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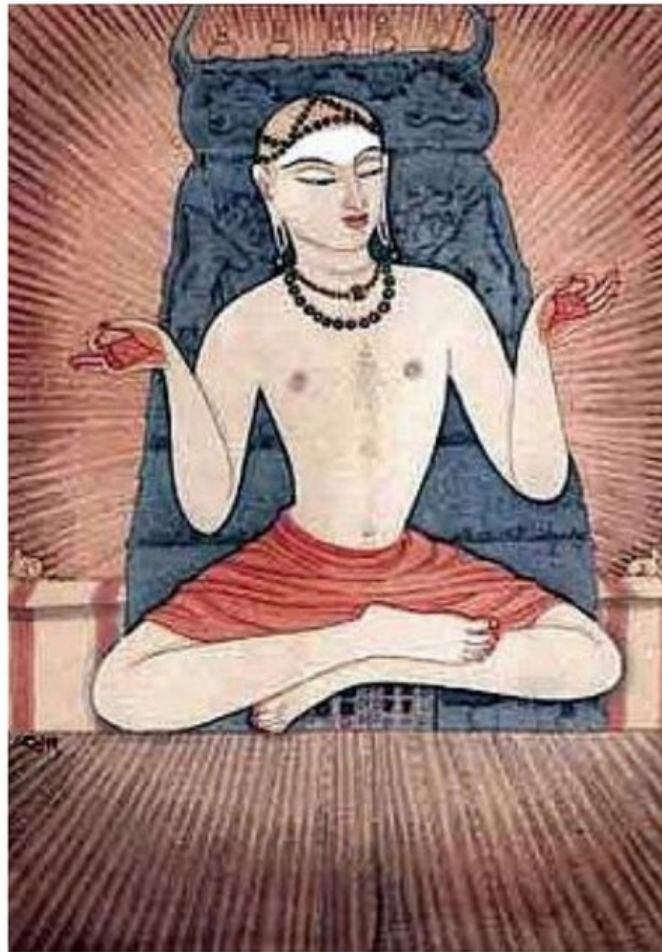


AGAMA SHASTRA:THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE MARVELS OF HINDU ARCHITECTURE

Agama Shastra is a Sanskrit word that means the manual for worship, temple building, rituals etc in Hindu Tradition.From Sanskrit,agama means handed down by tradition and Shastra means a commentary or treatise.

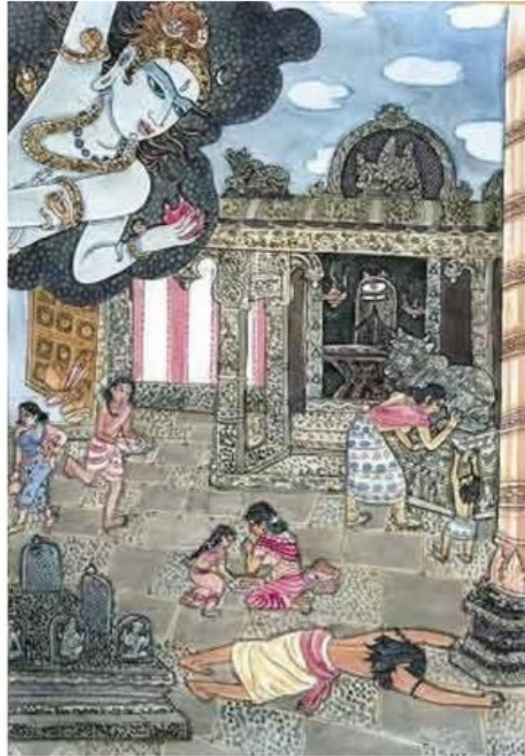
Agama Shastra and Temple worship

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The Hindu temples are complex institutions. They represent the culmination of social and religious aspirations of a society. Temple is the focal point in the life of a community and often represents its pride, identity and unity. It is also the index of the community's wellbeing. It draws into its fold people from its various segments and denominations; and binds them together. In smaller communities the temple apart from being a source of spiritual or religious comfort, also serves as center for education and recreation.

Therefore, Agama Shastra is a collection of ideas that drafts the rules for worship, temple construction, spirituality and rituals. It has been a guideline for many Hindus from ancient times. It's a collection of Sanskrit, Tamil and Grantha scriptures that mostly contains...



A temple is also a treasure house of art and architecture, designed according to the principle of Vaastu Shastra, characterized by their majesty, serenity and beauty of intricate sculpture and designs. A temple evokes in the visitor a sense of beauty in art and in life as well. It lifts up his spirit, elevates him to a higher plane dissolving his little ego. At the same time, it awakens him to his insignificance in the grand design of the Creator.

The most significant aspect of the temple worship is its collective character. Peoples' participation is both the purpose and the means of a temple. The community is either actually or symbolically involved in temple worship. The rituals that dominate temple worship are therefore socio- religious in character.

The worship in a temple has to satisfy the needs of individuals as also of the community. The worships that take place in the sanctum and within the temple premises are important; so are the festivals and occasional processions that involve direct participation of the entire community. They complement each

...methods of temple construction, idol creation, philosophical doctrines and meditative practices. It came into being after years of assimilation and from a variety of sources. Some parts of it are pre-vedic while some are post-vedic.

