

Book-Review

THE INDIAN TEMPLE TRACERIES by Prof. M. A. Dhaky, Published by American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi & D. K. Print World (P) Limited, New Delhi, 2005, Text pages 196 + glossary & bibliography pages 24, diagram figures 55 & photo illustrations 348. Price Rs. 3600.00

The book entitled THE INDIAN TEMPLE TRACERIES by an internationally known art historian Prof. M.A. Dhaky is a research work of unique importance on little known but essential part of Indian architecture of Buddhist *chaityas* and *vihāras*, Brahmanical and Jaina temples and also the Islamic architecture. Through this work Prof. Dhaky, visually sensitive art historian, has brought the traceries or the *jālas* to much broader perspective. The book sets a model for research wherein holistic approach for the study of some specific architectural decoration has been adopted. This is clear when Prof. Dhaky discusses traceries or *jālas* in perspective of Indian architecture including Islamic and goes further to fine stone works on architectural examples of Gothic style in Europe. Such a comprehensive, indepth, detailed and corroborative study of integral part of Indian and Gothic architecture becomes significant because the work comes from the pen of a scholar of eminence like Prof. Dhaky. A remarkable feature of the book is the weaving of textual and visual traditions to show that both were working together in the spirit of correspondence to shape the traceries or the *jālas*, right from second-first cent. B.C.E. in India and subsequently also across the Indian subcontinent. The book with flawless and eloquent language and presentation makes pleasant and smooth reading.

The book divided into six chapters has an epilogue at the end with conclusive observations. The introduction discusses Indian traceries in global context which starts from reference to the Indian *chaityas* and *vihāras* and subsequent temple architecture. The work also alludes with examples to Islamic architecture from 17th through 19th cent. C.E. Prof. Dhaky has not only theoretically discussed about the formal features and aesthetics of the traceries but has highlighted their functional aspects also for the purpose of light, air and compositional elegance. He has also pointed out that *jālas* grew more ornate with the embellished sacred architecture and were based mainly on earlier wooden *jālas*. He has also defined the purpose of *jālas* in the Muslim architecture as a symbol of faith veil ie virtue protective guise. The geometrical or vegetal decorations including *svastika* in Indian temple architecture reveal the deep sense of welfare of all (*svasti-bhāva*). The continuity of *jālas*

from Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical to Islamic architecture is key to understand interactive character of Indian art and culture.

The second chapter makes an academic discussion on the terminology found in different texts of North and South India. By the churning of the texts from the epics to the treatise on Indian art and architecture Prof. Dhaky has been able to put before us several other terms which were either synonymous or nearly synonymous to *jāla*.

The third chapter is virtually the elaboration of the earlier discussions on the basis of the *Vāstu* and *Shilpa* texts of North and South India. Analyzing different types of ornamental decorations (*svastika*, *nandyāvarta*, vegetal, geometrical decorations) found mainly in the context of temple architecture, Prof. Dhaky has classified accurately different types of *jālas* on the testimony of the texts. These are called *svastika*, *tūryasra*, *sakhaṇḍa*, *sakarṇaka* (four most popular *jālas* of Indian temples), *vardhamāna*, *gonetra*, *sarvatobhadra*, *kunjarākṣa*, *puṣpakanṭha* etc. It is undoubtedly rewarding for all of us to find 348 excellent photo illustrations from 6th-7th cent. C.E. to 19th cent. C.E. showing different types of *jālas* in Indian temple and Islamic architecture. Through these illustrations any scholar or art lover can fully appreciate the rhythm and aesthetics of Indian trceries. The chapter also gives relevant extracts from different texts to make the study authentic and lucid.

The fourth chapter in further elaboration of the third chapter discusses different types formulated by the author on the basis of textual reference. He has further divided different categories for example the auspicious symbol type as having *svastika*, *nandyāvarta*, *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *haṁsa*, *matsya* like symbols.

The fifth and sixth chapters make detailed study of the trceries as found in Islamic architecture of India (with examples and illustrations) and the medieval Gothic architecture of Europe. A number of visuals/figures from England, Germany, France given in the book make the entire study clearly understandable.

Epilogue in the book is virtually a retrospect with several conclusions and observations, well exemplified and textually supported. Prof. Dhaky has rightly observed that the formal manifestation of *jāla* types in each case, invariably reflects the characteristic cultural ethos, essence and flavour which reveals the underlying intentions of each architectural system. Prof. Dhaky has aptly made observations as to the symbolic connotation of *jālas* which were vital part of architecture representing the Cosmic Man or Absolute (*Param-Puruṣa*).

The detailed and systematic bibliography and glossary of terms further add to the value of the book. The layout and plates of the book are all excellent for which the publishers are to be thanked. As a student of Art History I feel proud to have the opportunity of reviewing

this significant work of Prof. Dhaky whom I deem to be **Bhishma Pitāmaha** in the field of the study and research of Art History. I only wish many more such trend setting works of Art History from the pen of Prof. Dhaky.

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