



NAGARA TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE - GS I MAINS

Q. Ayodhya's Ram Mandir was built on the lines of Nagara style of Temple Architecture. Discuss the architecture and the characteristics of the Nagara style temples. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *What is the Nagara style, in which Ayodhya's Ram temple is being built*

What's in the news?

- The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be inaugurated on January 22.
- Chandrakant Sompura, and his son Ashish, have designed the complex in the Nagara style of temple architecture.

Key takeaways:

- One of 'the two great classical languages of Indian temple architecture', the Nagara style emerged in north India around the fifth century CE.
- The Nagara style of temple architecture emerged some time in the fifth century CE, during the late Gupta period, in northern India.
- It is seen in juxtaposition with the Dravida style of southern India, which too emerged in the same period.

Temple Architecture:

Every Hindu temple has certain key elements that are common to all temples across the country irrespective of the architectural style adopted in their construction.

1. Garbhagriha:

- It is the main part of the temple that houses the vigraha of the chief deity. Garbhagriha literally translates to the "womb chamber" and is the central cave-like sanctum of the temple.
- The Shikara or the Vimana rises directly above the garbhagriha. The circumambulatory path around the garbhagriha is called the "pradakshina patha".

2. Mandapa:

- It is a portico or columned hall where devotees gather for prayers. At times, temples may have more than one mandapa of varied sizes.
- On the basis of their sizes, mandapas are classified as ardha mandapa, mandapa and maha mandapa.

3. Shikara or Vimana:

- The spire rising like a mountain is known as Shikara (north) or Vimana (south). While the Vimana is pyramidal, the Shikara is a curved structure.

4. Amalaka:

- It is a disc made of stone atop which the Kalash (Kalasha) sits. It is mostly found in Shikaras of northern temples.



5. Kalash or Kalasha:

- It is a pot shaped structure above the Amalaka which forms the apex of a temple.

6. Antarala:

- The transitional passageway that connects the garbhagriha and mandapa is known as Antarala.

7. Jagati:

- The raised platform on which the temple is constructed is called “Jagati”.

8. Vahana:

- Every deity has a Vahana (vehicle) and every temple houses the vigraha of the temple’s chief deity’s Vahana along with the Dhvaj pillar.

Nagara Temple Architecture:

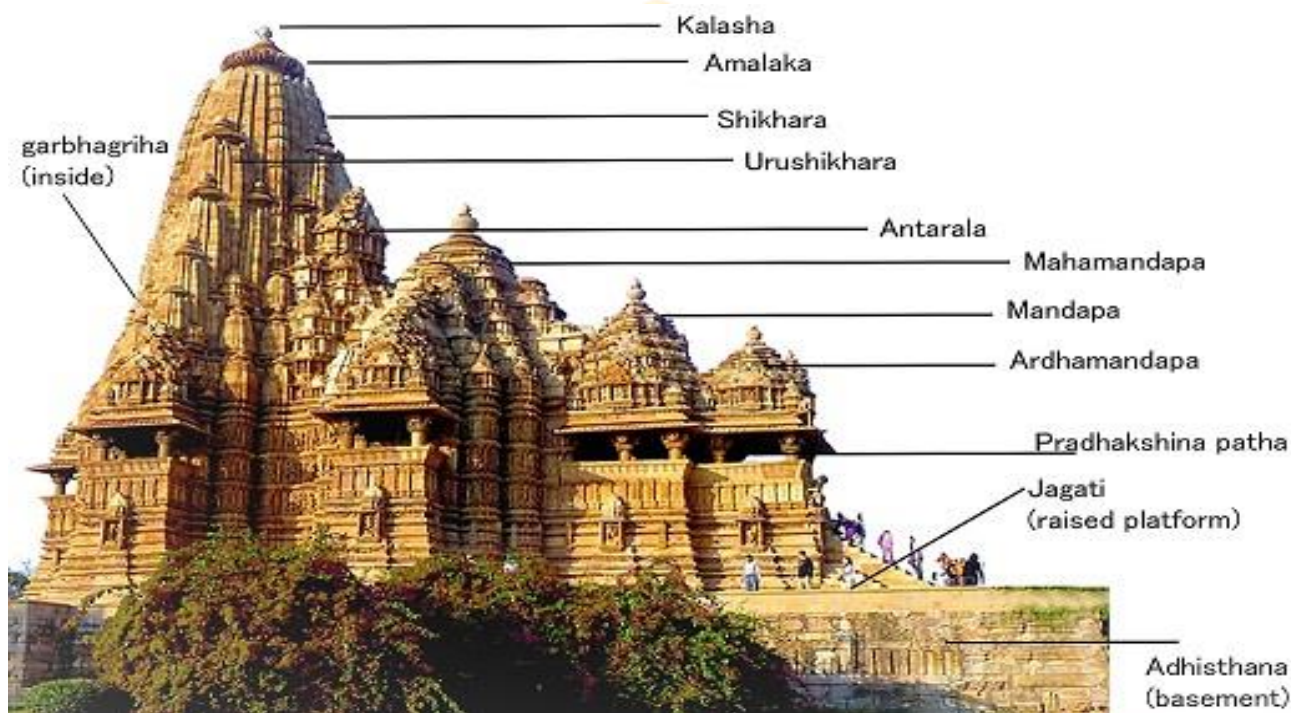
The Nagara style of temple architecture that became popular in Northern India. Nagara style was developed regionally, each region manifesting its own particular qualities. For example, various sub-styles of Nagara architecture are found vis-a-vis Odisha School, Solanki School, and Khajuraho School, etc.

