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# Nagara style of Temple Architecture

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**Why is in news?** What is the Nagara style, in which Ayodhya's Ram temple is being built

The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be inaugurated on January 22. **Chandrakant Sompura, 81, and his son Ashish, 51,** have **designed the complex** in the Nagara style of temple architecture.

## About:

The Nagara style of temple architecture emerged sometime 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.

## Major features of Nagara architecture:

**Shikhara:** The shikhara is the tallest tower of the temple. It is typically pyramidal in shape and tapers towards the top. It is topped by a bulbous finial called a kalasha.

**Plan:** Nagara temples are typically built on a square or rectangular plan. The shikhara is located in the center. The temple may also have many smaller towers, called mukhamandapas, located around the shikhara.

**Walls:** The walls of Nagara temples are typically made of stone or brick. They are decorated with sculptures and reliefs. The walls may also have a series of windows, which allow light to enter the temple.

**Pillars:** The pillars of Nagara temples are typically carved with intricate designs. They are topped by capitals that support the roof.

**Toranas:** The toranas are the gateways to the temple. They are typically made of stone or wood and are decorated with sculptures and reliefs.

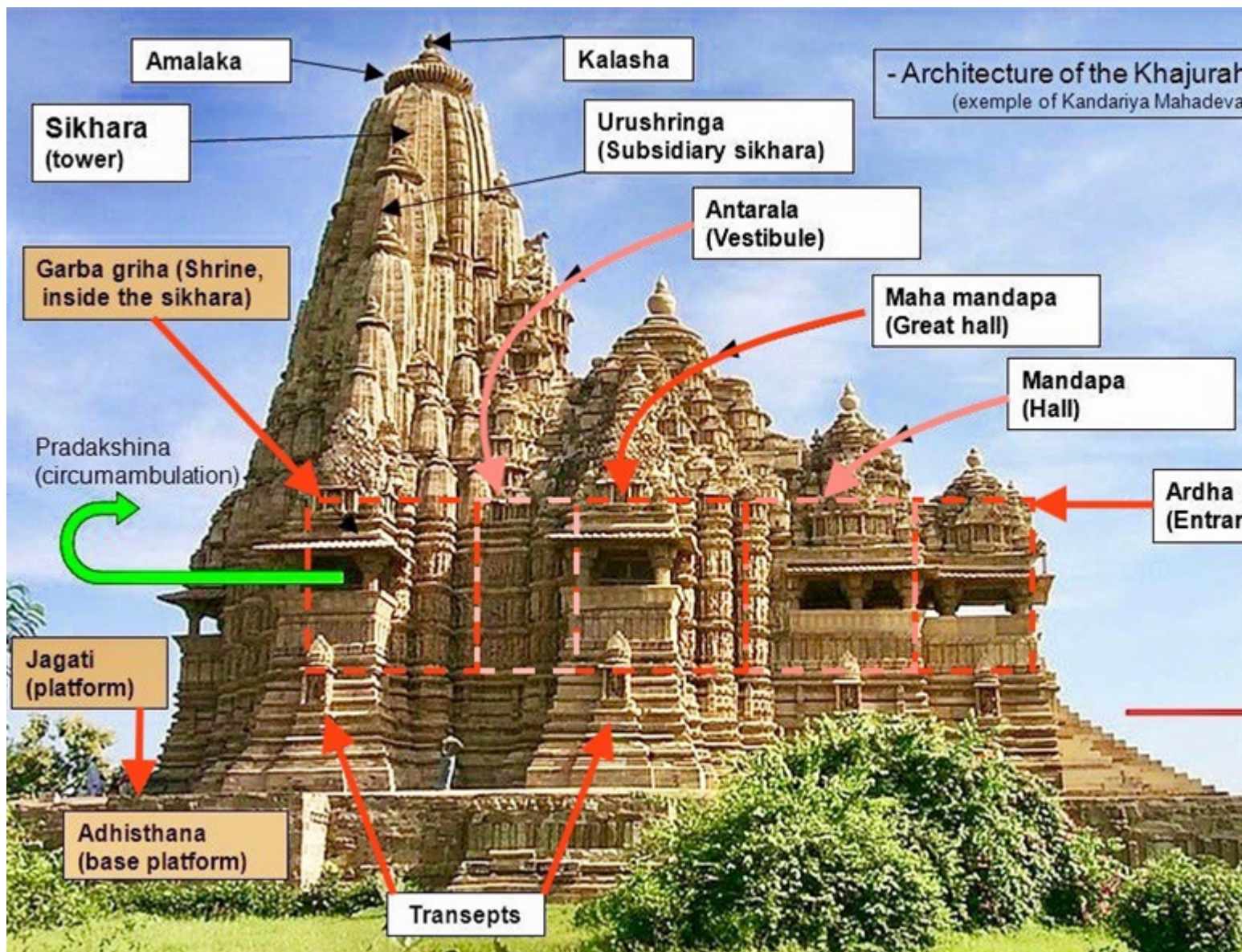
**Mandapa:** The mandapa is the main hall of the temple. It is where the devotees gather to worship the deity. Pillars typically support the mandapa and have a high ceiling.

