garbhagr̥ha* should be divided into nine equal *padas* (squares). The *liṅga* or the image should be installed in the centre. The remaining eight *padas* around it should be utilized for the erection of *bhittis*. The height of the *bhittis* should be equal to the width of five *padas*. The thickness of *bhittis* will be equal to that of one *pada*. The height of *śikhara* should be commensurate with the double of that of *bhitti* or ten times that of *pada*. The *śukanāsa* will measure the half or two-fourths of the *śikhara*. The *śikhara* should be divided into four parts. The lower will be covered by the *śukanāsa*. The third should create the *vedikā*, the fourth should be covered with *kaṅṭha* and *āmalasāraka*. The *kapāla* (*kapilī*) should be double of the *pada*. It should be decorated with *patravallīs* and surmounted by *aṇḍakas*.²⁶

(iv) Kṣetramāna Prāsāda

In another type of temple the area of the place where the cult deity is enshrined should be divided into three equal parts. One of these should be taken as the scale. One part should be covered with *rathāṅkas* (projection on walls decorated with sculptures). Two parts should provide the width of the *garbhagr̥ha*. The height of the *bhitti* should be equal to the width of the *garbhagr̥ha* and that of the *śikhara* the double of it. The *nemi* should be left around the *garbhagr̥ha*. The *prāgrīva* should measure one-fifth of four times a part's length. In the third part of *prāgrīva* the *suṣira* (perforated part like a latticed window) is to be constructed. The *kaṅṭhas* of the *prāsāda* should be erected, beside the *dvāra*, at the ends of the *garbhagr̥ha*.²⁷

Matsya Purāṇa presents a list of twenty temples named as Meru, Mandara, Kailāśa, Vimānacchanda, Nandana, Samudraka, Padma, Garuḍa (Surārṇeśa), Nandivārdhana, Gaja, Mṛga, Vṛṣa, Haṁsa, Kumbha, Sarvatobhadra, Simha, Vartula, Caturasra, Aṣṭāsra and Ṣoḍaśāsra followed by the details of various parts, decorations and dimensions of each temple type.²⁸ The temple can be made of bricks, wood or stone.²⁹

The Meru is erected with hundreds of *śṛṅgas*, four *dvāras*, sixteen *bhūmis* and variegated *śikhara*. It should be 50 cubits (*hastas*) in extent. The Mandāra has twelve *bhūmis*. Its extent is 45 *hastas*. The Kailāśa consists of nine *bhūmis*, Its extent should be forty *hastas*. The Vimānacchanda should be similar to Kailāśa with eight *bhūmis* and many *śikharas* with its extent of 34 cubits. The Nandivardhana may comprise seven *bhūmis* and its extent being thirty-two *hastas*. The Nandana should be similar to Viṣṇāka of thirty cubits. As the descending order follows it might have six *bhūmis*. The Sarvatobhadra consists of sixteen sides, many *śikharas*, *citraśālā* and five *bhūmis* and its extent is thirty cubits. The Vṛṣa should be without sides i.e. circular. Its height should

be similar to the Valabhīcchandaka *prāsāda*. The Simha is simimalr to a *simha* i.e. lion with its extent of sixteen *hastas*. The Gaja is similar to a *gaja* i.e. elephant with its extent of sixteen *hastas*. It has many *candraśālās*. The Kumbha is similar to *kumbha* in shape and has the extent of sixteen *hastas*. The Samudgaka is sixteen sided and consists of *candraśālās* and two *bhūmis* and ornamented with five *aṇḍakas*. The Padmaka is similar to Samudgaka. It has three *bhūmis* and beautiful *śikhara* with extent of twenty cubits. The Garuḍa is composed of seven *bhūmis* and it has three *candraśālās*. Another type of Garuḍaprāsāda has ten or twelve *bhūmis* and sixteen sides with extent of eight cubits. The Mṛgarāja will be decorated with *candraśālās*, big *prāgrīva* and six *bhūmis* and has sixteen sides. The Haṁsa is embellished with *candraśālās* and *prāgrīva*. This will be like *Simha-prāsāda*. The Vartula *prāsāda* is also similar to Simha and Haṁsa but its extent is given as twenty cubits. The Caturasra, the Aṣṭāsra and the Ṣoḍaśāsra will be similar to Simha-prāsāda.³⁰

Matsya Purāṇa says that seven *prāsādas* from Meru to Sarvatobhadra are considered to be *jyeṣṭha* (high), the eight from Vṛṣa to Mṛgarāja are *madhyama* (medium) and the five from Haṁsa to Ṣoḍaśāra are *kaniṣṭha* (low) ones. It also suggests that in Valabhīcchandaka *prāsāda* an image of Gaurī should be enshrined with Lord Śiva.³¹ The same names and descriptions of the twenty temples mentioned in the **Matsya Purāṇa** are also given in the **Bṛhatsamhitā**, **Viśvakarmāprakāśa**, **Bhaviṣya Purāṇa** and in the chapter on Nāgara-*prāsādas* in the **Samarāṅgaṇa sūtradhāra** with minor changes.³² Some names also appear in **Agni Purāṇa** and **Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa**.³³ The first three names in the **Matsya Purāṇa**, Meru, Mandara and Kailāśa which are named after mountains denote the largest temples measuring 50, 45 and 40 cubits (*hastas*) in extension and 64, 60 and 56 cubits in height. They also have the greatest number of storeys or *bhūmis* i.e. 16, 12 and 9.³⁴ Another four temples Vimānacchanda, Nandivardhana, Nandana and Sarvatobhadra consisting of 8,7,6 and 5 *bhūmis* with 34, 32, 30 and 30 *hastas* extension are also important and form the first group.³⁵ According to **Matsya Purāṇa** these seven *prāsādas* from Meru to Sarvatobhadra are considered to be *jyeṣṭha*.³⁶ Matsya clearly mentions Meru *Prāsāda* as four sided (*caturasra*). Thus, it appears that the ground plan of the first group of temples is a square. Others of the twenty temples are circular (*vṛtta* or *vartula*), eight sided (*aṣṭāsra*) or sixteen sided (*ṣoḍaśāsra*). One of them being Gaja or Kuñjara might have been like elephant (*gajaprṣṭha*) in shape with its apsidal or rectangular plan.

