

Purāṇas as repository of Indian Knowledge Systems: understanding architecture

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The *Purāṇas*, a genre of ancient Indian texts composed over several centuries, serve as comprehensive repositories of traditional Indian knowledge systems, encompassing a wide array of subjects such as cosmology, mythology, genealogy, and notably, architecture. These encyclopedic works, including prominent texts like the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa*, provide detailed guidelines and principles on various aspects of life and culture, reflecting the profound intellectual and spiritual traditions of ancient India. In the realm of architecture, the *Purāṇas* offer invaluable insights into the construction and design of temples, urban planning, and building practices. They elaborate on the technical specifications, aesthetic principles, and ritualistic procedures required for constructing sacred structures, ensuring that each element aligns with spiritual and cosmological symbolism. By preserving and transmitting this extensive body of knowledge, the *Purāṇas* have played a crucial role in maintaining the continuity and integrity of India's architectural heritage and other traditional practices, thus serving as foundational texts for understanding the rich and multifaceted Indian cultural legacy.

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The traditional Indian knowledge systems have been preserved in various forms, one of which is the Puranic literature. The *Purāṇas*, considered to be the fifth Veda, are a rich repository of diverse knowledge, including architecture¹. These ancient texts offer invaluable insights into the architectural traditions and design principles that were prevalent in the Indian subcontinent throughout history. The *Purāṇas* are ancient texts that serve as encyclopedic records of various aspects of life, culture, and spirituality in ancient India. They are divided into different categories based on their content, with some focusing on cosmology and mythology, while others delve into practical arts and sciences, including architecture. These texts were traditionally composed in Sanskrit and are considered both *śruti* (heard or revealed knowledge) and *smṛti* (remembered or traditional knowledge)².

Among the many ways that the *Purāṇas* function in contemporary Hinduism, as repositories of mythic history they often serve as links to a glorious past, legitimating and authenticating the present. The imprecision inherent in the term "*purāṇa*," which means "old or ancient," is adequately applied to the

narrative content as a whole in these works³, regardless of when they were written. *Purāṇas* define themselves as texts containing five characteristic topics (*pañcalakṣaṇa*): accounts of creation (*sarga*), re-creation (*pratisarga*), Manu cycles (*manvantara*), genealogies (*vamsa*), and dynastic histories (*vamsyānucarita*)⁴. While it is true that most *purāṇa* here rather inconsistently to this classification, it nevertheless reinforces their role as documents which connect human history to cosmic beginnings.

Scholars generally acknowledge that the *Purāṇas* represent collections of tales, some of which are indeed ancient¹. To what extent particular stories are historically accurate and what their "dates" of composition might be are questions as challenging as are attempts to date the compilations of extant versions of these works⁵. One particularly fascinating aspect of the Puranic literature is its documentation of traditional Indian architecture. The *Shilpa-Shastras*, or the ancient Indian treatises on the science of architecture, are closely linked to the Puranic corpus⁶. These texts, such as the *Manasara*, provide detailed guidelines and principles for the design and construction of various types of structures, including temples, palaces, and dwellings⁷.

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The Puranic literature reflects the deep reverence and spiritual significance that architecture held in the traditional Indian worldview. As noted, "Indian culture is suffused thoroughly by moral values", and this ethos is manifested in the Puranic approach to architecture⁸. The Puranic texts often describe the sacred symbolism and cosmic significance embedded in the design of built structures, underscoring the intimate connection between the physical and the metaphysical realms³.

The *Purāṇa*, timeless Indian texts composed over centuries, stand as profound repositories of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), offering insight into diverse domains such as cosmology, ethics, mythology, philosophy, and notably, architecture. This research approaches traditional Indian architectural knowledge through the lens of IKS, tracing its roots in the Purāṇic corpus. Texts like the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa* offer extensive guidance on temple architecture, construction techniques, spatial planning, and ritual significance, reflecting a holistic understanding of built environments that seamlessly integrate the material with the metaphysical. Through this article, architectural references have been explored from original Purāṇic sources, supported by classical commentaries and scholarly interpretations, to foreground the depth and continuity of architectural thought embedded in India's traditional knowledge systems.