**Garbhagriha:** The garbhagriha is the innermost sanctum of the temple, where the deity is enshrined. It is a small, dark room that is only accessible to the priests.

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### Five modes of Nagara architecture:

Depending on the period and geography, there is a large variation when it comes to what a shikhara looks like, or how it is used in a temple's design. On this basis, there are five modes of Nagara temple architecture — **Valabhi**, **Phamsana**, **Latina**, **Shekhari**, and **Bhumija**.

The first two are associated with what scholars have classified as **Early Nagara Style**.

#### **Valabhi:**

The Valabhi begins as a masonry rendering of the barrel-roofed [wooden] structure, simple or with aisles, familiar through chaitya halls [prayer halls, most associated with Buddhist shrines].

The domed chamber's edge is rounded, just like the wagons made of bamboo or wood that bullocks would have hauled in the past. They are frequently referred to as "**wagon-vaulted buildings**."

The shape of the temple was **influenced by prehistoric building styles** that were in use before the fifth century CE.

A formalisation of multi-eave towers, wedded to a piling up of slabs, **leads to the Phamsana Valabhi style** of temple architecture is square structures with roofs that rise into vaulted spaces.

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## **Phamsana:**

Compared to Latina structures, Phamsana structures are often wider and shorter.

In contrast to the Latina ones, which have roofs that resemble rapidly rising towering towers, theirs are made of several slabs that rise gradually to a single point over the middle of the building.

Phamsana rooftops have a **straight upward slope** rather than an inward bend.

The main Garbhagriha is housed in a Latina structure, while the mandapas are often constructed using the Phamsana style in North Indian temples.

Later, as the Latina structures grew more complex, the temple began to resemble one tall tower and began to support a number of lesser towers that were grouped like rising mountain peaks, with the highest tower being in the middle and always towering above the Garbhagriha.

## **Rekha-Prasad or Latina:**

Simple shikhara with square bases and inwardly curved walls with pointed apexes are common features of Rekha-Prasad or Latina-style temples.

The mode **emerged in the Gupta heartland**, was complete with curvature by the early seventh century, and during that century spread across the entire breadth of northern India.

For Example, Early medieval temples such as the **Markhera Sun Temple in Madhya Pradesh** and **Sri Jagannath Temple in Odissa**.

## **Shekari:**

The **tenth century onwards**, composite Latinas began to emerge, giving rise to Shekhari and Bhumija styles.

The Shikhara, a kind of Latina, consists of a central Rekha-prasad Shikhara and one or more rows of his smaller towers on either side.

The Shekhari shape has attached sub-spires or spirelets, echoing the main shape. These may run up most of the face of the shikhara, and be of more than one size.

**Mini Shikhara** is also installed on the pedestal and corners.

One of the most well-known temples of this type is the **Khajuraho Hokandari Yamahadev Temple**.

## **Bhumija:**

The Bhumija architecture created in Malwa during the reign of the **Paramara dynasty** was another sort of Nagara temple that emerged from the Latina style.

