



The Living Temple: Aesthetics in Śilpa Śāstra

Bettina Bäumer

There are at least two ways of approaching the subject: from the manifestations of Art to their underlying principles, archetypes, concepts and Śāstras, or from the Śāstras, principles, archetypes and concepts to the manifestations. Both ways are equally valid, because in the Indian tradition (as in most traditions – with the exception that India has such a vast corpus of texts underlying the Arts) – there is a two-way movement. The artistic expression (in any media, but we shall come to the architectural-sculptural specifically) is never simply an application of Śāstric prescriptions and principles; and the Śāstras are not canons limiting the creativity of the artist. Much has been said and written about the role of Śāstras in relation to Art which need not be repeated here.¹

After having spent about three decades of circumambulating, doing a *parikramā* of the sacred mountain of Indian Art in its fundamental principles, looking at it from various angles and scriptures, respectfully avoiding to ascend it, because the feet of our thoughts, categorizations and classifications may desecrate its sacred space – and having written on some aspects of so called aesthetics, what I may say now will sound like a truism or a repetition. But I shall try to extract some aspects which are less dealt with by other scholars.

Every one of the speakers in this lecture series will have to address the question of terminology: (1) aesthetics is a European term and one has to be conscious of its historical implications; (2) in its narrow sense it seems to deal mainly with the definition of beauty²; (3) it has been used and applied in the Indian context to much more than sense-experience (*aisthesis*) and beauty. In the context of the present lectures I understand it more in the sense of a “pervasive theory of Art.” (4) Having been involved with IGNCA since its beginning, and sharing the insights of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, our approach has always been trans-aesthetic (in the narrow sense), and multidisciplinary in the Indian context. Multi-disciplinary means also multi-textual. I am keeping all this in the background and will necessarily have to choose some texts and some aspects throwing light on my topic.

Before descending to the concrete manifestation of aesthetics in architecture

(mainly temple architecture), I want to start from the more basic question of the nature of matter in the philosophies underlying architectural aesthetics. I see these philosophies mainly based on the Āgamas/Tantras – not withstanding some Vedic–Upaniṣadic roots. If aesthetics is supposed to deal with form (*rūpa*), it cannot be separated from an understanding of the material which is given form. There is no space in this lecture to go into an entire cosmology, but I want to draw attention to one verse which, in a way, summarizes the Tantric understanding of matter. It is attributed to the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha (but not found there) and quoted by authors of Kashmir Śaivism (Kṣemarāja, Jayaratha).

āśyānaṃ cidrasasyaugham
sākāratvam upāgatam,
jagad-rūpatayā vande
pratyakṣam bhairavam vapuḥ .³

I pay homage to the glorious body of Bhairava, who is visibly manifest in the form of the world,

and who has assumed form (*ākāra*), being a condensation of the density of the joyful essence of Consciousness.

This verse contains three words for “form”: one is the divine form or the luminous ‘body’, *vapus*, an important key to the Vedic and Śaiva theo-aesthetics; the second is *ākāra*, a concrete, embodied form; the third is *rūpa*, an encompassing term in any of the Indian arts. But not by chance the term *rasa* is used which underlies all Indian aesthetics, here, however, in a symbolic sense of liquidity which becomes solid by coagulation (as ice from water, or sugar-crystal from cane juice). Though the primary meaning is not aesthetic, but a meditation on the essence of the world as a Divine manifestation, however the implication for any aesthetics of form is very deep. That which from a liquid state becomes coagulated in form is nothing but Consciousness: *cit*. I would extend this meaning to the very manifestation of the temple as the “essence of Consciousness” frozen in stone, or the taking form (*ākāra*) of the Divine body (*vapus*).

This has inspired me to title one of my articles on temple architecture: “From Stone to God”.⁴

The title given to me is a “pervasive theory of Indian aesthetics with reference to Architectural texts”, i.e. Śilpa and Vāstuśāstras. The adjective “pervasive” sounds very ambitious, and it can certainly not be covered in a single lecture. It may be pretentious, specially when we consider the vastness of the historical and geographical manifestations, (not confined to India), of temples as well as texts. The

only solution to this problem of being unable to cover the whole range is, 1) to concentrate on some fundamental principles which can be applied and modified according to the historical and geographical contexts; 2) to give some examples of both, texts and temples, which will obviously be taken from a field on which I have researched and have direct experience, which is Orissa. They can be paradigmatic for other regions and styles.⁵ These two parts or approaches cannot be separated, because the regional texts and temples also contain universal principles.

The second problematic term in the title as already mentioned, is “aesthetic”. The texts dealing with temple architecture and sculpture (these cannot be separated) are concerned with the creation of a sacred space and form oriented to ritual, and hence have to follow certain principles conducive to the purpose of the structure and form to be created. We could call this the sacred or religious dimension. They are further concerned with the technique (not to use the word ‘technology’) of construction, with all the implied engineering methods. The stupendous achievement of building stone temples of the dimensions of a Kandariya Mahadeva in Khajuraho, or of Sūrya Deul at Konārka demands skills and precision, planning and organisation. These Śāstras further elucidate some fundamental principles of the entire symbolism of temple and sculpture. Where do we place “aesthetics” among these areas? Is it the overall plan and execution, or its parts, and the effect the creation has on the devotee or visitor? In any case it is not a separate area, and I personally know of only one text which relates the *rasa*-theory of the Nāṭyaśāstra to sculpture, seen from both sides, the artist and the onlooker or devotee. Of course, many Śilpaśāstras, particularly the descriptive ones, use adjectives for ‘beautiful’ when describing images on temple-walls. But to my understanding, the so-called ‘aesthetics’ of the temple is a unity of these aspects dealt with in the Śāstras: the sacred or ritual, the technical, the conceptual or symbolical, and the artistic execution of architecture and sculpture.

First a note on the interrelation between text and temple, or between theoretical and practical knowledge. This is illustrated in a relief found at Khajuraho (Bījamaṇḍala mound), where there are craftsmen carrying a stone on the left side, on the right side is a religious teacher (bearded, holding a manuscript), and in between is a writer, executing the instructions of the *ācārya*. This shows beautifully the interaction, probably, of the religious *ācārya*, the *sūtradhāra* or author of the Śāstra, and the *śilpīs*.

I may quote two texts from Western and Eastern India which stress the necessary collaboration between the theoretician and the architect or builder (*sthapati*):

An architect who has book knowledge but has neglected to apply that knowledge to any construction will faint when called upon to demonstrate his knowledge, 'like a cowardly warrior on a battlefield.'

On the other hand, one who is proficient as a builder but has not studied the *śāstras* will prove to be a blind guide who leads his followers into a whirlpool.

SamSūt ch. 44 (quoted by D.Desai in
Sāmarasya, p. 199)

Without knowledge of the proper divisions and other matters, the temple will become disproportionate.

Describing the various parts and elements without the help of the *Sāstras* would be vain, like walking blind in the darkness of night.