Research Methodology

The present research on the *Purāṇa* as a repository of Indian Knowledge Systems, with special reference to the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa*, is based on critical, analytical, and comparative methods of study. The core methodology revolves around a close reading of the original Sanskrit texts along with their respective translations, particularly referring to *Matsyapurāṇāṅka* (Gita Press, Gorakhpur) and Gangadharan's translation of the *Agni Purāṇa* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi). A philological approach has been adopted to understand and interpret the terminologies, especially architectural terms and descriptions, that occur in these texts. Original Sanskrit terms have been preserved and italicized using diacritical marks as per Orientalist conventions, to maintain the textual authenticity and semantic nuances. The study is both descriptive and analytical in nature, where the architectural knowledge embedded in the *Purāṇas* has been extracted, categorized, and critically examined in the context of traditional Indian architectural systems and their

relevance to contemporary architectural discourse. Particular emphasis has been laid on identifying conceptual frameworks, terminologies, and structural typologies that provide insight into the indigenous knowledge systems preserved in these ancient texts. The research also employs comparative references to correlate ancient knowledge with modern architectural understanding, aiming to re-establish the *Purāṇas* as credible and rich sources of technical, cultural, and philosophical knowledge.

Agni-Purāṇa: nature, scope and date of composition

The *Agni-Purāṇa* is one of the important eighteen *mahapuranas* and of encyclopedic nature. It appears to have developed during a few centuries in the post-Gupta period and as R.C. Hazra thinks, between 700 and 1000 A.D.⁹. Besides a detailed narration of a number of arts, sciences, technological details, rituals, religious tradition, etc., the book also furnishes a detailed and valuable account of architecture, while doing so, it appears to follow the earlier tradition of *Matsya-Purāṇa* Which again depends on some chapters of *Visnudharmottara*¹⁰. The *Agni Purāṇa* is an admirable work of literature that was written during a time in ancient Indian history when many things were changing for the better, including important changes in literature, culture, and architecture. It belongs to that phase of Puranic development when the Puranic literature was enlarged by the addition of sectarian and some other matters, hence unrepresented.

Agni-Purāṇa appears to be a compilation and summary of works on a variety of subjects. Its present extant form is formed by frequent and subsequent additions and interpolations to the original kernel, made during a long span of time spread over three to four centuries. The time of this processing appears to be, as surmised by some scholars after a critical study of the present matter, the period stretched over almost three to four centuries from A.D. 700 or 800 to 1000 to 1100 A.D.¹¹. According to R. C. Hazra, the surviving *Agni-Purāṇa* is an apocryphal text from the ninth century that became rather well-known as Tantrism expanded. Under a different name, *Vāhni-Purāṇa*, which contemporary academics mistakenly consider to be an *Upapurāṇa*, the true *Agni-Purāṇa* had to preserve itself from extinction. But here we have assessed the data provided by the surviving *Agni-Purāṇa*, which is most likely a 9th-century composition⁹. The current popular *Agni-Purāṇa* covers a wide range of topics, including mythology,

religion, philosophy, cosmogony, polity, sociology, poetics, dramaturgy, history, geography, medicine, military science, phonetics, grammar, and lexicography, as well as art and architecture.

Out of the 382 chapters, at least nineteen (38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 61, 64, 65, 67, 93, 94, 95, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106 and 327) are stocked with valuable data on architecture directly or indirectly. The architecture, iconography, sculpture, temple building all go hand in hand and one finds useful but scattered references of these aspects¹⁰. The overlapping of one branch with another has to be studied rather carefully for sweeping out the desired material on one aspect. While dealing with the aspects of art, *Agni-Purāṇa* does not discuss them all and sundry but selects only temple and city's architecture and iconography with iconometry of certain deities.

Temple construction: the motivation

The construction of temples in the Indian cultural and religious tradition is not merely a matter of artistic or devotional expression- it is deeply embedded in the metaphysical, philosophical, and ritualistic frameworks of Hinduism¹². The Hindu temple (*devālaya*) is a material embodiment of spiritual thought, cosmological principles, and ritual performance. It functions not only as a sacred site for worship and pilgrimage but also as a symbol of the universe itself, a microcosm that represents the connection between the human and the divine. As such, the motivation to build temples transcends aesthetic or societal needs and moves into the domain of spiritual merit (*puṇya*), cosmic alignment, and dhārmic obligation.