Vedas. They are Vedic in spirit and character and make use of Vedic mantras while performing the service.

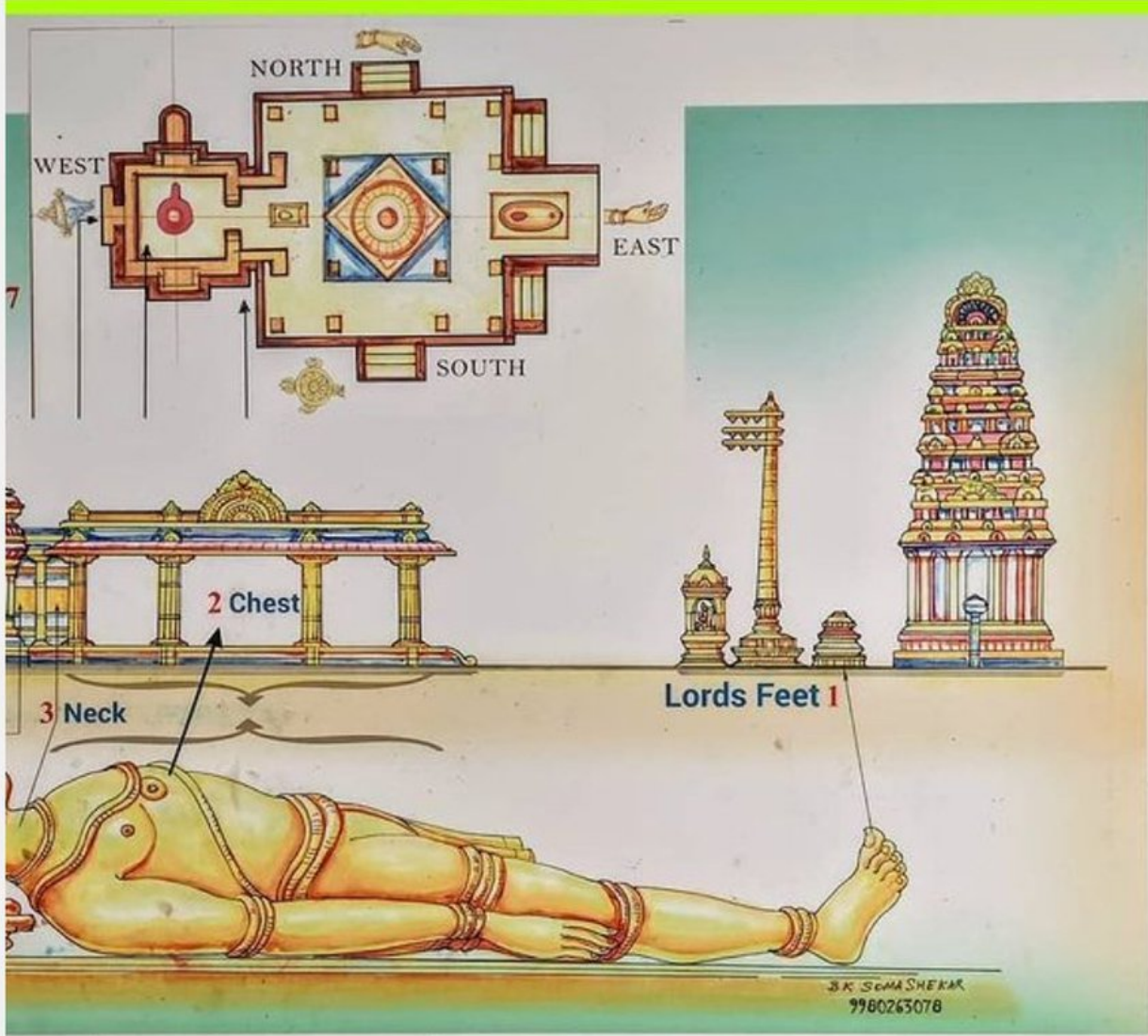
The Agama shastras are based in the belief that the divinity can be approached in two ways. It can be viewed as nishkala, formless – absolute; or as sakala having specific aspects. Nishkala is all-pervasive and is neither explicit nor is it visible. It is analogous, as the Agama texts explain, to the oil in the sesame-seed, fire in the fuel, butter in milk, and scent in flower. It is in human as antaryamin, the inner guide. It has no form and is not apprehended by sense organs, which includes mind.

Sakala, on the other hand, is explicit energy like the fire that has emerged out of the fuel, oil extracted out of the seed, butter that floated to the surface after churning milk or like the fragrance that spreads and delights all. That energy can manifest itself in different forms and humans can approach those forms through appropriate means. The Agamas recognize that means as the archa, the worship methods unique to each form of energy-manifestation or divinity.

The Vedas do not discuss about venerating the icons; though the icons (prathima or prathika) were known to be in use. Their preoccupation was more with the nature, abstract divinities and not with their physical representations. The Vedas did however employ a number of symbols, such as the wheel, umbrella, spear, noose, foot-prints, lotus, goad and vehicles etc. These symbols, in the later ages, became a part of the vocabulary of the iconography.