It is remarkable that these temples of twenty types are called Nāgra *Prāsāda* in **Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra** which indicates that these temples of North India were under

Nāgara category. Stella Kramrisch rightly says that 'the twenty temples form the nucleus of the development of each variety and its ramifications. These represent a liberal assortment of architectural shapes. A selection was made and five basic shapes (square, rectangular, circular, apsidal and octagonal) were ramify in the several schools of medieval architecture³⁸.

Maṇḍapas

Matsya Purāṇa devotes a complete chapter 270 to the description of *maṇḍapas* to be constructed in accordance with the shape of temples. Their three broad categories are *jyeṣṭha* (high), *madhyama* (medium) and *kaniṣṭha* (low) and these are of twenty-seven kinds. The name of each *maṇḍapa* is given according to the number of pillars attached with it. The Puṣpaka has sixty-four pillars, Puṣpabhadra sixty-two, Suvrata sixty, Amṛtanandana fifty-eight, Kauśalya fifty-six, Buddhisamkīraṇa fifty-four, Gajabhadra fifty-two, Jayāvaha fifty, Śrivatsa forty-eight, Vijaya forty-six, Vastukīrti forty-four, Śrutiñjaya forty-two, Yajñabhadra forty, Viśāla thirty-eight, Śuśliṣṭa thirty-six, Śatrumardana thirty-four, Bhāgapañca thirty-two, Nandana thirty, Mānava twenty-eight, Mānabhadra twenty-six, Sugrīva twenty-four, Harita twenty-two, Harnikāra twenty, Śatārdhika eighteen, Simha sixteen, Śyāmabhadra fourteen and Subhadra has twelve pillars. The shapes of the *maṇḍapas* should be *trikoṇa*, *vṛtta*, *ardhendu*, *catuṣkoṇa*, *aṣṭāsra* and *dviraṣṭaka*; other shapes are inauspicious.³⁹

The plot for the *maṇḍapa* should be divided into sixty-four *padas*. The *dvāra* should be placed in the centre. The height of the *maṇḍapa* should be double the width and the *kaṭi* (wall) should be one-third of the height, Half of the total area should be covered by the walls. One-fourth of the central portion (encircled open space) should be taken as the scale for *dvāra* whose height is the triple and width double of the scale. The *dvāra* should be made of *udumbara*. The door-jambs should be decorated with three, five, seven and nine *śākhās*. The doors measuring one hundred forty and half, one hundred thirty and one hundred twenty *aṅgulas* are considered as *jyeṣṭha*, *madhyama* and *Kanīyas* respectively. The door measuring 180 *aṅgulas* is supposed to be the best one for ventilation, while the other prescribed dimensions are 80,90,100,110 and 116 *aṅgulas*. There are ten doorways for *maṇḍaps*. Other dimensions are forbidden as they trouble the mind. There should be no obstruction, in front of the door, caused by tree, corner, curve, pillar, banner, well, wall and pit.⁴⁰

To the south of the *maṇḍapa* should be planted trees with fruits, to the east milky trees, to the west a pond full of lotuses and to the north should be palm trees and flowers, The *parivārālayas* (family living rooms) should be constructed on both

the sides of the main building. In the south there should be a place for penance (*tapovana*), in the north *mātrkā-temple*, in the south-east kitchen, in the south-west Gaṇeśa-temple, in the west Śrī or Lakṣmī-temple and a place for offerings for god Candra etc, in the north-west platform for *grahas (navagrahas)*, in the north *yajanaśālā*, in the north-east *vāpī* (step-well) and Śeṣasāyī Viṣṇu therein and in the front side there should be a place for Nandī in Śiva's temples. The temple should consist of *ghaṇṭā*, *torana*, *dhvaja*, *kuṇḍa* and *maṇḍapa* etc.⁴¹

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7. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 252, 2-4.
8. *Bṛhatsamhitā*, Chapters 56-58.
9. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 253, 20-21.
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11. *Ibid*, 253, 29-33.
12. *Ibid*, 253, 24-27.
13. *Ibid*, 253, 30-33.
14. *Ibid*, 253, 47-48.
15. *Bṛhatsamhitā*, 53, 42-50; 53, 55-56.
16. *Īyāśīrṣapāñcarātra*, VIII, 150
17. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 254, 1-44
18. *Ibid*, 255, 1-3
19. *Bṛhatsamhitā*, 53, 28.
20. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 255, 4-6
21. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 269, 1-4
22. *Ibid*, 269, 4-6.

23. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* I, 47, 6-10; *Agni Purāṇa* 42, 1-7; *Viśvakarmāprakāśa*, Matri Prasad Pandey (ed), Varanasi, 1937, VI, 56-81.
24. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 269, 7-13
25. *Viśvakarmāprakāśa*, VI, 56-81; *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, I.47 II-13 and *Agni Purāṇa*, 42, 9-22
26. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 269, 14-20.
27. *Ibid*, 269, 21-25.
28. *Ibid*, 269, 31-45; 47-51.
29. *Ibid*, 269, 46.
30. *Ibid*, 269, 31-45; 47-51.
31. *Ibid*, 269, 53-55
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36. *Ibid*.
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