From the earliest Vedic rituals involving fire altars (*yajñavedī*), we see the gradual evolution of sacred space-making, initially conceived in geometric precision through circular and square ground plans used in sacrificial rites³. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* refers to the altar (*vedī*) as the ground that holds sacrificial fire, symbolizing the entire earth and becoming the medium of communication with the divine¹³. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* even equates the Earth itself with an altar, reinforcing the sacredness of space and its role in ritual practice. These ideas continued to evolve and crystallized in the *Sūtra* literature¹¹, such as the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra*, which lays down measurements for sacrificial altars using standard units like *prakrama*, thereby introducing the notion of proportionality, scale, and sanctified geometry in architectural design.

While the early Vedic period emphasized formless worship and cosmic ritual, the Upaniṣadic and Paurāṇic traditions gradually ushered in the concept of *mūrti-pūjā* (image worship) and temple construction as central components of spiritual practice⁴. Texts such as the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* emphasize the transcendence of the divine beyond sensory perception, while the *Bhagavadgītā* acknowledges the human difficulty in relating to the formless (*nirākāra*), thereby legitimizing the development of tangible forms of worship. The transition from fire-altars to sanctified images housed in temples reflects this shift from abstract metaphysics to iconographic and architectural materiality. By the time of the epics- the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and into the Paurāṇic period, the presence of temples and public shrines becomes a normalized element of society, as evidenced by references to temple rituals and aesthetics in texts such as the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* and various *Purāṇas*⁸.

This spiritual imperative to construct temples finds a codified and merit-based rationale in texts such as the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa*¹⁴. The *Agni Purāṇa* (Ch. 38) not only extols temple building as a path to divine reward but explicitly states that the merit earned through constructing a shrine can surpass that acquired through traditional Vedic sacrifices¹⁰. It offers a gradation of spiritual benefits depending on the number and nature of temples constructed highlighting the perceived transcendental efficacy of such architectural undertakings. Similarly, the *Matsya Purāṇa* (Ch. 341) underscores the auspiciousness of different materials-clay, wood, stone, iron, copper, silver, gold, and gems-used in temple construction, each providing exponentially increasing merit¹³.

In this light, the need for technical architectural knowledge becomes evident. If temples are to embody cosmic order, spiritual ideals, and karmic outcomes, then their construction must adhere to precise guidelines-ranging from measurements and proportions to iconography and orientation¹⁵. Such detailed prescriptions are found in the architectural sections of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, *Matsya Purāṇa* (Ch. 269-270), *Agni Purāṇa*, and treatises like the *Bṛhatsamhitā*, *Mayamata*, and *Mānasāra*. These texts do not treat architecture as a merely utilitarian practice but as a sacred science (*vāstuvidyā*), where every line drawn and structure erected

aligns with cosmic principles and ritual significance⁷. The spatial logic of the temple, most notably its alignment, geometry (often based on mandalas), and scale, is infused with metaphysical meaning, transforming the architectural process into a spiritual *sādhanā* (practice).

Moreover, temples are seen as living entities, with their consecration (*pratiṣṭhā*) marking their spiritual birth. The *Agni Purāna* (Ch. 105) suggests that cities, villages, forts, houses, and temples be laid out using an 81-square grid, indicating a harmonized spatial arrangement for societal prosperity¹². This reinforces the idea that religious architecture was not isolated from everyday life but formed the sacred backbone of community planning and settlement patterns.

The motivation to build temples in the Hindu tradition emerges from a deep spiritual, cosmological, and socio-religious context, in which the built form is both a medium of divine presence and a path to liberation¹⁴. This motivation naturally necessitates a rigorous system of architectural knowledge, wherein texts like the *Matsya Purāna* and *Agni Purāna* serve not merely as theological treatises but as technical manuals preserving and transmitting the Indian knowledge systems of sacred architecture. Thus, understanding temple architecture is not just an exercise in art history or archaeology but a vital exploration into the epistemology of Indian civilization¹⁶.

The architecture depicted in the *Agni-Purāna* is not limited to religious structures; it also encompasses secular or mundane residences⁹. However, the distinction is that the construction of a divine edifice was generally the focus of attention, as it resulted in a significant amount of merit. Conversely, such religious advantages were not permissible in a private residence or residence. Many religious monuments, temples, and sanctuaries were constructed from more durable materials in order to withstand the passage of time. This is likely the reason. Excavations are necessary to uncover the residential and habitation areas, which are uncommonly visible¹⁶.