The idea of multiple forms of divinity was in the Vedas .They spoke about thirty-three divinities classified into those of the earth, heaven and intermediate regions. Those comprised twelve adityas, aspects of energy and life; eleven rudras, aspects ferocious nature; eight vasus, the directional forces; in addition to the earth and the space.

Hindu Temples are not just temples, they are the pride and identity of Hindus. They are the symbols of Hindu unity and their religious aspirations. Temples are the places of spiritual healing and are our connection with the creator almighty.



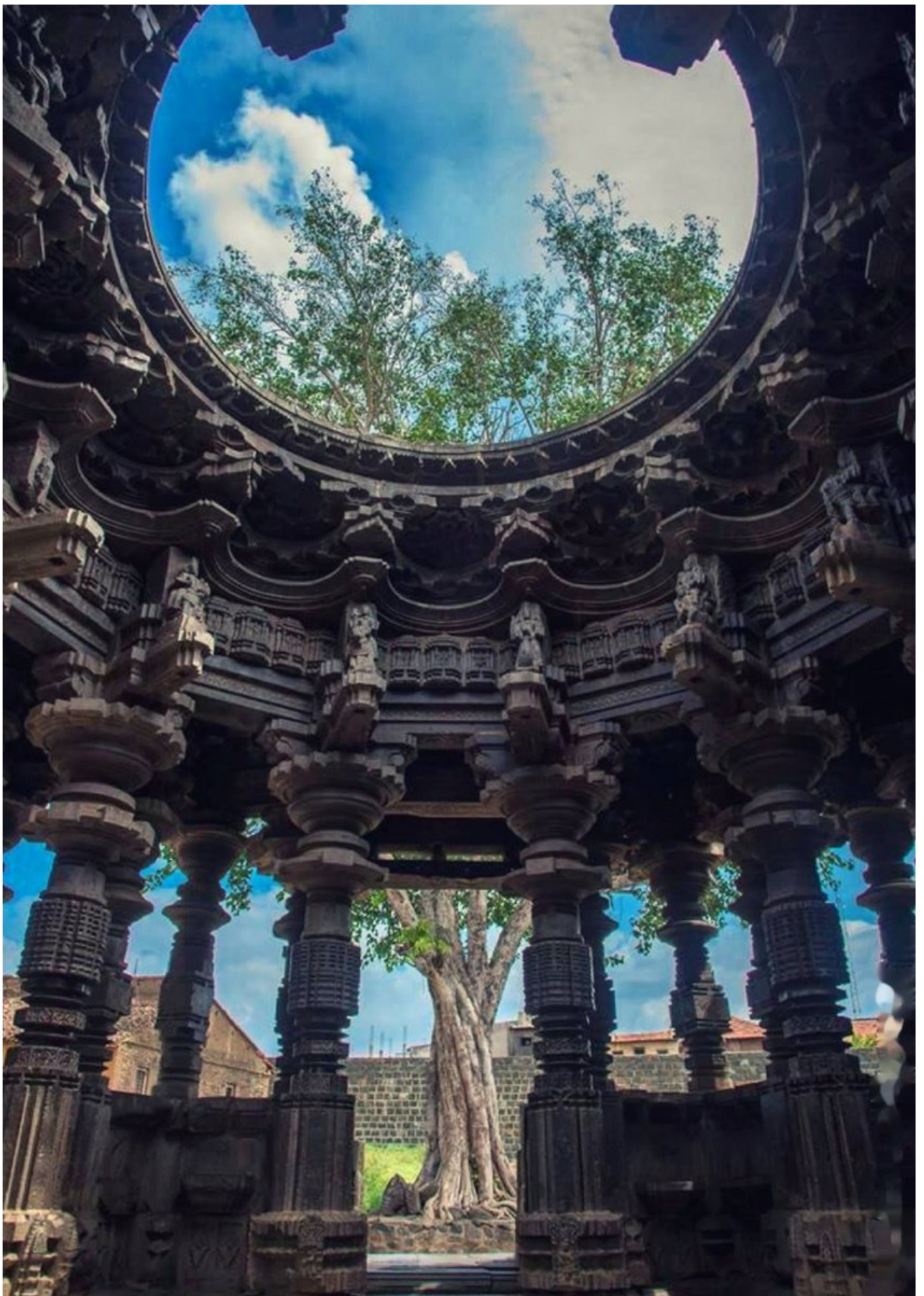
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देहो देवोलयः प्रोक्तो जीवो देवः सनातनः । गर्भगेहं शिरः प्रोक्तं शिखा शिखरमुच्यते ॥
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 गोपुरं पादमित्युक्तं देवालयं प्रकथ्यते ॥

The Agama Shastra States That a Temple is The "BODY OF BHAGAVAN HIMSELF" Kote venkataramana temple

Temples are the priceless treasure of our History, Heritage ,Art & Architecture. Architecture that mesmerises and spell bounds you. And Agama Shastra is that very text which is responsible for such a mesmerising and spell binding quality and beauty of our Hindu Temples.



Its between 6th&12th centuries CE dat several Agama texts were compiled as part of sakalaradhana (idol worship).They very minutely give guidelines for construction of temples&sculptures.Kamikagama, Vaikhanasagama&Padmasamhita r important agamas giving details of such construction

esoteric symbolic meaning. Very few of these rituals are in common practice today.