ŚiPrak 2.397–398

The Śilparatnakośa which describes temple types of Orissa with their component parts, describes *śilpa* (architecture and sculpture combined) as *sarvadarśanalakṣaṇam* (1.3), which can be interpreted as the characteristic, the symbol or visible expression of all *darśanas*, which makes the philosophical views of reality perceptible. The expression also implies that the temple, even if it is dedicated to a particular deity, is not sectarian in essence. And the same verse offers salutation to Viśvakarma as “the embodiment of all standards” (*sarvaprāmāṇarūpāya*), describing *śilpa* further as *sākāratattvam*, “the visible form of the principles.” We may take *tattva* as the reality or essence of art, but I rather understand it as the principles, categories or levels of reality (25 in Sāṃkhya, 36 in the Āgamas). Thus Śilpa gives form to the abstract principles, “form earth to Śiva”, as the Śaivāgamas often summarize. In verse 5 following the temple is praised:

*sthāpakatattva rūpeṇa prāsādaḥ mukhyarūpataḥ,
praśamsanti kārukārāḥ nānābhāgāśabhedataḥ .*

ŚiRaKo 1.5

According to architectural theory (*sthāpakatattva*), the temple is most important.

The artists praise it according to its various types, with their divisions and subdivisions.

I would like, first, to give the holistic concept of the temple, second, the elements of form language underlying its aesthetics, to be illustrated later by some examples.

In several texts, from the Agni Purāṇa to the Śilparatnakośa, the holistic understanding of the temple is contained in its identification with the Vedic Puruṣa: The *vimāna* (temple) is in the form of the Puruṣa (Man), from the *pīṭha* (plinth) up to the flag (on the top).

AgPur 61.11

The symbolic implications are multiple, just as the Puruṣa has manifold implications in the Indian tradition (including the Buddhist). The temple is thus conceived as a living organism, where all the parts are organically related to the whole. But Puruṣa is both, cosmic and divine, and hence the temple contains all the three dimensions: *theo-anthropo-cosmic* or *cosmotheandric*. The Śilparatnakośa takes this symbolism literally and identifies all the parts of the temple with parts of the body, which is reflected in the terminology:

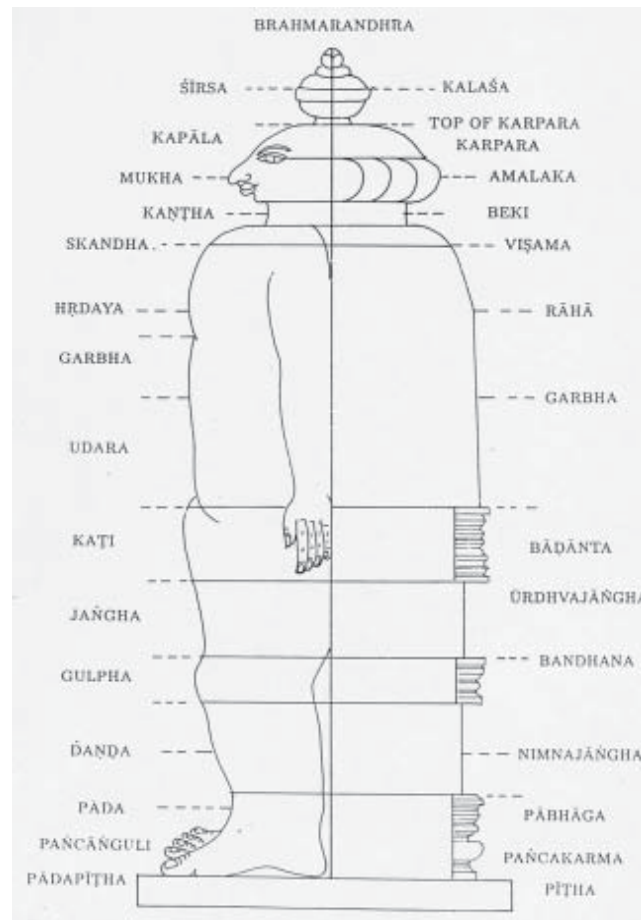


Figure 1: The Temple as *Puruṣa* from Śilparatnakośa

The other important holistic concept is the connection with the cosmic elements and the complete scheme of the *tattvas*. Though mostly ritually applied to the temple, this encompassing aesthetics is expressed in the *maṅgalaśloka*s or benedictory verses by Abhinavagupta to the 37 chapters of the Nāṭyaśāstra. They praise every element as a form of Śiva (who is not only *aṣṭamūrti* but *viśvamūrti*). To give only one example:

*viśvabījaṅgarohārthaṃ mūlādhāratayā sthitam,
dhartṇ-śaktimayaṃ vande dharaṇīrūpamīśvaram.*

AbhiBhā ch.1 *maṅgala* 3

I salute the Lord in the form of the Earth, the sustaining power, who is the basic substratum [of the macro and microcosm], in order to help the growth of the seed of the world.

The temple in its superstructure, rising as the *vimāna* or *śikhara* above the sanctum, ascends through the different levels, “from earth to Śiva”. Here again, the Orissan Śilpāśāstras identify the five components of the base, called *pañcakarma*, with the five cosmic elements on which the entire structure stands:

This *khura* is called the great earth, and it represents the element earth (*tattva*).

Just as the world is created from the five elements, so the temple is conceived (from the *pañcakarma*)

Above this (the *khura*) is the *kumbha*, which has the same height as the *khura*.

The *kumbha* represents the element water, and it always bestows auspiciousness.

ŚiRaKo 1.84–85 (p.59)

The text stresses also the aesthetic aspect of these five components:

In this way the *pābhāga* [foot part] looks beautiful on the *śikhara* and on the *śālā*.

Without the *pābhāga* the *śikhara* would look defective.

ŚiRaKo 1.102 (p.63)

Although literal “translations” of the concepts into architecture are not always easy, nonetheless the total conception corresponds. This correspondence is also one, as we shall see, between language and form. The Śilparatnakośa establishes a conscious correspondence between *alaṅkāra* in poetry and in the temple.

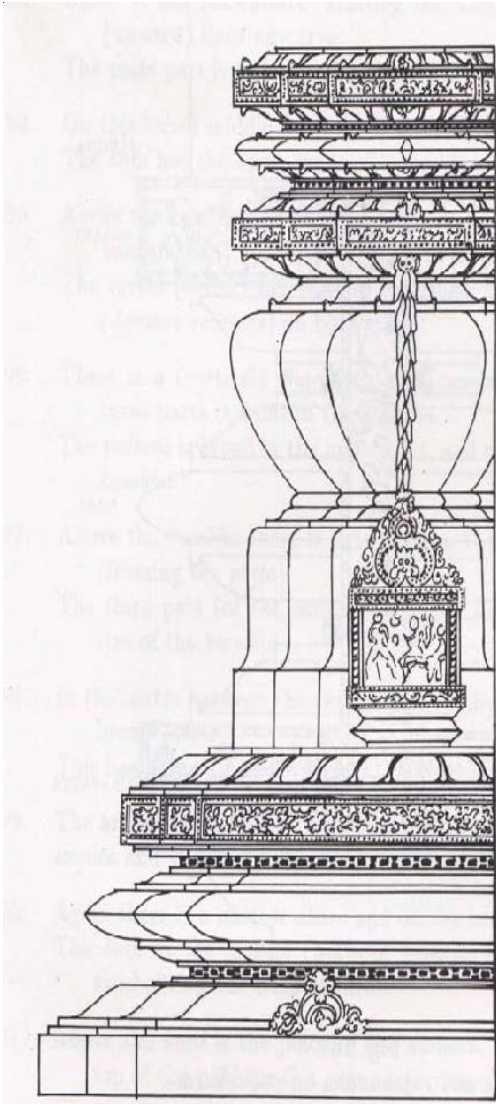


Figure 2: *Pābhāga* base (*kaṇṭhīpīṭha* and *pañcakarma*)

Just as the lower part is the *trikarma piṇḍikā* (base with three mouldings), the upper part is the *trikarma maṇḍana* (ornamentation with three mouldings), and in the middle is a pilaster with creepers as in a poet's imagination.