Architectural terminology

Like other scriptures providing material of *Vāstuśāstra*, *Agni-Purāna* also has used a specific Sanskrit for denoting and describing different parts of the temple¹⁰. The alphabetical list of such terms along with their English meanings is attached in the Table 1.

City planning

The book provides a good account of town planning in Chapter 106 where interesting details are

Table 1 — List of Architectural terminologies from *Agni Puran* with Asserted meanings¹² (Source: Author)

Term from <i>Agni Puran</i>	Asserted meaning
<i>āmalaśāraka:</i>	a ribbed member of pinnacle symbolising an 'amalaka'
<i>bhadra:</i>	a projection, also nirgam.
<i>bhaunya:</i>	comprisingbhumi, i.e., storeys.
<i>bhitti:</i>	wall, also <i>jaḡati</i> .
<i>bhramaṇa:</i>	circumambulation, also <i>pradakṣiṇā</i> .
<i>daruja:</i>	wooden.
<i>dvāra:</i>	doorway.
<i>dvārpāla:</i>	door-guardian.
<i>Garbha (gr̥ha):</i>	sanctum of temple.
<i>ghaṭa:</i>	literally "pitcher", used for a decorative motif of similar shape.
<i>gopura:</i>	ornamental gateway of the precinct also <i>prākāradvara</i> .
<i>iṣṭaka:</i>	(made of) brick.
<i>jaḡati:</i>	platform.
<i>jaṅghā:</i>	wall, particularly the portion embellished with sculptures.
<i>kaśa:</i>	pitcher, crowning member of a spire, a half-round moulding.
<i>kaṅṭha:</i>	constriction below the finial of the superstructure.
<i>maṇḍapa:</i>	hall
<i>madhyaśandhi:</i>	juncture of sanctum and hall, (<i>kapili</i> ?)
<i>mañjarī:</i>	small spire, generally erected above a miniature shrine.
<i>mithuna:</i>	couple, supposed as an auspicious decorative motif.
<i>mukhamandapa:</i>	entrance porch, also <i>pragṛśrava</i> .
<i>naramaya:</i>	terror figure
<i>nemī:</i>	periphery of the platform around the temple, the open place for <i>pradakṣiṇā</i> .
<i>nirgama:</i>	projection, bhadra.
<i>patravallī:</i>	foliage and creeper motif of decoration.
<i>piṇḍikā:</i>	pedestal, also <i>pīṭhikā</i> .
<i>pradakṣiṇā:</i>	circumambulatory (path) around the sanctum.
<i>pīṭhikā:</i>	pedestal, see piṇḍikā.
<i>prāgdvāra or prāggriva:</i>	entrance porch, see <i>mukhamandapa</i> .
<i>Prākāra:</i>	precinct (wall).
<i>Prāthara:</i>	door-guardian, also <i>dvarapala</i> .
<i>Pratima:</i>	icon.
<i>rathaka(thika):</i>	projection on walls decorated with sculpture
<i>Sakha:</i>	vertical ornamental fillet of doorjamb.
<i>Sikhara:</i>	spire of temple.
<i>Stambha:</i>	pillar
<i>Sukanāsa:</i>	antefix attached to the front facade of spire comprising a large arched niche (<i>candrasala</i>) also called sukanghri.
<i>Susiraka:</i>	perforated part like latticed window
<i>Udumbara:</i>	door-sill
<i>Vedi:</i>	an altar, a pedestal, a moulding.
<i>Vedika:</i>	a balcony, railing.

given. The reflection of earlier works and particularly the Town Planning chapter of *Kautiliya ~ Arthasastra* is clearly discernible¹⁰. The land selected may be of one *Yojana* or half *yojana* or one-fourth of *yojana* (106.1). The worship of the presiding deity of the city has been prescribed before taking up planning of a town (106.2). The land may be divided into a number of squares for accommodating various places. It is preferred to have four gates of the city of which the eastern one should be dedicated to *Surya*, the southern gate to *Gandharvas*, the western gate to *Varuna* and the northern gate to *Soma* (106.3). The doors of the gates may be six cubits wide to allow even the elephants (106.4). Worship of *Visnu*, *Siva*, *Surya* and other deities has been suggested (106.6). The *Agni-Purāṇa* suggests that of the proposed city, village, fort, house or a temple should be worshipped in eighty-one squares for prosperity (105.1)¹².

