

Chapter II

Temple, City, Heritage

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Abstract: This chapter explores the intricate relationship between sacred geography and heritage cities in India, particularly temple towns. Dr. Anand Burdhan delves into the architectural and cultural significance of these cities, emphasizing their connection to religious principles outlined in ancient texts like Vastu Shastra. The planning of temple towns, such as Varanasi, Tanjore, and Kanchipuram, reflects an integration of sacred geography, sacred performances, and sacred specialists. The author discusses how these elements contribute to the spiritual and cultural richness of Indian temple cities, where temples not only serve as religious centres but also as hubs of artistic, musical, and craft traditions. The chapter highlights the interplay of metaphysical, architectural, and communal aspects that have defined these cities for centuries, emphasizing their continued relevance in understanding India's heritage.

Keywords: Sacred geography, Temple towns, Vastu Shastra, Heritage cities, Cultural traditions

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All complexes are sacred complexes. What is interesting about these heritage cities is their sacred geography. And this is a unique concept as far as a study of Indian heritage cities is concerned. *Puranas* evolved a very elaborate concept, very comprehensive concept of a sacred geography and a place where religious structures, religious edifices can be created. There has been a discourse in many of the Shastric texts on Vastu, whether it is Manshaar, Mayamath, Ishaan Vishwa Guru Deva Paddhati, Vastu Shaar Mandan, Saraswati Kantha Bharana or Samarangana Sutradhar. We find that the entire schemata or the planning for a temple town has been based on some axiomatic religious principles.

Sanskrit literature give emphasis on axiomatic principle of architecture. This is what we must do. This is something we are not supposed to do, we are not supposed to follow. In context of our heritage city, what is important is vegetational planning. Tastraj said, *Adi Vrikshani Vinashyata, Tato Grihani Nivasyata*. Firstly, we should go for an adequate plan for having much of vegetation in and around the city. *Adi Vrikshani Vinashyata*. Firstly, we must think for different kinds of sacred trees. Everywhere the word sacred is added. What is sacred is beautiful. What is beautiful and useful is sacred in Indian tradition. Therefore, even geography is sacred. The geography of Varanasi is sacred because Varanasi is situated on confluence of *Varuna* and *Assi*. It is *Kashi*, a city that has self-luminosity. *Prayag, Prakrishnayag*, where the first grand ritual had taken place. It is situated on confluence of two rivers and one imaginative river. It is a perceptual space, a metaphysical space where there is confluence of three rivers. It is sacred. It has a sacred geography. *Gangotri* has a sacred geography. *Karnaprayag, Devprayag*, they all have sacred geographies. So sacred geography is very significant in context of temple towns. *Prayag Samhita* has elucidated it.

Vano panant nadi shaila nirjharo panth bhoomisho. Vano panant nadi shaila nirjharo panth bhoomisho. Ramante devata nityam pure uddhyana vatsucha. Ramante devata nityam. Gods reside at the place which has denizens of heaven, which has less greenery, where there is abiding panoramic, bewitching panoramic beauty. The whole natural kaleidoscope, cultural kaleidoscope of a temple town is very significant. This is a very, very interesting sloka described in *Brihat Samhita*. *Vano Upavana, Vano Upananda, Nadi* river, a perennial flow of water is very important for a sacred town. *Shaila*, means parbat, mountains. And *nirjharo panth*

bhoomisho, there should be sounding cattered, there should be waterfall. *Ramante devata nityam pure uddhyana vatsucha*. *Pura* means a fortified city. It should be well fortified. And *uddhyana* should be within the city. *Pura uddhyana vatsucha*. City must have parks, beautiful parks, *uddhyana*. Then it can be treated as abode of *Shiva*, abode of *Vishnu*, abode of *Saraswati*, abode of *Durga*, means a sacred town is abode of the Supreme God. And this is the reason that the architectural planning of the city should be done on the basis of some religious instructions given in text known as *Vastu Shastra*.

Friends, as far as planning of ancient cities is concerned, whether the plan has been *Padmaka* designed like a lotus with different petals. *Padmaka* is name of a plan for a city or a *Tandaka*, a city that grows in one perpendicular direction. And then a city which is based on a *Sarvatobhadra* kind of plan, a grand city, as we have a great city like Vidyanagar or Vijayanagar, which covered area of almost 32 to 33 kilometers. It was capital city. It is a temple town. It is a heritage city. It has religious complexes all around the city. It is situated on a sacred river Tungabhadra. So, the panoramic beauty, architectural beauty are the two very significant aspect, two very significant facets of a temple town. I must explain to everybody that both town and religious edifices structures have been created in ancient India or medieval India as per the principles of *Vastu Shastra*.