Features of Nagara style:

- The temples generally followed the **Panchayatana style** of temple making.
- Presence of assembly halls or mandaps in front of the principal shrine.
- Outside the garbhagriha, images of the river **goddesses Ganga and Yamuna were placed**.
- Generally, there were no water tanks or reservoirs present in the temple premises.
- The temples were generally built on raised platforms.
- The porticos had a pillared approach.
- Unlike South Indian temples, it does not usually have elaborate boundary walls or gateways.
- The three main distinctive features of Nagara style are,
 - a. **Shikhara (Curvilinear tower)** - While the earliest temples had just one tower or shikhara, later temples had multiple Shikharas. Shikharas were generally of three types:
 - i. **Latina or Rekha-prasad:** They were square at the base and the walls curve inward to a point on the top.
 - ii. **Phamsana:** They had a broader base and were shorter in height than the Latina ones. They slope upwards on a straight line.
 - iii. **Valabhi:** They had a rectangular base with the roof rising into vaulted chambers. They were also called wagon-vaulted roofs.
 - b. **Garbhagriha (Sanctum Sanctorum)** - The garbhagriha is always located directly under the tallest tower.
 - c. **Mandapa** (Entrance Hall)
- The vertical end of the shikhara ended in a horizontal fluted disc, known as the Amalak. On top of that, a spherical shape was placed known as the Kalash.
- Inside the temple, the wall was divided into three vertical planes or rathas. These were known as triratha temples. Later, pancharatha, saptaratha and even navaratha temples came into existence. The vertical planes were used as different panels to make narrative sculptures.



- The ambulatory passageway or the pradakshina path around the sanctum sanctorum was covered.
- Examples - Dashavatara Temple (Deogarh), Vishwanatha Temple (Khajuraho), Lakshman Temple (Khajuraho), Jagannath Temple (Puri).