The chapter furnishes some details about the allocation of direction to different stocks of people. The statement gives an interesting record of the texture of the society and the placement of the people as per their rank, aptitude and utility (Fig. 1).

Site-selection

Chapter 39 of *Agni-Purāṇa* deals with the procedure of construction of temples, preference of

site and measurements. In the beginning, it gives a detailed list of the works on the subject i.e., *vastushashtra*¹⁷. These are as under: -

Hayasirṣatantra, Trailokyamohana, Vaibhava, Pauskara, Prahlada, Gārgya, Gālava, Naradiya, Śrīpraśna, Sandilya, Aiśvarya, Saunaka, Vasistha, Janasagara, Svayambhuva, Kāpilya, Tarkṣya, Nārāyaṇīyaka, Ātreya, Narasimha, Ananda, Aruṇa, Baudhayana, and Viśva (39.2-5)¹².

While selecting a site it has been advised that it should not be just adjacent to the already existing temple. At least, a distance of double of the elevation should be left between the earlier edifice and the proposed one (39.14)¹⁰.

Measurements

Different measurements as per their proportion have been mentioned and accordingly, the eight *paramanus* are equal to one *rathanu*, 8 *rathanus* make one *trasarenu* and 8 of them are equal to one *balagra* which multiplied by 8 is equal to a *likhya*. Again, its eight times becomes one *yuka*, the multiplication of its eight *yavamadhyama* and its eight times is one *angula*, four of which are equal to *padmahastaka* and 24 of *angulas* make one *kara* (hand) (39.19). For installation rite of a temple, a Brahmin from the middle country, *madhyadesa*, is

North		
North-west distillery of liquor, government servants (106.8)	North brahmanas, ascetics, holy men (106.9), man of judiciary (Brahmana), eminent men (106.11), farmers (106.13)	North-east fruit sellers, merchants (106.9) temple of Candica and Visnu (39.13)
West war-chariots, weapons, swords (106.8), chief ministers, treasurers, architects (106.11), tradesmen, sudras, cattle sheds (106.13), temples in west but facing east(106.15), temple of Varuna (39.11)		East commanders (106.10), Laksmi, Kubera (106.14)
South-west actors, potters, fishermen (106.7), royal camps (106.10), demons (39.11)	South dancers, courtesans(105.7), officers attending ladies(106.10). military men(106.12), cremation ground (106.13) Candika(39.11)	South-east goldsmiths, blacksmiths (106.6), regiments of army(106.10), images Agni, Matrkas, Yama, goblins (39.11).
South		

Fig. 1 — Allocation of direction to different stocks of people as describe in *Agni Puran*¹²

preferred¹⁸. At the same time the Brahmins from *Kaccha*, *Kāveri*, *Koṅkaṇa*, *Kamarupa*, *Kalinga*, *Kāñci*, *Kasmira* and *Kosala* have to be avoided (39.6-7).

The *Agni-Purāṇa* at one place prescribes 81 squares for house and 100 squares for a temple (105.14). The temple should be a square one of 28 X 28 cubits *kara* (elbow to tip of middle finger). The circumference should be 22 and width of wall 9 and same measurements are for a pavilions known as *Sisirāśraya*, *Śivakhya*, *Rudrahina* and *Sadobhaya* (105.18). The pavilion of *Sāvitra* type is 18 X 15. The *Bhadra* class should have passage on three sides and on front only entrance¹⁵. The *Śrījaya* type should not have passage on any side.

The base

One has to decide which type of temple is to be constructed, *i.e.*, single chamber, double chamber or tri-chamber. Same is the case for elevation and for *Viṣṇu* a seven-storeyed temple has been recommended (65.3)¹². There are some technical terms for measurements like *vyaya* and *aya* which have nothing to do with expenditure and income in the present day context but these hint to the proportion of measurement as per *Gārgyavidya* (65.5-7)¹⁰. The *vyaya* may be taken as a measurement of hand multiplied by 8 and again multiplied by 3 and then divided by 3 (65.6- 7)¹⁰. Similarly, the word *dhvaja* also denotes a measurement although it does stand for flag too. The site has to be divided into a number of squares as 64 or 81 as per proposed building¹⁸.