ŚiRaKo 1.110 (p.67)

And it connects the ornamentation again with cosmic creation:

Many types of creepers should be carved on the *latā-jāṅgha*. Just as in the beginning, trees (and plants) were created out of the five elements,

So, on the *śikhara jāṅgha*, creepers and trees are pleasing to the mind.

ŚiRaKo 1.111–112 a (p.67)

This understanding of the vegetal decorations on the pilasters of the wall-part is again an indication of the organic nature of the temple.

Of course, many elements of temple sculpture have the functions of protection, auspiciousness, and bestowing bliss, as for instance the conspicuous



Figure 4: Kailāsa

nāgastambhas or serpent-pillars on Orissan temples: *evaṃ bhāgāśca sarveṣāmānanda-śubhadāyakāḥ* (1.159).

In the Indian tradition, beauty and auspiciousness are closely related, as the terminology often suggests: *subhaga/saubhāgya*, *śubha/śobhā*, etc.

In this way one can move from the broad conceptions to their detailed application at the temple.

Another archetype which finds expression in temple architecture is the cosmic mountain: Meru and Kailāsa.

The implications of this symbolic correspondence are cosmological, mythical or theological, but also structural. The very term *śikhara* meaning “peak” implies the mountain as model, and the repetition of the *śikhara* in miniature *sikharikās*

or *vimānikās* has an aesthetic effect, but it is equally based on the cosmological and mythic-structural archetype. (cf. ŚiRaKo 1.291: Especially on the Meru Kailāsa temples, there are *śikharas* on the *śikhara*.)

Apart from the cosmological holistic conception of the temples, there is a spiritual base, when the body of the temple (also called *garbha* in Orissan texts) also represents the yogic subtle body, where the central line passing from the sanctum through the elevation of the *śikhara* to the opening at the top is identified with the *brahmarandhra*, on which the *kalaśa* is placed, conceptually dropping down nectar on the *liṅga* or *mūrti* in the centre. This vertical axis is then symbolically identified with the *suṣumnā* or central vein in the yogic body. We shall see this when we come to the interpretation of a Śakti temple.

An important, if not dominant, aspect of temple architecture in theory and practice is the entire area of measurements and proportion (*tāla*, *tālamāna*, *pramāṇa* etc.). This concerns both, the technical as well as the aesthetic aspect. It is a harmonious, balanced proportion of the elements and components of the temple which lends it both, stability as well as beauty. A major part of the Śilpaśāstras are precisely concerned with this area, and there is no need to give examples. The proportions in temple architecture correspond to rhythmic structures (*tāla*) in music and dance, and to metre (*chandas*) in poetry. The term *chandas* is also sometimes found in the Śāstras, the metrical and rhythmic harmony related to proportions. Example: Bṛhadīśvara in Tanjore (the proportions between the parts are perfect, for example the base of the *vimāna* is 200 feet square, and the rising tower is 100 feet, the *garbhagrha* inside is 25 feet, and the *mahāliṅga* is in proportion to the entire structure, or rather gives it the measure, besides the layout of the entire compound which follows the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*, etc.).

In this context the term *nyāsa* is important, which is used in the sense of composition in the Śāstras (cf. ŚiRaKo 2.16, 32–33). It has ritual associations with the imposition of mantras on parts of the body in order to transform it into a divine body and make it worthy to perform the ritual. *Nyāsa* in architecture and image-making is therefore not simply a technical device of composition, but it is connected with the divinity to be represented in the building and in the *mūrti* or panel.

The *Vāstusūtra* Upaniṣad, which is more concerned with the fundamental principles of image-making, and only by implication architecture, begins its chapter on the “integration of the composition” (*sambandha prabodhanam*, ch. 6) with the laconic *Sūtra*:



Figure 5: Lingarāja Temple, Bhubaneswar, Kailāsa Śikhara



Figure 6: Brhadīśvara Temple, Tanjavur, in the image of *Meru*



Figure 7: Bṛhadīśvara Temple, Tanjavur, *Linga*

nyāsadhāraṇā śreṣṭhā

VSUp 6.1

The concentration on/conception of the composition is most essential.

And the commentary following it immediately identifies *dhāraṇā* with *sr̥ṣṭi*: creation. Cosmic creation is then linked with the artistic creation.

lakṣaṇapṛakāśārthaṃ śilpavidyā

VSUp 4.3 (p.97)

The science of Śilpa is to make manifest the (divine) features (characteristics, symbols).



Figure 8: Bṛhadīśvara Temple, Tanjavur

The commentary adds:

The Artists (*śilpodgītha*, lit. the praisers of Art) and the priests (*purohita*) make many types of composition (*nyāsa*) in due order.

The following Sūtra (4) enumerates the nine components of Śilpa (lit. *rūpanavāṅgam*), beginning with *nyāsa* (followed by *alaṅkaraṇa*, *mudrā* etc.). *Nyāsa* means here *rekhānyāsa*, the placement of lines on the panel (Sūtra 6.4 comm.).

This brings us naturally to the second theme, the form elements which are basic to both, the Śāstras and the application in architectural and sculptural creation. The form language being universal, some of the brief statements of the Vāstusūtra could well be accepted by modern art.⁶ In the beginning the artist (*sthāpaka*) is described as one who has knowledge of the circle and the line (Sūtra 1.4). Then the six disciplines of Art are enumerated as:

Knowledge of stones (*śailam*), compositional diagrams (*khilopañjara*)... the carving of stones (*śailabhedana*), the arrangement of the limbs or parts (*aṅgaprayoga*), the emotional disposition evoked by the composition (*nyāsabhāvanā*), and the understanding of the integration of the composition (*sambandha-prabodhana*). – VSUp 1.8 comm. (p.49)

The two most fundamental form elements are thus the line (*rekhā*) and the point (the centre point of the circle), which is either described as *marma*, the vital point (a term from Āyurveda), or as *bindu*. The connection is expressed in a Sūtra:

Sūtra 14: The bindu, obtained in the centre is the life-breath of the earth. The *śilpakāras* call it *marma* (core).

