



Mains Practice Question

The distinct architectural style of temple construction in different parts of India was a result of geographical, ethnic, racial, historic and linguistic diversities. Comment. (250 words)

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Approach:

- Highlight the basic features of a Hindu temple style.
- Highlight different temple styles of India, listing out their characteristics as influenced by geography

Introduction

- In India, every region and period produced its own distinct style of temples with its regional variations. However, the basic form of the Hindu temple comprises the followings:
- A cave-like sanctum (garbhagriha) – a small cubicle with a single entrance where the main icon is kept.
- Entrance to the temple which may be a portico or colonnaded hall known as mandapa.
- Freestanding temples tend to have a mountain like spire which can take the shape of curving shikhara or Vimana.

Body

Broad Orders of temples in the country are known as

Nagara Style

- This style of architecture was popular in northern India.
- These temples were commonly found to be built on a stone platform which was upraised.
- Earlier temples had just one tower or shikhara, later ones had several. The garbhagriha is always located directly under the tallest tower (depending on the shikhara, these are known by different names region wise. The most common shikhara is square at the base and whose walls curve or slope inward to a point on top is known as LATINA, or the REKHAPRASADA type.)
- PHAMSANA is the second type where buildings tend to be broadened and shorter, where roofs are made up of several slabs. They do not curve inwards)
- VALABHI are rectangular buildings with roof rising into a vaulted chamber. Triratha, Pancharatha, Saptaratha and even Navrath which are division of walls into vertical planes called rathas are found. All the shikara in Nagara style ends in a horizontal fluted disc called an amalak topped with a kalash or vase. For example, Vishwanath temple, Khajuraho, Lingaraj temple, Odisha, sun temple, Modhera.

The Nagara school further developed sub-schools:

- Odisha school – exterior walls lavishly decorated, interiors walls plain, no use of pillars
- Khajuraho school/ Chandel school – Developed by Chandel rulers in which both interiors and exterior walls were decorated don't have boundary walls.

- Solanki school – popular in Gujarat by Solanki rulers stepped tank, on steps, there are small temples.

Dravidian Style

- Temple architecture of South India which reached perfection under the Cholas. It is the oldest style of architecture. Big temple complexes under compound walls were made which also became the administrative centres for the adjoining areas.
- Gopuram or huge gateway was also a part of the structure. The main temple tower called VIMANA is like a stepped pyramid which rises up geometrically rather than curving. The word Shikhara is used only for the crowning element at the top of the temple called STUPIKA or an octagonal cupola.
Dvarapala/doorkeepers were found guarding the temple. Large water reservoirs or temple tanks are common.
Subsidiary shrines are either incorporated within or located as distinct inside the main temple, for example, Gangaikondacholapuram temple, Brihadeshwara temple, Thanjavur.

Deccan Styles

- Inspired both by north and South Indian styles were used and were known as VESARA. It consists of two important components - Vimana and Mandapa joined by Antarala.
This style did not have a covered ambulatory around the sanctum. The pillars, door frames and ceilings are intricately carved. For example, Lad Khan temple at Aihole.
- Thus it can be ascertained that temple architecture was influenced by geographical, ethnic, racial, historical and linguistic diversities of Indian sub-continent.

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