REGIONS AND INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

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As a planner, if one were making a conventional analysis of the effect of region on architecture, one first would look at questions of climate, available materials, technology, craftsmen, local traditions, relation of a region to "tradition," local economics, etc. In looking at Hindu stone temple architecture, however, surviving from *ca.* A. D. 400 to 1500, art historians rarely have made these the issues[1].

This is partly because these structures share a cultural system and its symbolism, partly because we have quite limited knowledge about the local circumstances leading to the appropriation of that symbolism through the building of architecture. What were the paths by which information was transmitted ? To what extent were there local traditions that had to be honoured or accommodated, in spite of broader patterns of royal or cultural patronage ? Though a limited number of texts survive, often not properly dated or located, we mostly have had to guess.

It is not as if some of these issues cannot be raised. Because of local availability, for example, marble was used in the Ābu region of Rajasthan at least from the seventh century A. D.[2] The pent-roof type of structure assimilated to temple architecture may once have had its roots in regions with heavy rain or snow[3]; early Cālukya monuments in Karnataka clearly accommodate the symbolic form of the temple to a local assembly-hall tradition[4]; Pallava use of granite rather than sandstone had some effect on the nature of Pallava ornament[5]; in some regions of India, stones were carved in place, in others, they were finished completely before being fitted together[6]; no one can look at centers such as Vijayanagar without recognition of the importance of local patrons and their ambitions[7].

Yet faced with anonymous monuments expressing a shared symbolism, we as art historians have tended to turn the issue of "regionalism" in this tradition into one of "style." Orissa is different from Rajasthan, Kashmir from Kerala. Yet recognizing the plurality of the Indian subcontinent has not settled questions of how "region" functioned, even in the formation of style.

Regions, in fact, should be ideal for the application of the mathematical theory of sets; each region always is in some way a sub-set or shared set with some other region. Hindu architecture primarily is South Asian, for example, not Latin American, in spite of a few attempts to trace architectural links to a "Hindu America." Within the set of Indian temples, the most significant regional sub-sets must certainly be South and North—Drāviḍa and Nāgara modes of architecture, which share a system of symbolic value for the monument but express that in morphologically quite different ways[8]. The morphology of Northern and Southern temples cannot easily be confused—yet is their separate origin primarily formal, symbolic, political, "regional" in some ethnic sense (as

"regional" too often is used to imply) or some combination of the above ?

An example of a significant regional "shared-set" might be that of the Vesara mode of architecture that develops in a region—the Deccan and Mysore plateaus—where Nāgara and Drāvida had co-existed in previous centuries, primarily under the later Cālukya and Hoysaḷa dynasties in the 11th and 12th centuries, and which establishes itself as a conscious mediator between North and South[9]; or we might talk of "Solaṅki" architecture in western India, named after the dynasty that was its principal patron in the 11th-to-13th centuries, which, itself, territorially subsumes areas associated in previous centuries with separate styles[10].

What mechanisms of analysis can work ? Throughout the last 150 years of scholarship, the field has tended to focus on defining "styles" both regionally and dynastically, and we have become quite good at separating styles by looking at the minutiae of their craftsmanship[11]. This visual connoisseurship may be easy—as in separating the stumpy Orissan from elongated Central India Nāgara temples—or much more difficult, because more tied to the hand of the craftsman and less to his overall system of forms, as in separating Pāṇḍya from Pallava or Pallava from Rāṣṭrakūṭa Dravidian architecture. Note that my first example was, as defined, essentially regional, the second dynastic, though having clearly differing regional loci. We have often gotten confused in our definitions, as in trying to trace links between the Pallava dynasty's Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñcīpuram and the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty's Kailāsa temple at Ellorā in terms of political primacy and the migration of workmen from the south[12]. The originality of Deccani architecture, as well as the plurality of the sources for its synthesis, is one of the prime correctives provided by recent scholarship emphasizing the autonomy of regions[13].

This dichotomy of region vs. dynasty in recent decades has acted as a central focus for much scholarly discussion, as smaller dynasties were identified and sub-regional styles differentiated—but whether tied to a dynasty or region, our methodology for distinguishing such styles has been essentially connoisseurship. In western India, to distinguish between "Greater-Maru" and "Greater-Gūrjara" regional styles (one of the more successful distinctions made by recent scholarship)[14] we have still had to look at the nature of cornice mouldings, or whether the web-pattern on the superstructure is scooped out or stencilled in its rendering.

Neither dynasty nor region, I believe, has primacy, however, in defining the nature of "style" in India. In arguments that make a contrast of region and dynasty, a third category often is lost, that of the craftsman themselves. It is they that the cultural, climatic, and technical limits of a region effect; only through their hands is the "style" of a region expressed; and from what they craft a dynasty may define its power.

The consistency of "style" at a regional site like Osiāñ, in the region of Maru-deśa, is the result of a generation of craftsmen working on its monuments[15]. Yet if we are willing to look at sub sub-sets, the "style" of the contemporary "Mahā-Māru" temple at Lamba, 35 miles away[16], is not exactly that of the temples at Osiāñ, because the

craftsmen who worked there were different.