But what makes us very proud of the ancient concept of town planning are the three important aspects on that we must focus. I have already said, I have already quoted sacred geography. Sacred geography means topography, physiography of a particular place that must have very special significance. Second important thing is sacred performances and the third element is sacred specialists. So there is trichotomic interrelation among these three elements, sacred geography, sacred performances and sacred specialists. Sacred performances don't mean only rituals. It means singing, it means dance, it means craft, it means making of the sculptures, it means painting, and it means multiple activities related to dance, drama, music and industrial art. When we say sacred specialist, we don't mean that a sacred specialist is one who is ritualistic. A craftsman is also a sacred specialist. A sculptor is also a sacred specialist. An architect is also a sacred specialist. Then sculptors, craftsmen, master architect and even artists, painters, dancers themselves, they all are sacred specialists.

So, our literature defines a sacred town in a very different way. Sacredness is the seminal principle, subliminal principle on that the whole concept of art, architecture, town planning in India is concerned. How a temple town looks and how a temple town is created. The

fundamental principles are really very intriguing, very interesting. We have *Digapala Devata*, guardian deities, for that we create temples in different cardinal directions. For *Yama*, there is a well-defined direction. For *Kubera*, there is a well-defined direction. For *Indra*, there is a well-defined direction. For *Agni*, *Nariti*, *Varuna*, we have well-defined directions. Why in every direction there should be a temple and how these different directions are connected with different roads. If a plan is like a *vritta* kind of plan, circular or it is *vrittaya*, epsilon form, it is in epsilon form. Then even there should be a planning for making roads, all roads will be connected to the main temple of the town where the presiding deity of the town, the chief deity of the town dwells in. I am taking an example. Presumably, the *Brihadeshwara* temple of Tanjore is at the nerve point of the city. It is at the epicentre of the city and in all the directions there will be different temples. Temples of *Gargian* deities, temples of *Navagraha Devata*, planet gods. Then we will have many other temples, subsidiary slimes within the complex and also outside the complex. There will be town of the *Nagar Devata* and *Devata* who protects the whole city. For example, Kashi has a *kotwal*, *kotpal*, superintendent of police, and protector of the city. He is *Bhairava*. So, every town, temple town is known for multiple temples, small temples, big temples and then grand temples and at the very centre there will be the grandest one, the loftiest one, the loveliest one, the largest one.

You can see, you can find it in the town planning of Kanchi. You have *Ekambhreshwara*, you have *Kamakshi* temple, you have *Varadaraja* temple, you have many other temples in the city, *Vaikuntha Perumal* temple, but the city belongs to *Varadaraja Perumal*, Lord Vishnu. So, the centre of all sacred activities is *Varadaraja*. We have numerous inscriptions related to *Varadaraja*. *Varadaraja* having villages given as grand, *Chaturvedi Mangalam* villages, *Bhumi Agrahara* villages, *Brahmadeva* villages, *Devadeva* villages and similarly, if you will take the example of Tanjavur temple, the Tanjavur town, you will be surprised to know that there were more than 900 temple functionaries working with this Brihadeshwara temple, the grandest temple of the Chola period. But the grand 13-storey temples with two *Gopurams*, *Rajaswara Gopuram* and *Keralantakan Gopuram* is not just significant as a protuberant structure, a marvel of architecture.

Every temple town is known for its symbology, its philosophy, its metaphysical facets and a great spiritualistic vision where people of different communities will live, where dancers will live, where damsels will live, where architect will live, where the chief architect will live, where the Brahmanas, the ritualist Brahmanas will live and where the warrior class of Brahmanas will live, where the traders will live, where the doctors will live. What a great concept of planning

India had in ancient times. When you pip into the hoary past, the alluring past of our country and especially temple towns, you have reasoned to be bewildered and to be pleased with a great cultural tradition of the country.

The villages, the township of the artisans, they were made one particular area. So, temple is known for a grand planning. Temple town based on a grand concept of planning, a sculptural decoration, making of subsidiary shrines and later course you can find within a temple complex itself, various kinds of shrines, and various kinds of institutions emerged. Aarogya Vihar, they had collection of Pandu Liti, they have Avan Kalam, they had Poon Bhandaram, they had Sri Bhandaram. Avan Kalam functioned as an archive and a museum. You may have all reasons to feel very surprised and also to be very proud of it. They had Chitravithi, Brideswara temple has a Chitravithi, a gallery of painting and that is on the first floor where on the very concept theological principle of dance, cosmological principle of dance, cosmology and dance have been interrelated by the name of Shiva and the activities of the Shiva, the transform of Shiva, the movement of Shiva's body and a great panorama, a great spectacle, a spectacular spectacle of knowledge by painting work has been created and this Chitravithi is known for Natya Karana. Friends, I would like to bring to your kind notice that if we remember the dance form introduced in India by Bharat Muni or we remember we are proud of a Natya order called Bharatanatyam or Odissi dance, it is because of temple towns and structures, great temple structures. Chidambaram depicts our dance form, our mudras, movement of hands, movement of feet, movement of the head, costume designing and everything, the whole grammar, the whole parallels, the entire dictum dance is depicted in Brideswara, in Chidambaram, in temple like Konark.