The most widespread rituals of worship today are of the Aagamic variety. The Agama methods are worship of images of God through rituals (*Tantra*), symbolic charts (*Yantra*) and verbal symbols (*Mantra*). Agama regards devotion and complete submission to the deity as fundamental to pursuit of its aim; and hopes that wisdom, enlightenment (*jnana*) would follow, eventually, by the grace of the worshipped deity. The Agama is basically dualistic, seeking grace, mercy and love of the Supreme God represented by the personal deity, for liberation from earthly attachments (*moksha*).

As compared to Vedic rituals (*Yajnas*) which are collective in form, where a number of priests specialized in each disciple of the Sacrificial aspects participate; the Tantra or Agamic worship is individualistic in character. It views the rituals as a sort of direct communication between the worshipper and his or her personal deity. The Yajnas always take place in public places and are of congregational nature; and in which large numbers participate with gaiety and enthusiasm. A Tantra ritual, on the other hand, is always carried out in quiet privacy; self discipline and intensity is its hallmark, not exuberance or enthusiasm.

The culmination of these two dissimilar streams of worship is the temple worship. It could be argued that a representation of the Supreme Godhead is theoretically impossible; yet one has also to concede that an image helps in contemplation, visualization and concretization of ideas and aspirations. Here, at the temple, both the Vedic and the Tantric worships take place; but each in its sphere. A temple in Hindu tradition is a public place of worship; several sequences of worship are conducted in full view of the worshipping devotees; and another set of rituals are conducted by the priests in the privacy of the sanctum away from public gaze.

The temple worship is guided by its related Agama texts which invariably borrow the mantras from the Vedic traditions and the ritualistic details from Tantric traditions. This has the advantage of claiming impressive validity from Nigama, the Vedas; and at the same time, carrying out popular methods of worship.

Agama Shastra plays a very significant role in consecration and construction of Hindu Temples.

The Four Padas

Each of the Agamas consists of four parts-

Kriya Pada-Lays out details for worship and temple construction.

Charya Pada-describes rules and code of conduct for worship.

The Vaikhanasa Vasishnava archana vidhi, which perhaps was the earliest text of its kind, codified the of worship practices by judicious combination of Vedic and Tantric procedures. In addition, the worship routine was rendered more colorful and attractive by incorporating a number of ceremonial services (*upacharas*) and also presentations of music, dance, drama and other performing arts. It also brought in the *Janapada*, the popular celebrations like Uthsavas etc, These ensured larger participation of the enthusiastic devotees.

The Agamas tended to create their own texts. That gave rise to a new class of texts and rituals; and coincided with the emergence of the large temples. It is not therefore surprising that town-planning, civil constructions and the arts occupy the interest of early Agamas.

In due course the Agama came to be accepted as a subsidiary culture (*Vedanga*) within the Vedic framework.

Agamas are a set of ancient texts and are the guardians of tradition .They broadly deal with *jnana* (knowledge), *Yoga* (meditation), *Kriya* (rituals) and *Charya* (ways of worship).The third segment *Kriya* (rituals) articulate with precision the principles and practices of deity worship – the mantras, mandalas, mudras etc.; the mental disciplines required for the worship; the rules for constructing temples and sculpting the images. They also specify the conduct of other worship services, rites, rituals and festivals. The fourth one, *Charya*, deals with priestly conduct and other related aspects. [Incidentally, the Buddhist and the Jaina traditions too follow this four-fold classification; and with similar details]

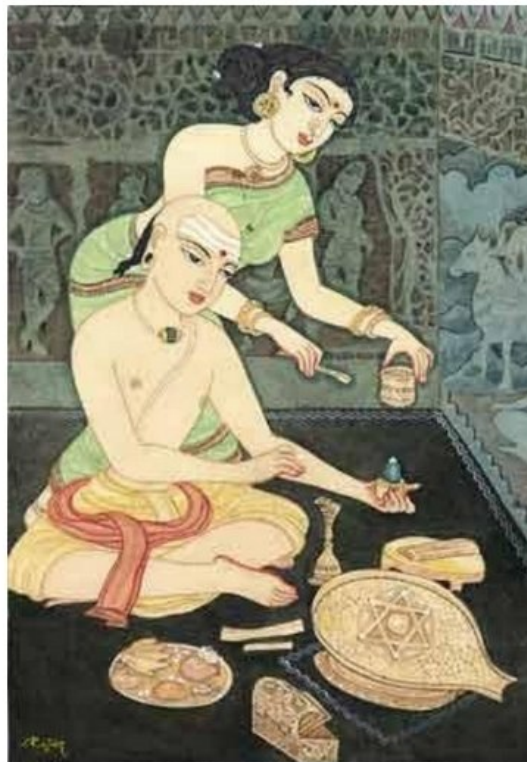
The Texts hold the view that *Japa*, *homa*, *dhyana* and *Archa* are the four methods of approaching the divine; and of these, the *Archa* (worship) is the most comprehensive method. This is the faith on which the Agama shastra is based. The Agama shastra is basically concerned with the attitudes, procedure and rituals of deity worship in the temples. But it gets related to icons and temple structures rather circuitously. It says, if an image has to be worshipped, it has to be worship- worthy. The rituals and sequences of worship are relevant only in the context of an icon worthy of worship; and such icon has to be contained in a shrine. And an icon is meaningful only in the

Yoga Pada-describes the physical and mental practices that lead to unification with higher consciousness.