Before constructing the temple, three basic elements must be taken care of, *i.e.*, *ātmatattva* (soul or spirit), *vidyātattva* (knowledge) and *Śivatattva* (Bliss or Ananda). These should be consecrated on the door of the temple at the level of pedestal, middle and high (100.6-7). At the door or the temple gateway a good number of auspicious items like barley, white mustard, *krāntā*, *rddhi*, *viddhi*, *mahatila*, *gomta*, mustard, *rajendramohani*, *lakṣmaṇa*, *amṛta*, *racanā*, *rug*, *vacā*, *durva* and *poṭali* should be placed¹⁸. This is necessary for the protection of the god's abode and while doing so, *Om* should be repeatedly (100.4-5).

Beside the consecration of the gateway, the foundation laying ceremony of the temple has also been discussed in the subsequent chapter (Ch. 101). Accordingly, a pitcher made of gold and other metals should be placed on the eastern side and filled with *pañcagavya* (five items prepared through the cow)¹⁵.

The pitcher should be placed on five gems and adorned with garland cloth, etc. (101.23).

The shape of the temple has been projected in chapter 104 which suggests that the ground should be divided into four parts (104.1)¹⁰. The main part of the temple (sanctum) should occupy 1/7th of the ground and the pedestal should be 1/4th of the sanctum¹⁴. The pedestal should also occupy the central part of the ground which should further be divided in four parts. Different views have been given with regard to the sanctum or adytum. If a plot is divided into six parts, the walls should have one part of such proportion¹³. The height of the temple has been prescribed as double of the breadth and sometimes 1/3rd of the ground plan. The inside circumference should be less than the area of the temple (about one quarter less) while the outer circumference may be 1/3rd.

Construction details: Plan, elevation, and embellishment

The *Agni Purāṇa*, particularly chapters 42 and 104, provides significant insights into temple architecture, reflecting the interweaving of sacred geometry, ritual considerations, and proportional systems¹⁰. These chapters' detail both foundational principles and practical construction methods, drawing heavily from earlier Agamic texts, notably the *Hayaśīrṣa Pañcarātra*. The first 18 verses of Chapter 42 are identical to those found in the *Hayaśīrṣa Pañcarātra* (1952), suggesting direct textual borrowing and inviting further inquiry into intertextual chronology and transmission within early medieval architectural canons¹⁹.

Chapter 42 outlines a methodical approach to temple construction beginning with site selection—a level square ground divided into sixteen parts. The central four parts house the *garbhagr̥ha* (sanctum), while the surrounding twelve form the *bhitti* (walls). Proportions are strictly maintained: the *jan̄ghā* (vertical section) equals the length of the *garbhagr̥ha* and is double the height of the *mañjarī* (decorative element). The *pradakṣiṇā* (circumambulatory path) should be one-fourth the breadth of the *mañjarī*, and *nirgamas* (side exits) follow the same dimension. The *jagatī* (platform) may be equal to or twice the *śikhara* (spire) height, according to desired scale¹⁴.

The *mukhamandapa* (entrance pavilion) is to be aligned with the *garbhagr̥ha*, and should match or exceed its length. Above the entrance, a *śukanāsa* (miniature spire) is placed, with a carved *simha* (lion) at the confluence. The dimensions of the temple are often derived from the primary cult image: the

pīṇḍikā (base) is proportionate, the *garbhagr̥ha* is cubical, and the *śikhara* height is twice that of the *bhitti*. Decorative *rathakas* (projections) measure one-eighth the width of the *garbhagr̥ha*. The vertical articulation concludes with crowning elements including *āmalaśāraka*, *kalaśa*, and *vedikā*.

Chapter 104 presents alternative layout schemes based on land divisions—into four, five, or six parts—each allocating spaces for elements such as *pīṇḍikā*, *bhitti*, *śikhara*, and *garbhagr̥ha*. In every model, proportional harmony is emphasized. For example, in the six-part plan, the *garbhagr̥ha* and *pīṇḍikā* are each assigned two parts. The *jagatī* breadth is prescribed as one-sixth of the total layout, while the external *paridhi* (circumference) governs the placement of *rathakās*. Deities such as *Chāmuṇḍā*, *Bhairava*, and *Naṭeśa* are assigned to these external niches, with cardinal orientation guiding iconographic placement. Door elements like *śākhās*, *udumbara*, and guardian figures (*Chanda* and *Prachanda*) are also described with exact dimensional and ornamental details.

