

## MODEL OF A BRAHMIN TEMPLE.

---

By IMMANUEL M. CASANOWICZ,  
*Of the United States National Museum.*

---

Made of the bleached pith of the cork tree, each piece having been cut with a knife and glued to its place.

The temple proper is a square structure standing on a platform and surrounded on all sides by a pillared porch or arcade. Inside the shrine is divided into two chambers; the front is to hold an altar upon which the offerings of the worshipers are deposited, and the rear which is to be occupied by the image or symbol of the deity. The shrine is surmounted by a bower, likewise square in plan, rising in three stories, and crowned with a bulbous dome, set at either end between an open lotus, the sacred flower of India. The whole terminates in a pinnacle in form of a graceful vase reversed. The tower as well as the balustrade surrounding it are richly carved. In front of the sanctuary is a large court inclosed by a colonnade, the entrance to which is surmounted by an oblong truncated pyramid. The court as well as the platform of the shrine rest on another broad terrace. Steps on all four sides lead up both terraces to the court and porch of the temple. Inside the court and all around outside on the lower platform are placed vases holding flowers and shrubs, while at the corners in front of the court stand betelnut palms.

Mr. W. E. De Riemer, who obtained the model in the Madura district of the Madras Presidency, South India, and for many years lived in India, thinks that, while it was made from a particular temple, it fairly represents the general type of a Hindu temple devoted to the service of Siva in southern India.

Architecture is the dominant art of India; sculpture and painting have been chiefly developed as accessories to it. As India is "the land of religions," and the life of its people is in all its aspects governed by religious motives, its art is essentially religious and associated with buildings dedicated to the service of religion.

None of the architectual and sculptural monuments of importance which survive in India antedates the third century B. C. In the early architecture of India wood was almost exclusively employed.

It was about the middle of the third century B. C. that the Buddhists, under King Asoka, who had raised Buddhism to the position of State religion in India, introduced stone as building material for important structures. Many features of Hindu architecture point to the general previous use of wood, being to a large extent imitations of wooden models.

There does not seem to be any fundamental distinction, from the point of view of art, between a temple devoted to the worship of Vishnu or to that of Siva—the two chief gods of the Hindu population. It is only by observing the images or emblems worshiped, or by reading the mythological stories represented in the sculptures with which the temple is adorned, that the deity to whom it is dedicated can be determined.

The essential part of every temple is the shrine or cell called *vimana*, in which dwells the god with the attendant priest, and the vestibule (*antarala*), which receives the worshipers, with a preceding porch (*jagamahan*). This actual temple is not always the principal element in the composition. It is very often of small dimensions and is overshadowed by the subsidiary parts, such as courts, gateways, tanks, dwellings for the priests, and numerous other buildings designed for the convenience of the pilgrims, or for the purpose of producing the impression of mass and dignity. The Hindu temple is not designed to serve as a meeting place of worshipers for the recital of common prayers, or the performance of a public ritual. The Brahmin cult is not congregational, but individual. The worshiper walks round the temple a set number of times, always with his right side next to it, then enters the front chamber, rings a bell to call the attention of the god, presents his offerings of flowers, fruit, rice, etc., either makes a prostration or raises his hands to his forehead, mutters his inaudible short prayer, gets a glimpse of the god, and leaves.

The general characteristics more or less common to all Hindu styles are the pyramidal stepping of the dominant parts and the placing of temples on platforms or terraces, features which may have been borrowed from Babylonia by way of Persia. The dome is horizontal, taking a form more or less conical or pointed, and its decoration is usually likewise horizontal; that is, the ornaments are ranged in concentric rings, one above the other, instead of being disposed in vertical ribs as in Roman or Gothic vaults. The same motive, moreover, is often indefinitely repeated, representing, as it were, miniatures of the tower or some other part which it decorates. To these features may be added a predilection for minute and profuse ornament, consisting almost exclusively of sculpture and carving. "What the Hindu architect craved for," says Ferguson,<sup>1</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> James Ferguson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, revised and edited with additions by James Burgess and R. Phene Spiers, London, 1910, p. 352.

great authority on the architecture of India, "was a place to display his powers of ornamentation, and he thought he accomplished all his art demanded when he covered every part of a building with the most elaborate and most difficult designs he could invent." The differences either in form or plan of Hindu temples, as illustrated by extant buildings, answer rather geographical and racial divisions than variations of creed, and there are accordingly distinguished three leading styles:

1. The northern, in vogue in the vast region between the Himalayan and Vindhyan Mountains. It is also called the Indo-Aryan style, because in those parts of India the people are generally known as Aryans and speak dialects derived from the Sanskrit language.

2. The Chalukyan style, so called after the dynasty which reigned from the sixth to the tenth century A. D. over most of the Dekkan. It is therefore also called the Dekkan style, and is applied to the architecture of the broad zone between the Narbadda and Kistnah Rivers in Central India.

3. The Dravidian style, in southern India, the territory nearly identical with the Madras Presidency, which is inhabited by peoples speaking Dravidian tongues.