Jnana Pada-describes the philosophy and worldview.

Temples and places of worship cannot be built haphazardly. These architectural marvels are the marvels for a reason...

The worship at home is regarded as motivated by desire for attainments and for spiritual benefits (*Sakshepa*). In the temple worship, on the other hand, the priest does not seek spiritual benefits in discharge of his duties (*nirakshepa*). He worships mainly for the fulfillment of the desires of those who pray at the temple. That, perhaps, appears to be the reason for insisting that a priest should worship at his home before taking up his temple duties.



Traditionally, a person who receives remuneration for worshipping a deity is not held in high esteem. The old texts sneer at a person “displaying icons to eke out a living.” That perhaps led to a sort of social prejudices and discriminations among the priestly class. But, with the change of times, with the social and economic pressures and with a dire need to earn a living, a distinct class of temple-priests, naturally, crystallized into a close knit in-group with its own ethos and attitudes. Whatever might be the past, one should recognize that temples are public places of worship; the priests are professionals trained and specialized in their discipline; and

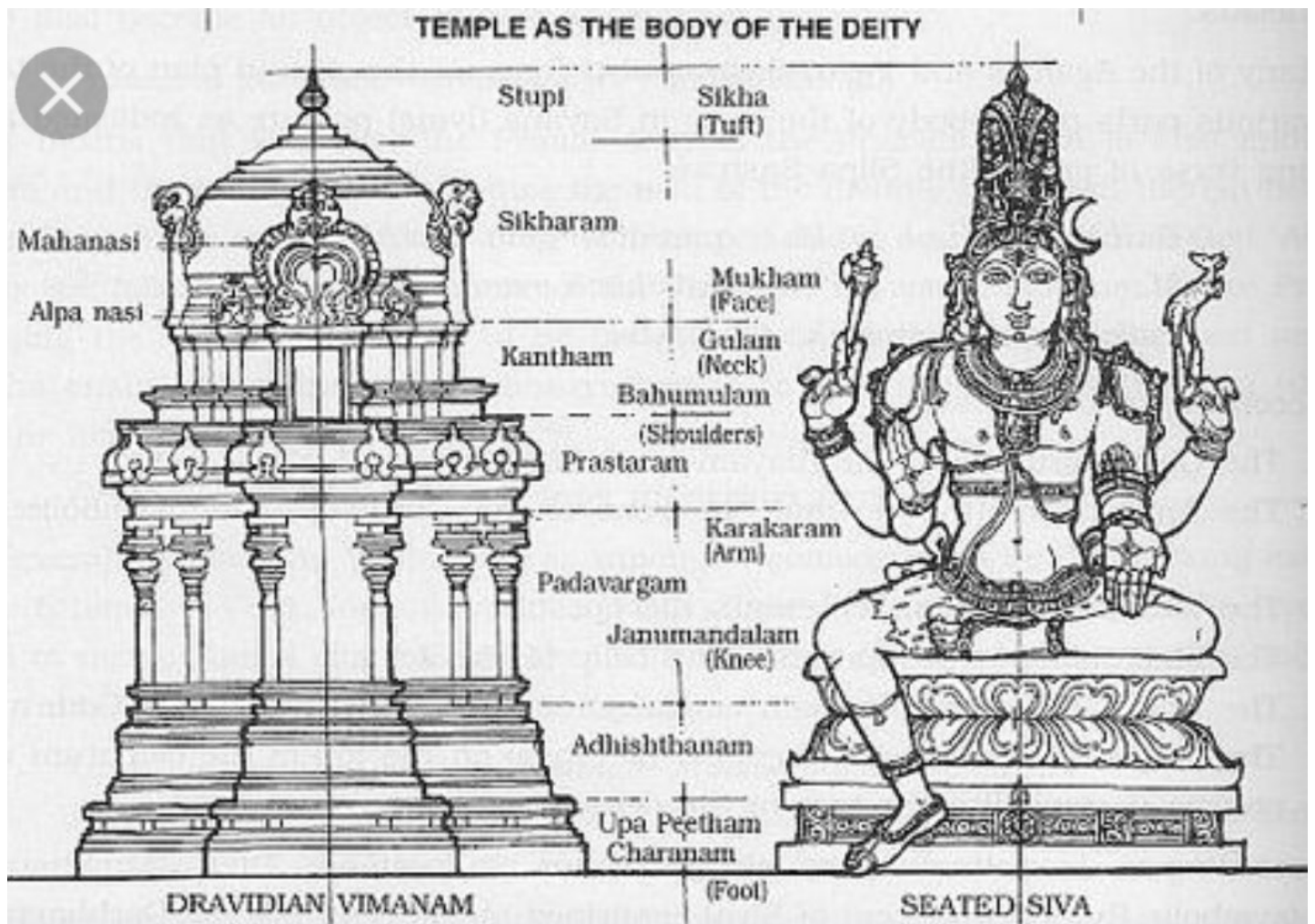
...as they are intricately designed as per the rules laid down in the Agama Shastra. There are rules about every aspect, including the smallest detail from the positioning of the holy figurine to the materials from which the temple is to be constructed.