The Bhumija, on the other hand, has miniature spires, in horizontal and vertical rows, all the way to the top, creating a grid-like effect on each face.

The actual shikhara often approaches a pyramidal shape, with the curve of the Latina less visible.

With both horizontal and vertical carving, it is a miniature Shikhara at the **Udayeshwar Temple in Madhya Pradesh**.

## **Comparison to Dravida style:**

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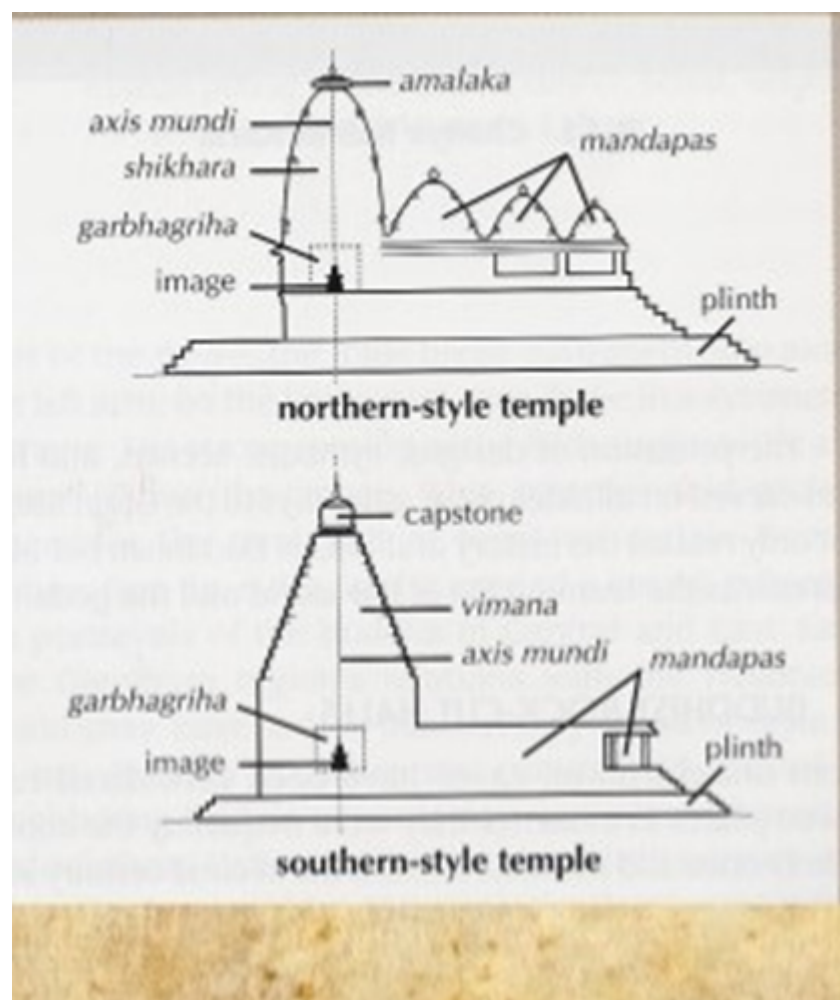


The Dravida counterpart to the **shikhara** is the **vimana**. There exists, however, a fundamental difference.

In the Dravida style temples, vimanas are typically smaller than the **great gatehouses or gopurams**, which are the most immediately striking architectural elements in a temple complex.

Moreover, while shikharas are mentioned in southern Indian architectural sources, they refer to only the dome-shaped crowning cap atop the vimana.

The existence of gopurams also points to another unique feature of the Dravida style — the presence of a boundary wall



### Conclusion:

India has **three temple-style architecture**: Vesara, Nagara, and Dravidian school of architecture.

Nagara style of architecture is the most prominent one as it covers half of India, including east, central and northeast, and various schools are also connected to it.

The Nagara style of temple architecture shows distinctive features of Shikara, Garbhagriha, and Amalkas.

Few Nagara style temple complexes are lined with **distinctive boundary walls** that are a part of the temple's design.

This is one of Ayodhya's Ram temple's 'hybrid' features — although no elaborate gopuram has been built (citing paucity of space), a 732m long wall runs around the temple compound.