1. The northern or Indo-Aryan style. Its main characteristic is the bulging curved tower over the shrine, tapering upward and crowned with the *amalaka*, so called from its supposed resemblance to a fruit of that name (*Phyllanthus emblica*), but which appears more like a melon or large gourd (as seen in the dome of the model). The square plan of the shrine is often rendered slightly cruciform by the addition of slender rectangular projections in the center of each façade. This style, in one variety or another, has prevailed in North India from the sixth century A. D. to the present. The finest examples are assigned to the period between 950 and 1200 A. D., and the temple of Bhuvaneswar in Orissa, dating from 650 A. D., is considered one of the landmarks of this style.

2. The Chalukyan style. The shrine is polygonal, star shaped in plan with stepped conical, rather low roof and vaselike ornament crowning the summit. Sometimes two or even three shrines are grouped round a central hall and connected by a common porch. "The Chalukyan temples," says Ferguson, "are throughout the most elegant forms of Hindu art, and those which will best stand comparison with European examples."<sup>1</sup> Nothing surpasses the richness and elegance of the decoration of the Chalukyan temples. The most magnificent example of the Chalukyan style is the temple of Hullabid in Mysore, dating from the thirteenth century A. D. though, owing to the upheaval of the Mohammedan invasion in 1310 A. D., it remained unfinished. It is a double temple, dedicated

<sup>1</sup> James Ferguson, *History of Architecture in all Countries*, vol. 2, p. 548. London, 1867.

to Vishnu and Siva, respectively. Its dimensions may roughly be stated as 200 feet square all over, including the subsidiary extension, while the temple proper is 160 by 122 feet. It is constructed of indurated potstone of volcanic origin, and stands on a terrace, 6 feet in height, and paved with large slabs. On the base of the building is a frieze 710 feet in length,<sup>1</sup> adorned with 2,000 elephants, most of them with riders and trappings. Above them is a frieze of *sardalas* or conventional lions. Then comes a scroll pattern of great beauty. Over which is a bas-relief with scenes and incidents from the Ramayana epic. Then comes celestial beasts and birds, with groups from human life. Then a cornice with a rail divided into panels, each containing two figures. Over this, to the right and left, are windows formed by elaborately pierced slabs, while the center is occupied by a frieze 5 feet 6 inches high and 400 feet long, depicting repeatedly the incarnations of Vishnu, dancing girls, Siva with his consort Parvati upon his knees and Brahma, the third member of the great Brahmin triad or *trimurti* of gods.

3. The Dravidian style. The temples of this style are the largest and the most numerous in India. "The Dravidian is the most extensive style. There are perhaps more cubic feet of masonry in buildings of this style than of all the other styles of India put together."<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps due to the circumstance that the iconoclastic zeal of the Mohammedans did not overwhelm the south to the same extent as the other parts of India. The shrine of a Dravidian temple is square in plan and decorated with pilasters and niches. The tower surmounting it is pyramidal and always stepped or storied, terminating in a small dome. Preceding the door leading to the shrine is a hall, *mantapa*, or two such. The temple invariably stands within a rectangular inclosure with great pyramidal gateways, called *gopuras*. These *gopuras* are in general design like the towers over the shrine, excepting that they are twice as wide as deep, forming a truncated pyramid (like that of the model). Frequently they are more imposing than the temples themselves. Some temples have several such inclosures, each with its gateways. Another distinguishing feature of the Dravidian temple is the pillared halls, called *choultries*, which occupy the spaces between the various inclosures. They range in size from a small pavilion on four columns to a magnificent "hall of a thousand pillars." These pillars are often of close-knit granite and covered with sculptures from base to capital in a way that in most instances no two are exactly alike. These halls serve various purposes, as porches for the convenience of pilgrims, halls of ceremony, etc.

<sup>1</sup> The frieze of the Parthenon is not quite 525 feet long.

<sup>2</sup> History of Architecture in all Countries, vol. 2, p. 548.

The temple at Tanjore, in Mysore, is considered as the oldest and best preserved example of Dravidian art. It probably belongs to the tenth century A. D., and was dedicated to Siva. It stands in a courtyard of 500 by 250 feet. The base of the shrine is 82 feet square, and is in two stories. Above this rises the pyramidal tower through 13 stories to a height of 190 feet, crowned with a dome said to consist of a single stone. But for vastness of dimensions it is surpassed by the unfinished Vishnu temple at Seringam, near Trichinopoly. It stands with its gilded dome, holding an image of the god, in the center of 7 inclosures, which are crowned with 16 gate pyramids. The outer inclosure extends 2,865 by 2,520 feet. The great pillared hall measures 500 by 138 feet, resting on 953 columns, each of a single block of granite and all carved more or less elaborately.

While the pyramidal tower recalls the terraced temple towers of Babylonia (a model of which is likewise in the United States National Museum), the pyramidal gateways, or gopuras, suggest the pylons, or doorways with their massive towers which led to the forecourt of the Egyptian temples, and the hall of columns, or choultrie, answers the Egyptian hypostyle hall, so called from its covered colonnade which, like its Hindu counterpart, was used for processions and other ceremonies, and behind which stood the small shrine in which the god dwelt.