If you have Odissi, in the purest form, because a temple structure like Konark which is based on India's understanding and a very prolific and profound understanding of astrology, astronomy, mathematics, architecture, science of sculpture, iconometry, iconology, iconography, it is a wonderful creation that represents the entire gamut of India's symbolism in one particular temple we call Konark and the name is simply Kona. Kona, it is in a particular angle, this angular structure in particular angle and Arka, Arka means, Ar means movement, Ka means whole, the movement of the whole universe is determined by Lord Sun. So, planet gods, Digbalas, Nachatras, all Rasis, all zodiac symbols, they all are significant in the making of a temple and they are integral to the architectural plan and order which was practiced in India.

I am telling you a very interesting story. Do you know that Konark as a temple with its sculptural schemata and the whole decorative element which are on the facade of the temple especially of *Jagmohan* was designed by girls who were graduate in the science of architecture. Girls, we have inscription, girls designed the facade of the temple. What a great glory India comprises of in form of temples. History must bring to the fore such discourses. We are involved, woman was in a poor condition, there was a class of Dalit, it is the temples will reveal the history, who was the singers, who were the dancers, who were the musicians, who were the weavers, who were the people who were making the *Tadapatra* manuscript. All castes, all cultural groups, all communities were associated with temple activities and all were considered as sacred performers, sacred specialists. The temple history reveals to us the real picture, the real story of ancient India and there is not one temple. All great towns in ancient India whether it was Jain, the town which was looted, sabotaged, demolished, they have archaeological remains and relics.

Of course, tradition was wiped out, it has vanished but you will have to relate it with the available information in your *Shastras*, in *Vastu Shastras*, *Shilp Shastras*. We have 18 excellent texts from ancient India including a text like *Chira* means milk and *Arnau* means *Samudra*. A notion of milk or a notion of knowledge, it is really such a comprehensive explanation, elucidation which is very explicit and technologically very advanced that describes about the sculptural decoration of an edifice and sculptural decoration for a town where the image of *Yaksini* should be placed, where the images of *Sursundari* should be placed and the concept of modelling was very important. If you are creating image of a woman, what is important is you have to show the movement of the body. For example, you can take Khajuraho. We have unearthed so far 24 grand temples and inscription says it had more than 81 temples. Probably it had 84 temples at one particular place with excellent, excellent example of hydraulic engineering, water harvesting, storage system in ancient India. *Sivasagar Talab*, you see the ponds. If you will see the structural plan of Nalanda, it had 52 Kamal Pushkarni, 52 Kamal Pushkarni. It was such an advanced planning. Kamal Pushkarni with white lotus, Kamal Pushkarni with pink type of lotus and all around there were, you know, called *Tadaga*, Pushkarni, Kamal Pushkarni, Brihat Pushkarni, many, many Pushkarni. The town of Gaya had 52 Pushkarni in ancient time.

We find the description and I belong to Gaya and I had seen at least 12 to 13 huge ponds in Gaya city, in the middle of the Gaya city. There was a *Tadaga* in Gaya. Nalanda all around, Nalanda city, what has been described by Yuan Tsang and we find in Buddhist literature, it

was part of Amba Khanda. Amba means mango. There were mango trees, orchards of mango were all around Nalanda and so Nalanda was known as Dharmakhanda, the sacred land where religion and religious philosophy was patronized. It received tutelage. It was sacred land where mango trees were in great number and you should be very proud of this very idea. One Sanskrit poet says, a country is dead if it has no tree. A country is alive only if there are trees and in a temple town there must be Panchavati. Five sacred trees must be there like Peepal, Vatavriksha and then Pakad, also Jambu, Jamun and what you call this fig, Anjeel, tree of Anjeel. The concept of Panchavati, Bihar had placed as Naugachiya, nine sacred trees. Very interesting.

You had temple towns which are very significant in terms of planning. I am giving another example. Temple towns were having a system of water storage. They developed canals from Kaveri. A canal was developed and water of Kaveri was brought to Tanjore. We have still a canal of this Kaveri River just besides the Tanjore temple. But the king launched a great program for water harvesting by creating a Shiva Ganga project. Radha Bhoja actually developed a temple town near Bhopal and where we have Bhojasar, we have also Bhojaswara temple and Vijayamandal and there you can find there is factory site for creating sculptures for making architectonic designs or sculpting beautiful statues and sculpture. And there you have large embankment all around in a huge area to trap and to harvest the surplus water of Betwa river.

It is something that can be found in every important sacred town of India. We can take Ellora as an example where you have various 34 rock cave temple. It is one of the most significant laboratories and a library of lithic art in India where you have from one to cave number 13, cave number 12. You have Buddhist caves, then you have caves related to Brahminic cult and after that you have caves related to, dedicated to Jain Tirthankara. You have five important caves of Jain Tirthankara. This different sectarian identity was not a matter of class and conflict, communal conflict. It shows how a society with a sense of co-existence had evolved in India and there you can see the kind of planning in creating a grand structure; how a structure with grandeur and splendour was created.

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