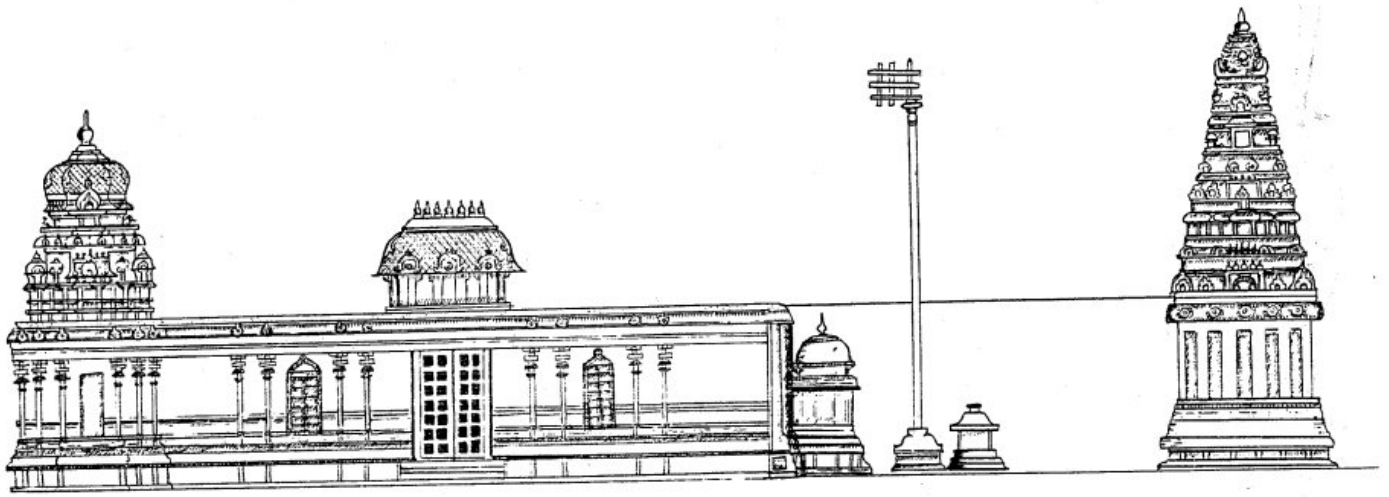
Vedic guidelines focus more on Bhavan building whereas Agama Shastra dwells at length on idols and figurines of Deities. It is a scientific blueprint for temple making. Most elaborate & explicit rules are laid down in Agamas for Shilp(the art of sculpture).



They describe quality requirements of the places where temples can be built, kind of images to be installed, materials to be used, dimensions, proportion of materials, air circulation, lighting in temple complex etc. The Manasara & Silpasara r some of the works dealing with these rules.



Agama prescriptions form the basis for worship at home or temples as it exists today. They cover the entire activities associated with temples, its functions and purposes. These include the training manuals for performing priests, their initiation into worship service...