VSUp. 2.14

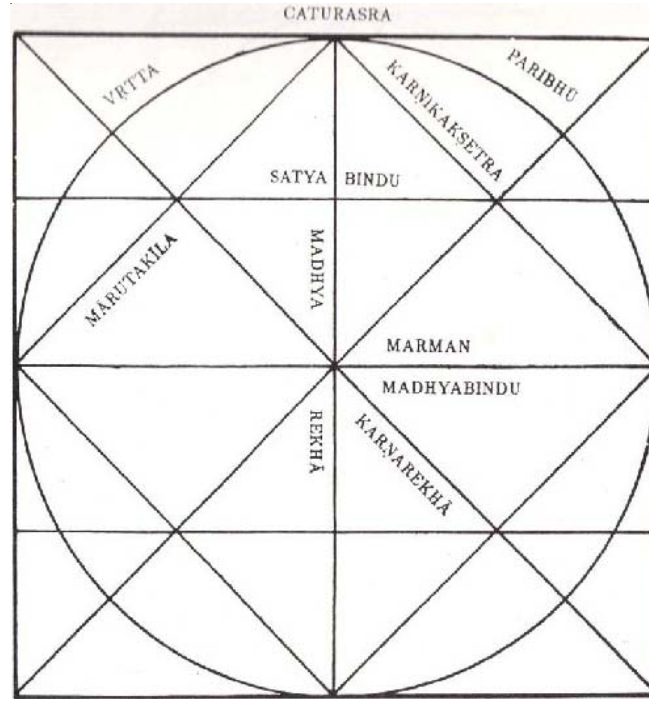
The fundamental forms created by the point and the line are thus connected with cosmic realities.

Sūtra 6: In the beginning is a circle. The circle is the All (universe).

The breath of life (*prāṇa*) is (contained) in its form, even as the mind is in Man. The circle is Time, according to the Vāsturveda. The movement of the circle is restricted (by its circumference), life the fluctuation of the mind. The support of the circle is the immortal, the *bindu* is its firm position (station) like the Ātman (in man). Starting from the *bindu*, by connecting it with another point arises the circumference (enclosure) surrounding it. He who knows this is the supreme Lord, the Overseer, Union (*yoga*), he is intelligence (*kratu*), he is truth. – VSUp 2.6 comm. (p.56).

All this symbolism of the lines, basic geometric forms, and their cosmic correspondences, is applied to image-making, which starts from a grid or line-diagram, called *pañjara*. The Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad is situated at the transition from Vedic ritual to image-making (and temple building, although this is not explicitly contained in the text), and hence the geometry is derived from the Śulvasūtras and their science of making altars and sacrificial platforms (*kuṇḍa*, *sthaṇḍila*, *vedi*), including the *yūpa* or sacrificial post, which remains a symbolic link to temple architecture (cf. the *yūpa* installed near the temple as a “witness” to the temple, ex. Koṇārka, Paraśurāmeśvara, etc.). The *yūpa* is further the prototype of the human figure.

The following two terms are significant for the entire aesthetic or artistic theory: *tattvarūpa* and *rūpatattva*.

Figure 9: *Khilapañjara*

Sūtra 2.20: *sūtrāyane rekhāḥ subhagā bhavanti.*

Lines following the Sūtra become harmonious.

Here *sūtra* can mean the measuring thread with which the lines are drawn, as also in a ritual *yantra* or *maṇḍala*, or the Sūtra as the textual rule. “Harmonious” is the essence of beauty, implying also the proper proportion of the parts.

Sūtra 21: The knowledge of the compositional diagram (*khilapañjara*) is the best.

Those who know it, who are knowers of form, create the essential forms (*tattvarūpāṇi*) according to the principle of form (*rūpatattva*). It should be remembered that without tracing the lines (of the diagram) the form becomes deficient.

Sūtra 22: Vertical lines have the nature of fire, horizontal lines have the nature of water, diagonal lines have the nature of wind (*māruta*).

With the different lines the differences of characters (of images) arise.

That form shines forth as determined by the lines and the form becomes perfect (*surūpa*). By depending on the essential lines (*tattvarekhā*), the soul of form becomes manifest, and also that of the represented image. As by sacrificial offerings rain is produced, thus by a harmonious form the ood of meditation is induced. As from rain food is produced, thus from meditation arises absorption. By absorption men become divinized. ...

Sūtra 23: By a harmonious form a meditative mood is induced.

VSUp 2.21–22 (p.63–64)

No aesthetics of Indian Art can ignore these connections between elemental forms, artistic creation, cosmic and sacrificial implications (Vedic or Tantric), and the mood of devotion and meditation produced, leading to divinization and liberation.

It is obvious that the line is fundamental to all visual arts, painting, sculpture and architecture, as well as dance,⁷ but the Vāstusūtra, among the other texts emphasizing its importance, is particular in linking it with the nature of divinity. In the process of stone carving:

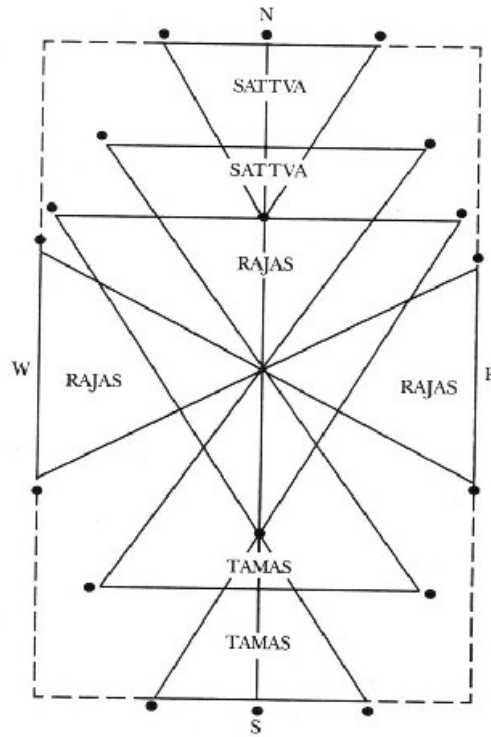
The limbs of the images follow along the lines

Sūtra 1: The character (*bhāva*) of the form is essential.

From the character arises inspiration, from that inspiration divine vision, the action for this is the science of carving (*bhedanavidyā*). As from highest knowledge arises divine nature, thus men can obtain divine nature through perfect form. In order to manifest the character of the image to the minds of the people, the *sthāpakas* proceed with great care in the creation of forms.

VSUp 3.1 (p.67)

What is called *pañjara*, the line-diagram underlying the composition of images, in the Vāstusūtra, is called *yantra* in the Śilpa Prakāśa, obviously reflecting its Tantric tradition. *Yantra* has here two applications: the ground-plan of the temple, or the sacred-symbolic diagram placed beneath the centre of the *garbhagrha* (and other parts of the temple), depending on the deity to whom the temple is dedicated; and second it is the symbolic outline of images to be carved on the temple walls. At the foundation of a Śakti temple a *yoginī yantra* is placed.

Figure 10: *Yoginī Yantra*

There is no place here to go into the implied symbolism. Alice Boner writes in her introduction to the Śilpa Prakāśa:

After the consecration of the *Yoginī-yantra* in the foundation of the *garbhagṛha*, the erection of the temple-walls begins. Symbols, which hitherto were expressed in the form of *yantras*, reappear in another form in the constructive and decorative elements of the temple. While the symbolism of *yantras* is abstract and refers to the essence and nature of creative processes, in the build-up of the temple it is formal and plastic and makes reference to concrete manifestation in the world of forms.