The *Agni Purāṇa* thus synthesizes aesthetic, functional, and symbolic dimensions in temple construction, offering a technically robust and ritually coherent framework⁹. Its shared content with the *Hayasīrṣa Pañcarātra* underscores the dialogic nature of textual traditions and the continuity of architectural knowledge¹⁹.

Results and Discussion

The *Purāṇas*, an extensive corpus of ancient Indian texts, are invaluable repositories of traditional knowledge encompassing a wide range of subjects, including the sophisticated science of architecture²⁰. This essay delves deeply into how the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa*, among other *Purāṇas*, preserve and transmit architectural wisdom. By analysing these texts, we can uncover the profound connection between spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and architectural knowledge in traditional Indian knowledge systems.

Architecture in *Matsya-Purāṇa*

The *Matsya Purāṇa* emerges as a vital repository of architectural thought in ancient India, integrating technical precision with philosophical and sociocultural frameworks. While it retains the foundational purāṇic themes of cosmogony, dharma, and sacred geography, its extensive engagement with *Vāstuvidyā* and *Prāsādalakṣaṇa* reflects a matured understanding of built environments as both utilitarian

and sacral domains⁶. Composed and interpolated across centuries—from the Gupta to early Medieval periods—the architectural sections reveal the temporal evolution and regional adaptability of Indian construction traditions.

The classification of *vastumaṇḍalas* into 64- and 81-square grids signifies an advanced codification of spatial planning aligned with metaphysical and functional goals⁷. This system anchors temple (*prāsāda*) and domestic (*gr̥ha*) architecture within a cosmological framework, as confirmed by corresponding traditions like the *Hayasīrṣa Pañcarātra*¹⁸. Moreover, the enumeration of 18 *Vāstusāstrakāras* (architectural seers) underscores the transmission of architectural science (*śilpasastra*) through revered lineages, blending mythic origin with practical mastery.

Chapters devoted to structural typologies—residential layouts (*catuḥśālā*, *triśālā*, *dviśālā*), pillar classifications (*rucaka*, *vajra*, *dvivajra*, *pralinaka*, *vr̥tta*), and temple planning—demonstrate a refined knowledge system rooted in geometry, material science, and aesthetics. These forms were carefully proportioned and contextually designed for various social strata, suggesting a stratified yet inclusive architectural ethic. Decorative schema, including motifs like *padma*, *latā*, and *kumbha*, reinforce the text's integration of ornamentation with symbolic representation.

The detailed rituals—such as *Vāstupuruṣa-śānti* and temple consecration rites—emphasize the spiritual gravity of construction, where architecture becomes an offering (*yajña*) and a cosmic alignment. Through chapters like *Prāsādavidhi*, *Prāsādānukīrtana*, and *Maṇḍapakaraṇa*, the *Matsya Purāṇa* bridges the material and the metaphysical, grounding architecture in both sacred science and lived reality¹⁵.

In conclusion, the architectural corpus of the *Matsya Purāṇa* exemplifies a holistic design philosophy—where structure, function, aesthetics, and spirituality coalesce. It affirms that architecture in the Indic tradition is not a mere act of construction but a sacred articulation of cosmic principles, sociocultural order, and devotional expression.

Architecture in *Agni-Purāṇa*

The *Agni Purāṇa* serves as a pivotal text in understanding the synthesis of sacred geometry, ritual science, and architectural practice within the Indian knowledge systems. It encapsulates a codified body of technical and symbolic knowledge that reflects the

deep interweaving of metaphysical cosmology with material construction⁹. The detailed terminologies—such as *garbha*, *śikhara*, *gopura*, and *maṇḍapa*¹⁰—demonstrate a sophisticated architectural vocabulary that is not merely structural but inherently symbolic.