Perhaps we have thrown the process at work out with our methodology—connoisseurship distinguishes "hands" and yet we write of "styles." I have increasingly begun to distinguish "idiom" from "style" in India, unwilling to use either "substyle" or "regional style" to distinguish the variations we find from site to site. Of that distinction I have written, in an attempt to make a general statement of the relation between "idiom" and "style" as it has emerged from my personal field experience over the last twenty years, that :

> Style seems to me an "average," related to broad patterns of patronage and political affiliation. "Style" carries with it patterns of general conventions which grade, however, from one area to another. We talk, therefore, sometimes of regional "idioms" as if they were versions of a larger style. "Idiom" however, in my experience is site and guild related, rooted in a place (or region) through local population and tradition. Thus many "idioms" make up the basis for "styles"; the gradations are located in the continuum of local idioms. As political hegemony expands, as "centers" for conventional norms shift under such patronage, local idioms rooted in local craft can sway from affiliation with one "style" to affiliation with another[17].

A colleague of mine at the University of Pennsylvania who has worked on both Islamic and colonial architecture, Professor Renata Holod, points out that the antithesis of the concept of "regional" should be "imperial"—empires try to obliterate vernacular and idiomatic variations by establishing a universal style. In India, however, few dynasties could claim so broad a hegemony; the plurality of India's shared community preserved the creative autonomy of sliding regional "sets" and "subsets"; and the process of interaction artistically remained at the level of craftsman.

By this I mean specifically to raise the issues of a hierarchy of craftsman, with differing responsibilities, experience, levels of literacy, opportunities to travel, connections to patrons, knowledge of other traditions. If the master architect may have been more world-wise than his workmen, of many "local" things they may have known more than he.

As an example of the complex nexus of regions, artisans, and patrons from which art was created in India, let me end this essay with the example of "Vesara" architecture of the later Cālukyas in Karnataka (Plate. 2) and "Bhūmija" architecture adopted by the Paramāras in Central India (Plate. 2), both new modes of temple architecture well established by the 11th century, created I suspect with the regional autonomy and identity of the patron dynasties fully in mind. Both represent different regional and dynastic affiliations; each represents a consciously created form attempting to make a new "style" for a perceived "place"; one is derived from Drāviḍa, the other from Nāgara modes of architecture morphologically; yet both suggest conceptual and artistic overlappings that might unite them as a new "set."

The mechanisms for interaction between artisans in India may be a more fruitful question than that of segregating regions, and the persistent plurality of traditions, with so wide a territorial continuum of artisans, the more significant phenomenon. If the locus for interaction in India was primarily that of the artisan, then only if we can bring our discussion back to issues that faced creative craftsmen can the relation of region to architecture fully be addressed.

REFERENCES :

1. Issues of regional *versus* dynastic classifications were raised in Moti Chandra, ed., *Seminar on Indian Art History*, Lalit Kalā Akademi, New Delhi, 1962 and the implications carried through in the work of M. A. Dhaky, particularly his "The Genesis and Development of Māru-Gūrjara Temple Architecture," in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture,* ed. Pramod Chandra, New Delhi 1975, pp. 114-165, and related articles.

2. Michael W. Meister, "A Field Report on Temples at Kusumā," *Archives of Asian Art*, XXIX (1975-1976), pp. 23-46.

3. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture : Buddhist and Hindu,* 3rd revised edition, Bombay, 1959; *see* also Michael W. Meister, "Phāmsanā in Western India," *Artibus Asiae,* XXXVIII (1976), pp. 167-188.

4. Odile Divakaran, "Les temples d'Ālampur et de ses environs au temps des Cāḷukya de Badami," *Arts Asiatiques,* XXIV (1971), pp. 51-101.

5. G. Jouveau-Dubreuil, *L'archeologie du sud de l'Inde : L'Architecture,* Paris, 1926; K. R. Srinivasan, *The Dharmaraja Ratha and Its Sculptures,* New Delhi 1975.

6. This is demonstrably true in Orissa, where some temples remain constructed but uncarved.

7. John Fritz, George Michell, and M. S. Nāgarāja Rao, *Where Kings and Gods Meet,* Tucson 1984.

8. Michael W. Meister, "An Essay in Indian Architecture, *"Roopa Lekha,* XLI (1973), pp. 35-47; "Altars and Shelters in India," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers (aarp),* 16 (1979), p. 39.

9. M. A. Dhaky, *The Indian Temple Forms in Karnāṭak Inscriptions and Architecture,* New Delhi 1977.

10. M. A. Dhaky, "The Chronology of the Solaṅkī Temples of Gujarat," *Journal of the Madhya Pradesh Itihasa Parishad,* 3 (1961), pp. 1-83; Dhaky, "Genesis and Development...."

11. *see* notes 1 and 5.

12. Brown, *Indian Architecture....;* a similar example might be the confusion calling the barrel-vaulted form of the Teli-kā-mandir at Gwalior "Dravidian."

13. *See* note 9.

14. *See* note 10.

15. D. R. Bhandarkar, "The Temples at Osiā," *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report,* 1908-09, pp. 100-115.

16. M. A. Dhaky, "The Old Temple at Lamba and Kāmeshvara Temple at Auwa," *Journal of the Asiatic Society,* Calcutta, VIII (1966), pp. 141-148.

17. Michael W. Meister, "Style and Idiom in the Art of Uparamāla," *Bulletin, Museum and Picture Gallery,* Baroda (U. P. Shah Felicitation Volume), in press.

Plates :

1. Udayapur, Madhya Pradesh, Udayeśvara temple, south, *ca.* A. D. 1080. (Courtesy : American Institute of Indian Studies, Varanasi.

2. Dambal, Karnataka, Dodda Basappa temple, southwest, *ca.* 12th century A. D. (Courtesy : AIIS, Varanasi.)