ŚiPrak p.21

The Śilpa Prakāśa is unique as a Śāstra on temple architecture describing the *yantras* underlying the images displayed on the walls. In the discussion on the so-called erotic images on the temples, which is often misunderstood, the text gives

a unique key to understanding the different levels of meaning, so typical of Tantric symbolism. The Kāmakalā Yantra is drawn containing the integration of the Liṅga with the Kalāśakti (ŚiPrak 2.508–529), and the *mithuna-mūrti* is carved on top, hiding it beneath.

The most secret (*kāmakalā*) *yantra* is best for giving protection to all. It is the evident giver of power and the manifest bestower of all perfections (*siddhis*).

In the best temples dedicated to the Śakti or to Rudra this *yantra* must certainly be placed. Then the monument will stand forever.

This *yantra* is utterly secret. For this reason a love-scene (*mithuna-mūrti*) has to be carved on the lines of the *yantra*.

In the Kaulācāra tradition it should be made on the lovely *jāṅgha* in the upper part of the wall. The *kāmabandha* is placed there to give delight to the people.

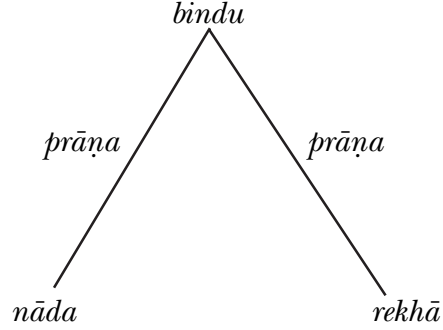
ŚiPrak 2.536–539

Here the two levels of understanding the *mithuna-mūrti* are implied: the Tantric initiate sees and contemplates the *yantra*, whereas the common people are delighted by the representation of the love-scene.

Devangana Desai, in her thorough study of the Khajuraho Temples, has applied this *yantra* to some of the *mithuna* images and groups and found in it the key to their understanding⁸. This has become already a classic example of how the Śilpaśāstras offer important clues to the interpretation of the temples.

Whereas the Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad, belonging to a transitional phase, uses Vedic elements, terminology and symbolism (mixed with local popular traditions), the Śilpa Prakāśa (dated in the 11th cent.) belongs clearly to the Tantric Kaula tradition, and hence the *yantras* are an important element of its meditation on the divinities represented on the temple. But both texts and traditions rely on the same form-elements: the point, the line, and the geometrical forms.

The texts insisting on the life animating the temple and the image, lead us to an interesting parallelism between form (*rūpa*) and sound (*nāda*). The Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad calls the centre point *prāṇa*, and it also describes the lines radiating as either rays of light (*tejāṃsi*) or as *prāṇa*. It is from the *bindu* that, on the one side, the line arises, with the dynamism of life-breath, thus creating form, on the other side from *bindu* as the concentrated sound-energy arises *nāda*, again by way of *prāṇa*, creating the sound-element (*mantra*, music). Form belongs to the sphere of space, whereas sound belongs to the realm of time.



No discussion on aesthetics in any field of the Arts would be complete without the evocation of *rasa*. This concerns both, the artist and the spectator or devotee (since we are in the domain of sacred art). The Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad, after dealing with the technical, the formal, symbolic and other aspects of Art, emphasizes the central importance of the expression of moods and sentiments (*bhāva* and *rasa*).

Sūtra 5.1: *bhāvasyāropanam rūpakarmaṇi vidheyam.*

In image-making the infusion of feeling is enjoined.

After the *dhyāna* which is based on the description of and meditation on the divinity represented, it is the *bhāvarūpa* which brings forth the expression leading to experiencing the *rasas*⁹. The eight or nine *rasas* are applied to image-making and put in a psychological sequence, as for instance the transition from *śṛṅgāra* and *hāsya* to *karuṇa* (Sūtras 6–10).

The *bhāvas* and *rasas* are expressed by stress on different lines, in bodily actions, but mainly in the facial expression (5.6–16). It is interesting how from the sentiment of disgust (*bībhatsā*) the *śānta-rasa* arises:

When desires are given up (due to disgust) a divine sentiment arises, this is the last means. Due to realization one becomes detached.

Sūtra 16: The sentiment of peace is the eight (actually ninth) *rasa*.

In this way by the eight transformations of a living being the eight emotional states (*bhāvāḥ*) are produced.

I have tried to apply these *rasas* to the temple in the case of the Koṅārka Sun Temple. Most prominent is the display of *śṛṅgāra rasa* in the *mithuna mūrtis*, showing love in all its aspects, from the delicate to the gross uninhibited sexual

poses. Not only at the human level, the *nāga* couples also display the love sentiment. *Hāsya* or the sense of humour is evoked by grotesque ascetics and playful monkeys; *vīra* or heroism and even *raudra* or anger are evident in the royal and battle scenes; *adbhuta*, wonder or surprise is produced by many of the composite or *virāla* figures, some of which also evoke *bībhatsā*, revulsion, or *bhayānaka*, fear. *Karuṇa rasa*, sorrow or pathos, is not easily found, except in some minor scenes (as for ex. the old lady taking leave of her family). But the final *rasa*, *śānta*, is visible in the serene, peaceful divine images of Sūrya. The overall dominant emotion brought about by the total imagery of the temple is *ānanda*: joy or bliss, as also expressed by the monumental Aparas on the roof, and the music and dance scenes on the Naṭa Mandira. But *rasa* is not only applied to individual sculptures or groups, it is a matter of the overall ‘aesthetic’ effect of the temple.



Figure 11: *Nāga mithuna*

One could also consider the entire temple, conceived as the chariot of Sūrya, as an expression of wonder: *adbhuta*, the wonder of such a heavy monument being drawn by speeding horses and moving on 24 wheels.

This is just a brief survey of the sculptural programme on the Sun Temple in terms of the *rasas* represented.

The last example I want to present to show the importance of combining text and temple in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the monuments is the Rājarāṇī Temple of Bhubaneswar. In this case I could appreciate the expression of Michael Meister: “Reading monuments and seeing texts”.¹⁰