Sanctum

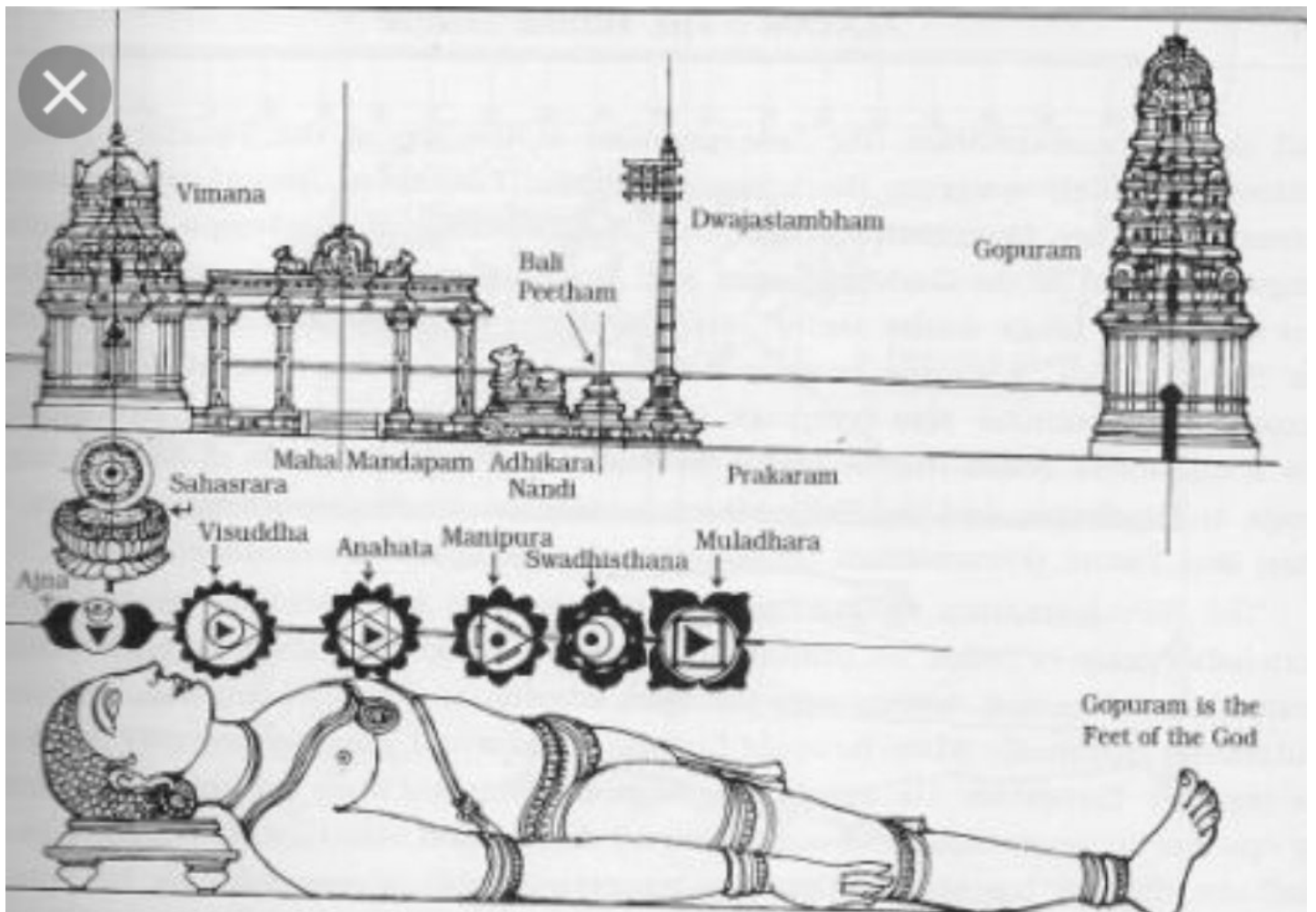
Mahamandapam

Dwajasthambam

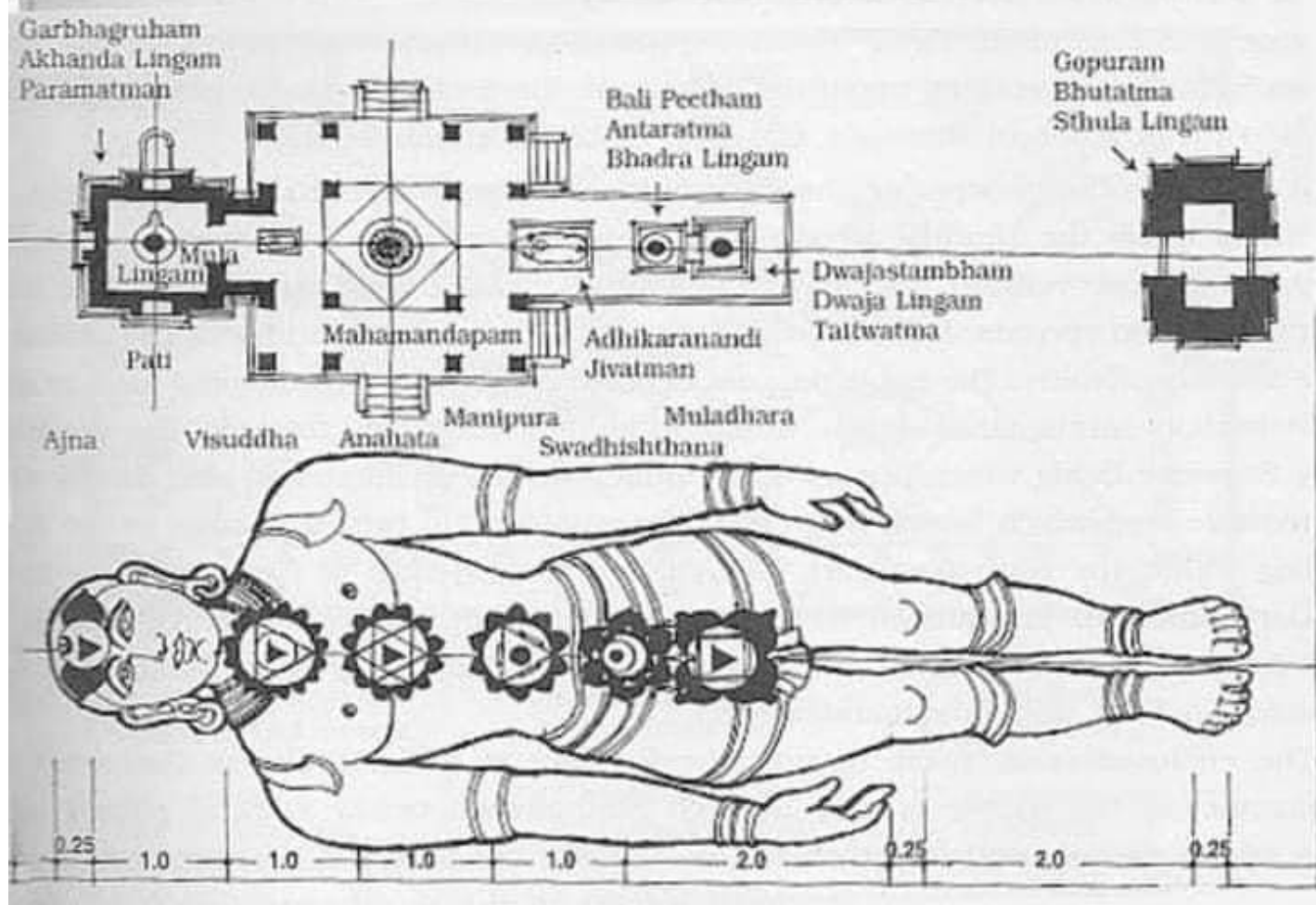
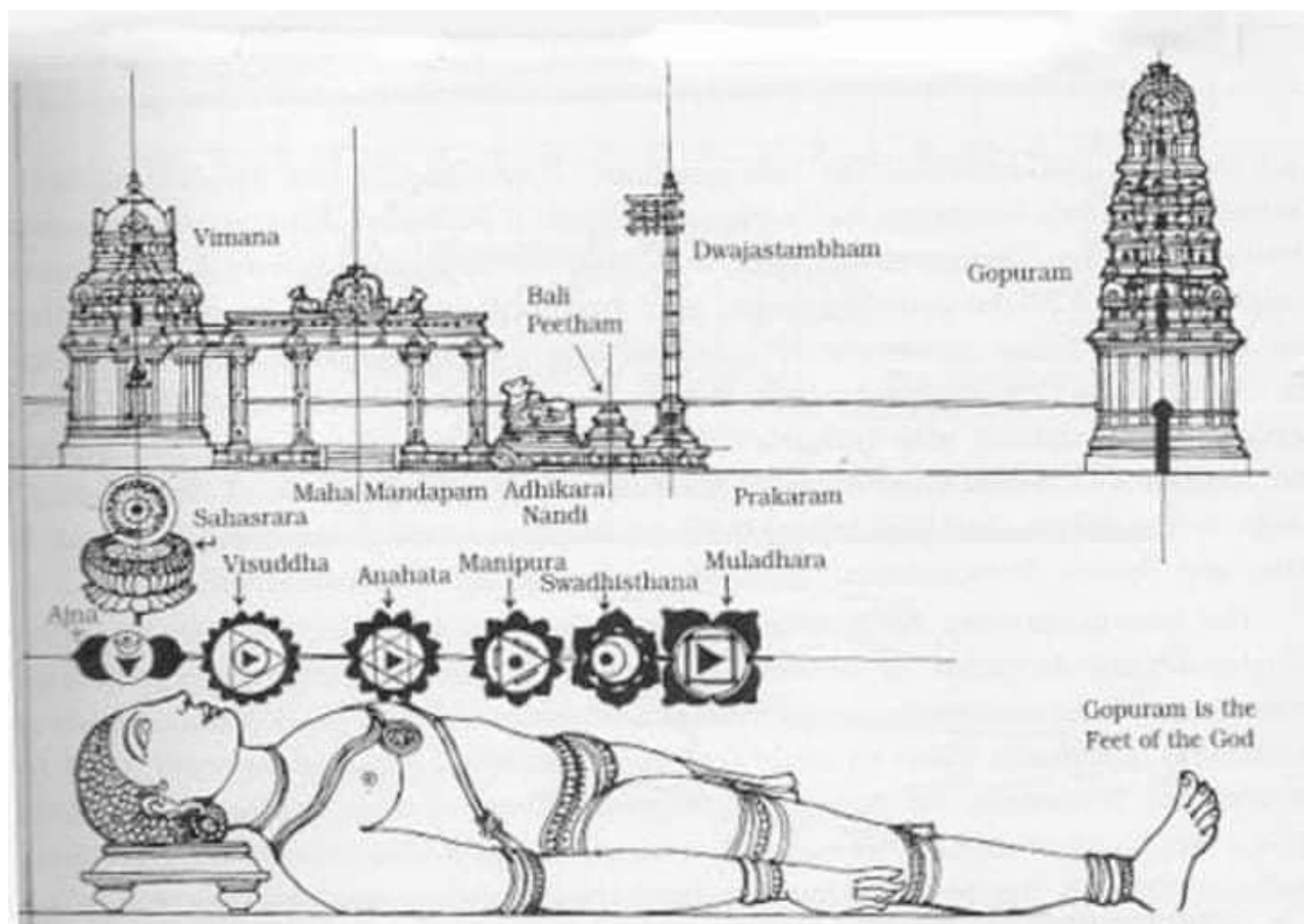
Rajagopuram

...the worship procedures specially designed for each type of deity, the details of daily rituals, occasional celebrations, festivals etc.

The Hindu Temples are spread over a vast territorial space all over the Indian Subcontinent.



And it is truly unbelievable that how Agama Shastra is followed throughout the majority of these temples, in spite of the vast cultural and regional differences. It's the divinity of Agama Shastra that makes our temples divine.



Sanatan Dharma doesn't confine itself to a single text or a single approach to Dharma which is why it is so rich and vibrant. It's complexity makes it unique. It's the only religion with science at its heart.

It's b'coz of the scientific base of Sanatan Dharma that our temples are so profound and wonderful from the Times immemorial and the modern architecture has still a lot to learn from them. Our temples are the real wonders of the world right from the ancient to the modern times.



Our temples are the real wonders of the world right from the ancient to the modern times. You believe it or you don't but that doesn't change the fact.