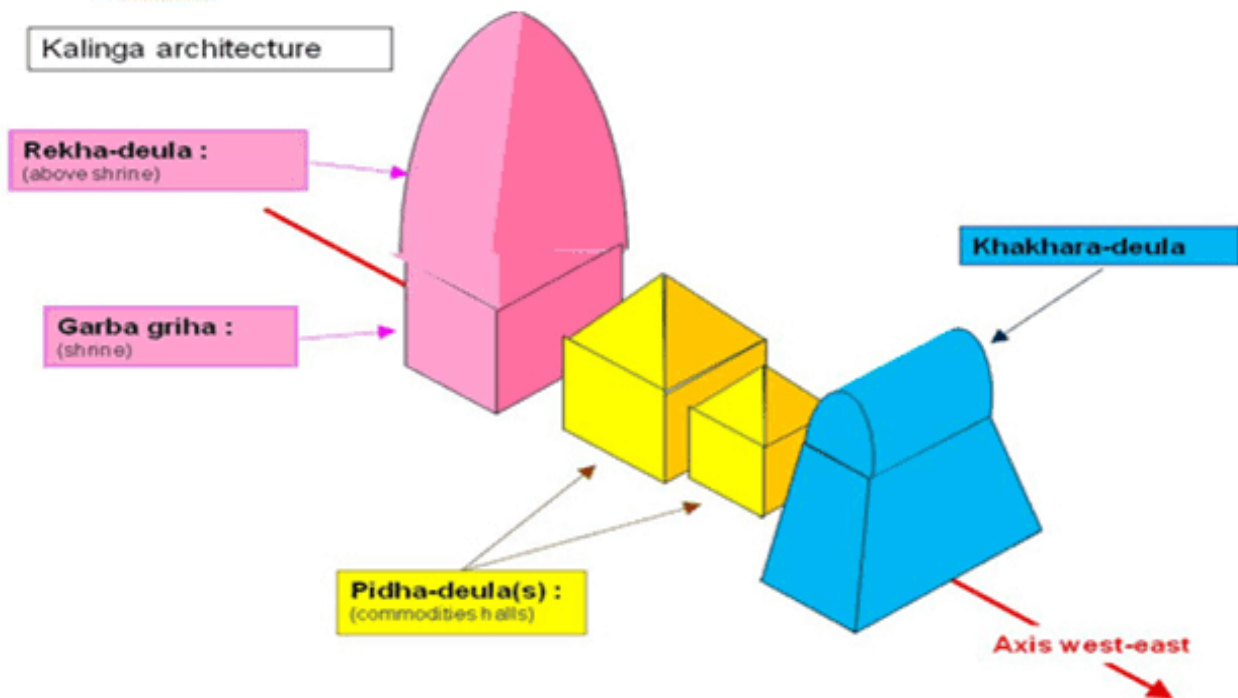


Sub-schools of Nagara style:

Odisha School:

In different parts of the Kalinga Empire, a distinct style of temple architecture developed. Some of its features are as follows:

- The **exterior walls were lavishly decorated** with intricate carvings, but interior walls were plain.
- There was **no use of pillars** in the porch. **Iron girders** were used instead to support the roof.
- The shikaras in the Odisha School were known as **rekhadeuls**. They were almost vertical roofs which suddenly curved inwards sharply.
- The mandap was known as **jagmohan** in this region.
- The ground plan of the main temple was **square**.
- Temples were surrounded by a **boundary wall** as in the Dravidian style of temple architecture.
- **Example:** Sun Temple at Konark (also known as Black Pagoda as the first rays of the Sun entered the garbhagriha through the sea-facing pagoda), Jagannath Temple at Puri, Lingaraj Temple at Bhubaneswar, etc.



Khajuraho School:

In the central part of India, the Chandela rulers developed a distinct style of temple making of their own, known as Khajuraho School or Chandel School. The features of the temples here include:

- **Both the interior and exterior walls were lavishly decorated** with carvings.
- The **sculptures were generally erotic in their themes**.
- Made up of **sandstone**.
- The temples had three chambers such as garbhagriha, mandapa and Ardha-mandapa. Some temples had a vestibular entrance to the garbhagriha known as antarala.
- Generally north or east facing.
- Panchayatana style of temple making was followed.
- Subsidiary shrines also had Rekha prasad shikharas. This created an impression of a mountain range.
- The temples were built on a relatively high platform.
- The temples belong to **both Hindu as well as Jain religion**.
- **Example:** Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Lakshman Temple at Khajuraho, etc.

Solanki School:

In the north-western parts of India including Gujarat and Rajasthan, this school developed under the patronage of the Solanki rulers. The features of this school are:

- **Devoid of any carvings**.
- The garbhagriha is connected with the mandap, both internally as well as externally.
- The **porticos have decorative arched gateways** known as **torans**.
- A unique feature of this school is the presence of a **step-tank**, known as **Surya-kund** in the proximity of the temple.



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- The steps of the tank are full of **small temples**.
- Wooden carvings are also present in these temples.
- Used a variety of materials to make temples including **sandstone, black basalt, and soft marble**. Most of the temples are east-facing and designed such that every year, during the equinoxes, the sun rays fall directly into the central shrine.
- **Example:** Modhera Sun Temple, Gujarat (built in 1026–27 by Bhima-I).