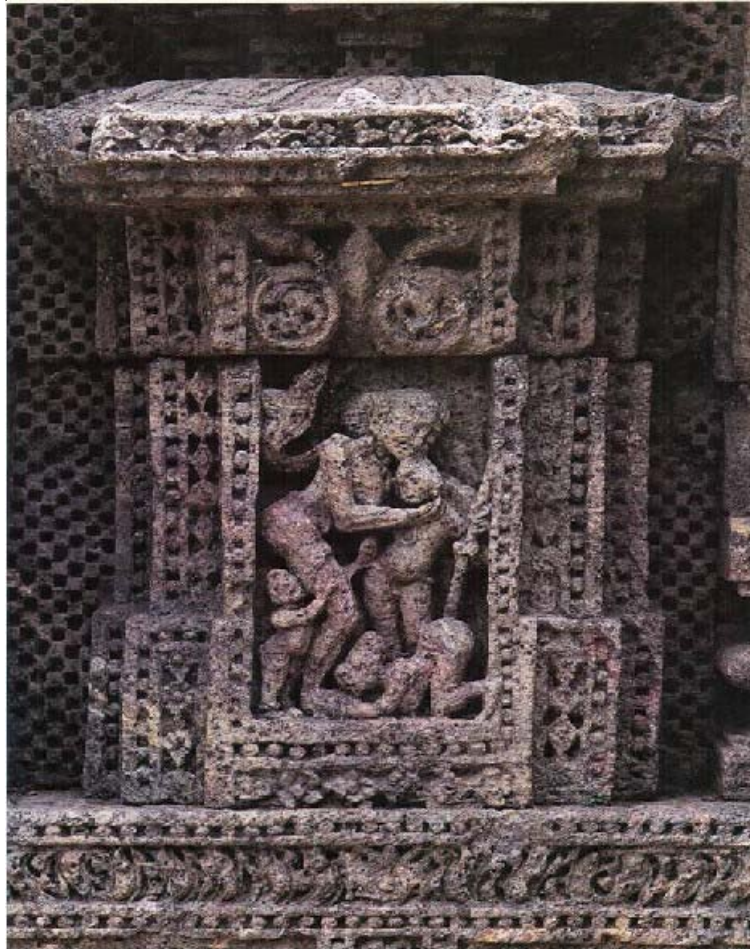


Figure 12: *Karuṇa rasa*

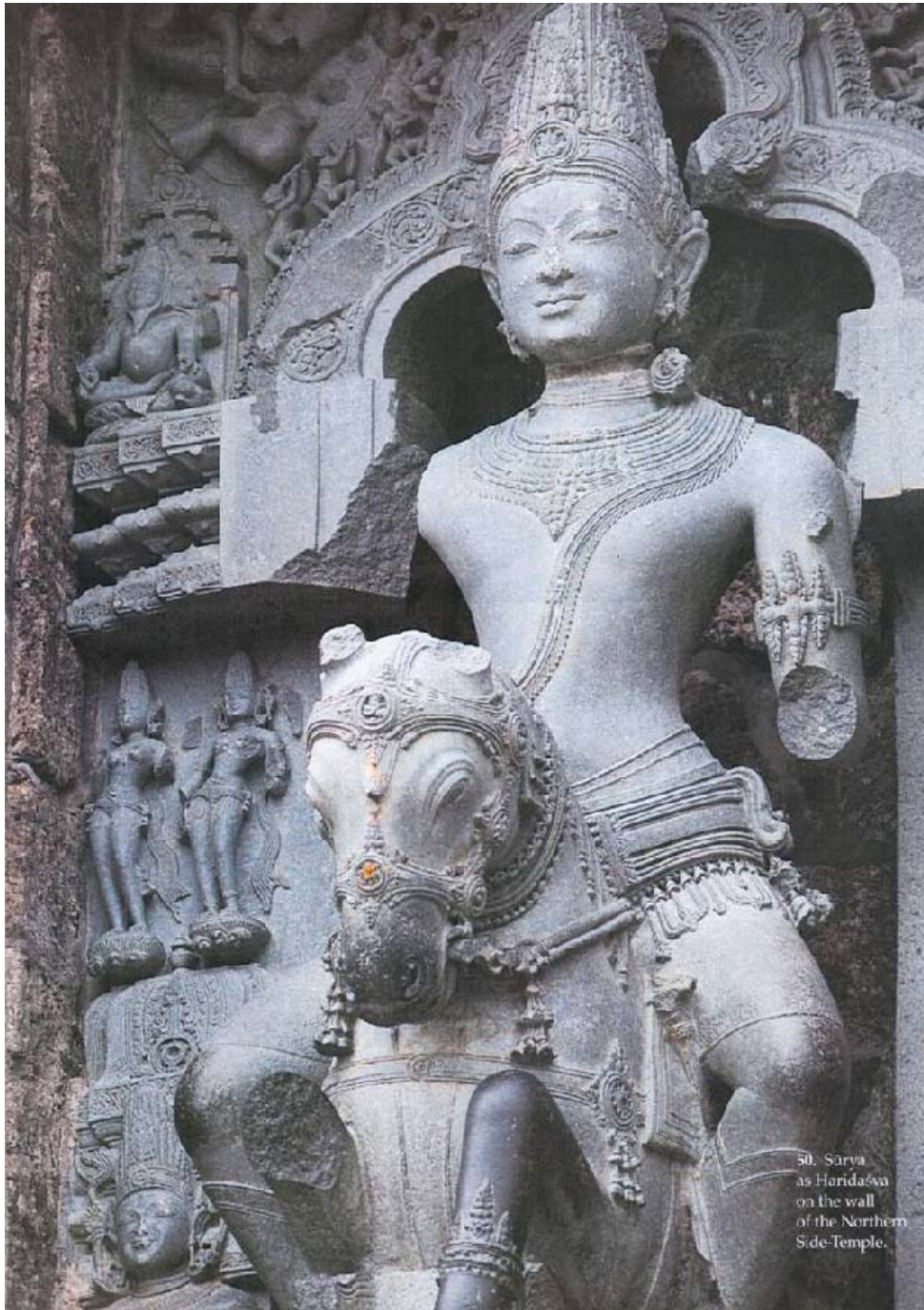


Figure 13: Sūrya as Haridaśva, *Śānta rasa*



Figure 14: *Virāṭa*, *adbhuta rasa*



Figure 15: Apsaras on the roof of *mukhaśālā*: *ānanda rasa*

The Śilpaśāstras describe temple types and not individual temples, and the identification between the two has to be done on the basis of a detailed comparison. The Śilparatnakośa describes, among different types, the *Mañjuśrī* temple, which had been briefly mentioned by the earlier Śilpa Prakāśa (10th–11th century)¹¹. The author of the Śilparatnakośa seems to have been fascinated by this temple and fully aware of its symbolical-metaphysical significance. He himself gives a hint at the best example for this type: what is now called Rājarānī Temple at Bhubaneswar, dated 1025 A.D. In the middle of the description he says that this temple “is built in the shape of the Śrīcakra” (1.377). This phrase provided the clue for identifying the temple.

The artistically exceptional Rājarānī Temple has suffered a number of misinterpretations. Since its *mukhaśālā* or front hall collapsed and the cult image in the



Figure 16: Koṅāraka Temple as Chariot of the Sun God

garbhagrha was removed when worship ceased, its tradition has been forgotten, and it became the object of a number of speculations. To mention only a few of them: An article described this as a “temple without a deity”, and concluded that it was the only temple in Orissa “dedicated not to its deity but to art.”.¹² One could not imagine a greater ignorance about the tradition! Another fanciful interpretation, based on the name, stated that it was not a temple but the pleasure resort of a king and his queen. Even an archaeologist like K.C. Panigrahi¹³ derived the name from “the very fine-grained yellowish sandstone called *Rajaranja* in common parlance”, ignoring the fact that it is the temple which gave the name