The text's emphasis on proportionate measurements, prescribed materials, site orientation, and ritual procedures reveals an integrated framework of engineering, aesthetics, and spirituality¹². The foundational principles outlined—ranging from excavation dimensions to geometric divisions of land—are rooted in *Vāstuśāstra*, aligning physical structures with cosmic order and environmental harmony. Chapters dedicated to plan, elevation, and embellishment underscore a design methodology that is both systematic and sacred, ensuring that temples function as energetic and spiritual centres within the built environment.

Moreover, the *Agni Purāṇa*'s alignment with *Pāñcarātra Āgamas* and its resonance with complementary texts like the *Matsya Purāṇa* reinforce its role in the transmission and standardization of temple architecture across diverse cultural and geographical landscapes¹⁵. The text not only reflects a continuity of architectural tradition but also offers insights into the adaptive evolution of styles—*Nāgara*, *Drāviḍa*, and *Vesara*—tailored to regional aesthetics and socio-religious contexts.

In sum, the architectural knowledge embedded in the *Agni Purāṇa* is not merely a guide to constructing edifices; it is a manifestation of dhārmic design principles, where space, structure, and spirit coalesce. It affirms that in the Indic worldview, architecture is not only a technological endeavor but a sacred act—*śilpa* as *yajña*—embodying the eternal connection between the terrestrial and the transcendental.

Transmission of Architectural Knowledge: tradition to continued relevance

The *Purāṇic* texts play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting architectural knowledge. They serve as manuals for architects and builders, providing detailed guidelines and principles for construction. Key aspects of knowledge transmission include:

- **Textual Preservation:** The *Purāṇas* ensure that architectural knowledge is recorded and preserved for future generations¹⁶.
- **Training of *Sthapatis*:** Master builders, known as *sthapatis*, are trained in these principles and entrusted with the responsibility of designing and

constructing buildings according to traditional guidelines.

- **Oral Tradition:** In addition to written texts, oral traditions play a significant role in passing down knowledge from one generation to the next²⁰.

This dual approach ensures the continuity and evolution of traditional architectural practices. The principles and guidelines outlined in the *Purāṇas* continue to be relevant in modern times¹². Contemporary architects and builders often refer to *Vāstu Śāstra* principles to create harmonious and sustainable structures. Key modern applications include:

- **Residential Buildings:** Designing homes that align with *Vāstu* principles to ensure the well-being of the inhabitants.
- **Commercial Structures:** Applying traditional guidelines to create conducive and prosperous work environments.
- **Temple Construction:** Building new temples that adhere to ancient architectural principles, ensuring their spiritual efficacy and cultural significance.

The integration of traditional knowledge with modern techniques allows for the preservation and adaptation of ancient practices in a contemporary context.

The *Purāṇas*' role as repositories of architectural knowledge highlights the richness and diversity of traditional Indian architecture, reflecting a deep connection between culture, spirituality, and the built environment. Their continued relevance in shaping architectural knowledge up to contemporary times underscores the enduring significance of these ancient knowledge systems, effectively bridging the past and the present while offering profound insights into the timeless principles that inform the art and science of building.

Conclusion

The *Agni* and *Matsya Purāṇas* serve as invaluable resources for understanding traditional Indian architectural knowledge. Their detailed descriptions of construction techniques, architectural terminology, and symbolic meanings provide a comprehensive guide to ancient Indian building practices. By integrating the principles of *Vastu Shastra* and emphasizing the spiritual and cultural aspects of architecture, these texts ensure that buildings are not merely physical structures but also embodiments of cosmic and spiritual principles. Through their

guidance, the *Purāṇas* continue to influence and inspire traditional Indian architecture, preserving the rich heritage of India's architectural legacy.

In essence, the *Purāṇas* function as encyclopaedic references that connect the past and present, providing practical insights and enduring wisdom, much like the traditional Indian architecture. There is a significant opportunity to capitalize on the corpus of knowledge. They guarantee that the spiritual and cultural essence of this ancient knowledge system remains relevant and vibrant in the contemporary world by providing detailed accounts and prescriptions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

The conceptual idea and framework of the paper were jointly discussed and developed by all three authors. KK has structured the paper, formulated the methodology, and collected the primary data. Further analysis and investigation were carried out under the joint supervision and guidance of SPB and PM.

Ethical approval

Not applicable.

Data Availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and also in the supplementary material. The data may

also be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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