Figure 17: Rājārāṇī Temple, Bhubaneswara *Śikhara*

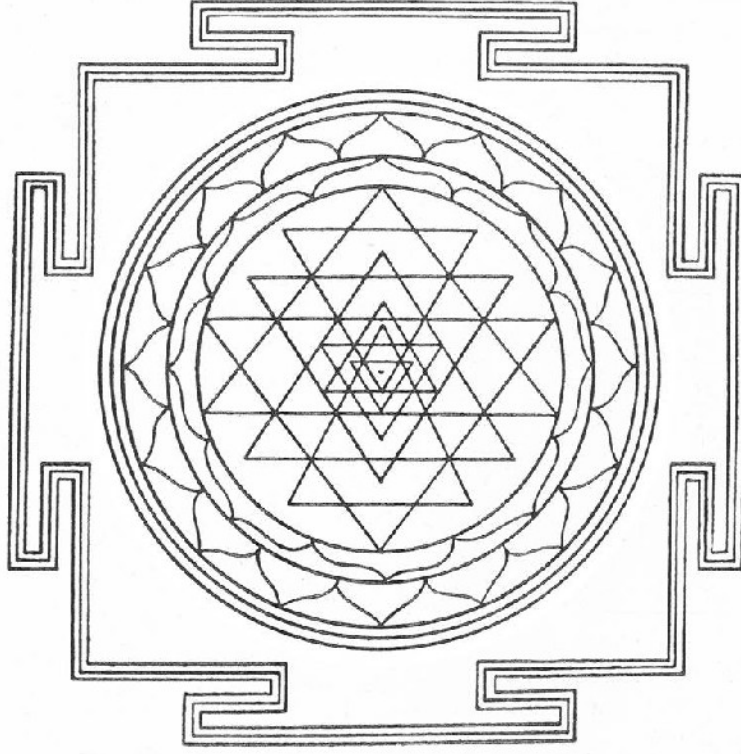


Figure 18: Śrīyantra

to the stone and not vice-versa ! Other speculations based on the local *Sthalapurāṇa* identified the temple with Indreśvara, mentioned in the Purāṇa to the East of Mukteśvara. Even the art-historian Thomas Donaldson¹⁴ found this theory convincing, though without any further proof except the assumption that it was constructed by the king Indraratha. Debala Mitra of the ASI, in her guide book on Bhubaneswar, leaves the identification equally vague, indicating only the “Śaiva association” of the temple.¹⁵

Let us pursue the argument of the text. Taking the clue from the identification of the temple with the Śrīcakra, we proceeded in our research by identifying all the parts of the *vimāna* or *śikhara* (spire). The other clue was given in the following verses indicating the deity:

Such a temple is built for Tripurā or Bhuvaneśvarī. (ŚiRaKo 1.376)

...

Above this is another niche, one fourth the width of the (whole) *niśā*.

In these the associate goddesses (*upadevīs*) should be placed, beginning with Anāṅgamekhalā. (1.383)

This part of the *rāhā* is particularly meant for the *ṣaḍaṅgayuvatīs*. The goddess Rājarājeśvarī, the presiding deity of the Śrīcakra, is at the centre. (1.384)

Here the clue is complete, regarding the different layers of the temple: Goddess Rājarājeśvarī is at the centre, i.e. she was worshipped in the Sanctum. The Rājarāṇī was always famous for its graceful female figures on the spire, called *kanyā* or *alasā* (graceful maiden) in the Orissan Śilpāśāstras. But far from being merely decorative, they are here identified with the *upaśaktis* or *upadevīs* of the main deity, her associate powers. Since the entire temple structure is identified with the Śrīcakra, their placement and number had to be tallied with the *śaktis* of the Śrīcakra.¹⁶ Not only the female figures, the miniature spires or *vimānikās* are also related to the elements of the Śrīcakra:

Covering the whole *garbha* there is a circle (*maṇḍala*) of *vimānas* (miniature spires).

They are twenty four in number, and they represent the twenty four *Upaśaktis*. (1.391)

The female association of the temple is stressed in other cases too. At the top of the spire, below the *āmalaka*, Bhairavas of impressive form are placed on Orissan temples for male divinities such as Śiva or Sūrya. Here the text explicitly says:

Four Bhairavīs of pleasing form (should be situated) on top, at the place of the Bhairavīs.

No male (Bhairava) should be placed there. (1.389)

Another aspect of the Mother Goddess is the description of the double *rāhā* projection, calling them mother and child (1.370).

Very briefly the Śilparatnakośa makes the distinction between male and female temples clear, by declaring: “the *rekha* temple has the form of *puruṣa*, whereas Mañjuśrī is a *yantra* temple.” (1.393) *Yantra* has the neutral meaning of ground plan in the Śilpa texts, but here the meaning more specifically refers to the Śrīyantra, the embodiment of the Goddess Herself¹⁷. The name Mañjuśrī then assumes its full significance: the beautiful temple for Mother Śrī, whose other



Figure 19: *Upāsaktis* on Rājarāṇī Temple

names in the Śrīvidyā tradition are: Tripurā (the Goddess ruling over the three cities), Bhuvaneśvarī (the Goddess as ruler over the worlds or universe), Lalitā (the lovely or graceful Goddess), and, as mentioned already, Rājarājeśvarī and Mahārājñī. It is not difficult to arrive at the original meaning of the name of the temple which has been so well preserved in popular tradition: *Rājarāṇī*.

The Śrīcakra or Śrīyantra, belonging to the esoteric tradition of Śrīvidyā, can be worshiped in the mere outline, in a two-dimensional drawing or painting, or in an elevated three-dimensional form, called *Meru prastāra*. (illustr.) Thus the entire *śikhara* could be identified with the elevated Śrīcakra, not as the “house of the Goddess” (*devālaya*, Oriya *Deul*), but as the body of the Goddess. The integra-

tion of the Śiva and Śakti *trikoṇas* received further confirmation by the reliefs at the base (*khura gṛha*), where we find a worship of the Śivalinga at the northern base, and at the corresponding southern *gṛha* I could identify a worship of the Śrīyantra *meruprastāra*. In the centre, in the western niche at the *pīṭha* level we find the scene of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, thus making the integration complete.



Figure 20: Worship of Śivaliṅga by ascetics, *Khuragṛha* of Rājarañī Temple



Figure 21: Rājarāṇī as *Meru*

These condensed examples, which can be multiplied with examples from different times and regions, shows sufficiently that the aesthetics of temple architecture is inseparable from the totality of meaning, the symbolism, the ritual traditions, and the attitude of the worshipers participating in all these dimensions, consciously or unconsciously. They also clearly prove the expression of the Śilparatnakośa, that *śilpa* is *sarvadarśanalakṣaṇa*.

References:

- ¹ Cf. A.L. Dallapiccola, (ed.), *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, 2 vols., Wiesbaden/Stuttgart (Steiner), 1989.
- ² Saundarya, *The Perception and Practice of Beauty in India*, ed. by H.V. Dehejia and M. Paranjape, New Delhi, Samvad India, 2003.
- ³ Cf. Pratyabhijñā Hṛdayam on Sūtra 4 (p. 55); p. 105.
- ⁴ “Unless even the gross matter such as stone has the inherent nature of divinity, it cannot become an instrument and expression of divinity, as in a mūrti or temple.” (p.28)
- ⁵ Cf. a similar methodology followed by Devangana Desai in her article: *Relevance of Textual Sources in the Study of Temple Part*, in: *Sāmarasya*, pp. 199–222.
- ⁶ Cf. Geeti Sen, *Bindu, Space and Time in Raza’s Vision*, Media Transasia Ltd., 1982., pp. 119–123.
- ⁷ Cf. Bettina Bäumer. art. *Rekhā* in *KTK* vol. V, pp. 1–35.
- ⁸ Cf. D.Desai, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, pp. 195–196.
- ⁹ Cf. *Aparājītapṛcchā* ch. 224. 1–24, VSUu ch. 5.
- ¹⁰ Cf. his article with the same title in : A.L. Dallapiccola (ed.), *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, pp. 167–173.
- ¹¹ Rāmacandra Mahāpātra Kaula Bhaṭṭāraka, *Śilpa Prakāśa*, ed. & transl. by Alice Boner and Sadāśiva Rath Śarmā, revised by B. Bäumer, R.P. Das, S. Das, New Delhi, IGNCA & MLBD, 2005.
- ¹² *Raja Parija* in *The Times of India*, May 12, 1990.
- ¹³ Cf. K.C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, Bombay, 1961, pp. 94–98.
- ¹⁴ Th. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, Leiden, Brill, Vol. I, 1985, p. 310.
- ¹⁵ Debala Mitra, *Bhubaneswar*, A.S.I., New Delhi, 1978, pp.51–54.
- ¹⁶ For a detailed comparison see the Introduction to *Śilparatnakośa*, pp. 5–10.
- ¹⁷ Cf. M.M. Gopinath Kaviraj, “The Temple of Mother Śrī”, in: *Bharata Manisha Quarterly* Vol. I, No. 1, April 1975, pp. 5–15. This article is based on the traditions of Kashmir Śaivism and Śrīvidyā, but unfortunately it does not contain any textual references.

Bibliography

A. Texts quoted:

- Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad, The Essence of Form in Sacred Art, ed. and transl. by Alice Boner, Sadashiva Rath Sharma, Bettina Bäumer, Delhi (MLBD), 4th revised ed. 2000
- Rāmacandra Mahāpātra Kaula Bhaṭṭāraka, Śilpa Prakāśa, Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture, ed. and transl. by Alice Boner, Sadashiva Rath Sharma, revised edition by Bettina Bäumer, Rajendra Prasad Das, Sadananda Das, New Delhi (IGNCA and MLBD), 2005
- Sthāpaka Nirañjana Mahāpātra, Śilparatnakośa, A Glossary of Orissan Temple Architecture, ed. and transl. by Bettina Bäumer, Rajendra Prasad Das, New Delhi (IGNCA and MLBD) 1994

B. Studies:

- Desai, Devangana, “Relevance of Textual Sources in the Study of Temple Architecture”, in: Sāmarasya. Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy, and Interreligious Dialogue, ed. by Sadananda Das, Ernst Furlinger, New Delhi (D.K. Printworld) 005, pp. 199–222
- Desai, Devangana, The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho, Mumbai 1996
- Dhaky, M.A., “Prāsāda as Cosmos”, in: The Adyar Library Bulletin, VolXXXV, Parts 3–4, 1971, pp. 211–26
- Dhaky, M.A., “The Vastusastras of Western India”, in: Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay, Vol. 71 (1996)
- Jamkhedkar, A.P., “Indian Temple: Concept and Development”, in: Aesthetic Theories and Forms in Indian Tradition, ed. by Kapila Vatsyayan and D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 503–531
- Misra, R.N., Śilpa in Indian Tradition, Concept and Instrumentalities, Shimla/ New Delhi (IIAS and Aryan Books Int.) 2009.

C. Bettina Bäumer, Articles on Aesthetics:

1. The Divine Artist, in: The Indian Theosophist, Thakur Jaideva Singh Felicitation Number, Oct.–Nov. 1985, Vol. 82, Nos. 10–11, pp. 79–86.
2. Pañjara et yantra: Le diagramme de l'image sacré, in : Mantras et diagrammes rituels dans l'hindouisme, ed. by A. Padoux, Paris (C.N.R.S.) 1986.
3. Puruṣa and the Origin of Form, in: Rūpa Pratirūpa, Alice Boner Commemoration Volume, New Delhi (Biblia Impex), 1982, pp. 27–34.
4. Unmanifest and Manifest Form according to the Śaivāgamas, in: A.L. Dallapiccola (Ed.), Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts, Stuttgart (South Asia Institute, Heidelberg), 1989, pp. 339–349.
5. L'image divine: Sa raison d'être et son effet selon la Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad in: L'image divine, culte et méditation dans l'hindouisme, ed. by A. Padoux, Paris (C.N.R.S.) 1990.
6. From Guhā to Ākāśa: The Mystical Cave in the Vedic and Śaiva Traditions, in: K. Vatsyayan (Ed.), Concepts of Space, Ancient and Modern, New Delhi (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Abhinav) 1991, pp. 105–122.
7. Mudrā: Its Metaphysical Basis in Kashmir Śaivism, in: Art, The Integral Vision, Kapila Vatsyayan Felicitation Volume, ed. by B.N. Saraswati, S.C. Malik, Madhu Khanna, New Delhi (D.K. Printworld) 1994, pp. 111–121.
8. The Rājārānī Temple Re-identified, in: India International Centre Quarterly, Spring 1994 (Utkaldhvani), pp.124–132.
9. Lines of Fire, Lines of Water: The Elements in Śilpa-Śāstra, in: Prakṛti: The Āgamic Tradition and the Arts (see books).
10. The Relevance of Śilpa/Vāstuśāstra, in : Gandhian Perspectives, Vol. VII, No.1, Spring 1994, pp. 23–28.
11. Aesthetics of mysticism or mysticism of aesthetics? The approach of Kashmir Śaivism, in: Mysticism in Śaivism and Christianity, ed. by Bettina Bäumer, New Delhi, (D.K. Printworld), 2nd Edition, 2006, pp. 329–349.
12. Yoga and Art: An Indian Approach, in: B.N. Goswamy (ed.), Indian Art: Forms, Concerns and Development in Historical Perspective, New Delhi (Munshiram Manoharlal), 2000, pp. 77–90.
13. From Stone to God, in: R. Nagaswamy, Foundations of Indian Art, Chennai

- (Tamil Arts Academy) 2002, pp. 28–38.
14. Beauty as ānandaśakti in Kashmir Śaivism, in: Saundarya. The Perception and Practice of Beauty in India, ed. by H.V. Dehejia and M. Paranjape. New Delhi (Samvad India Foundation) 2003.
 15. The Lord of the Heart: Abhinavagupta's Aesthetics and Kashmir Śaivism, in: Religion and the Arts, A Journal from Boston College, Vol. 12–1–3 (2008), Special Issue: The Interreligious Imagination, ed. By Richard Kearney, Brill, Leiden, pp. 214–229.
 16. Light and Reflection: The Metaphysical Background of Aesthetics in Kashmir Śaivism, in: Aesthetic Theories and Forms in Indian Tradition, ed. by Kapila Vatsyayan and D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 127–147.
 17. Dhvani in Stone: Architecture and Sculpture (unpublished).
 18. Text and Temple in Orissa: The Rājārañī Temple at Bhubaneswar (in way of publication).
 19. Also the following articles in Kalātattvakośa, A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of the Indian Arts, Vols. I–V, especially: art. *rekhā*, Vol. V, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 1–35