



Lecture Series on World Heritage and Culture

84th Lecture on “SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF GUJARAT”

By

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SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF GUJARAT

Gujarat is the sixth largest in area and ninth largest in population in India. Located in the western India, it has a historical and art heritage starting from the Indus Valley civilization, i.e., from the third and second millennia. At Dholavira and Lothal, there are many characteristic features of Harappan towns. "Brick structures are regularly laid out on grid patterns with streets in between; drains and wells indicate a controlled use of water. Earthen embankments, possibly serving as fortifications, surround residential areas. Among the artifacts recovered from these sites are large painted earthenware jars, terracotta figurines and miniature stone seals with animal motifs and an undeciphered script". Almost no monuments of early historic period are preserved in the western region. However, the later centuries are exceptionally rich in temple architecture and art. Gujarat is well known for its innumerable Jain monuments. They flourished during the Muslim and Rajput rule. The Buddhist relics are also found in this region. It is very well attested by the presence of the 3rd century BCE rock cut edicts at Girnar. It shows the Mauryan domination during the reign of Asoka in this region. Under the 2nd-4th century Kshatrapa rulers of Junagadh, monasteries for the Buddhists and Jains were cut into the rock. "In the 5th century, the Maitraka rulers of Gujarat sponsored the building of stone Hindu temples with distinctive features. Numerous small-scale projects survive in the Saurashtra peninsula. The earliest of these is the 6th century temple at Gop, which has part of its towered sanctuary still standing. At Bileshwar the 7th century temple has a pyramidal tower covered with arch-like motifs. Sculptures from the Maitraka period are mostly damaged; however, several finely modeled Hindu divinities and attendant maidens, in a style reminiscent of late Gupta traditions, come from Roda and Saamalaji. 8th century temples at the former site, where the largest group of Hindu monuments in Gujarat still stands, are clearly linked to contemporary Pratihara architecture in central India. Small square sanctuaries have curved towers covered with finely detailed arch-like motifs; *amalaka* sand pot finials are positioned above. The outer walls have projections with small niches surmounted by pediments, doorways, columns and roofs are all elaborately decorated". At the beginning of the 11th century the Gujarat was ruled a powerful dynasty by name the Solankis. They started developing their own architectural features. During their rule sanctuaries were erected with passage ways adjoining the columned *mandapas* with porches. Additional detached *mandapas* were aligned on an axis with the central shrine. A rectangular tank was integrated into the overall layout. "During the 12th and 13th centuries, the Solanki reached the climax of its development. Ruined monuments at Ghumli, Girnar, Sejakpur, Sidhpur and Vadnagar indicate the increased scale of architectural conception and the elaboration of carved decoration. Jain monuments of western India continued to evolve stylistically even when the southern part of the region came under Muslim control from the fourteenth century onwards". There upon the Muslim influence in the religious as well as secular buildings became unavoidable.

Hindu Monuments

The oldest surviving structural temple in the Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat is perhaps the well known old temple at Gop. It seems to have been erected between CE 755 and 800 during the reign of the Maitraka rulers. Its structure deviates from the north Indian *nagara* type of temple structure and shows the development of western Indic styles, deriving both from earlier traditions in the west, as well as from the Gupta modes. "Relationship between the Gop temple and later Kashmiri forms, as well as earlier Bactro-Gandhara architecture, have been observed by scholars, and the temple is usually classified as belonging to the "Gandharic" type since it preserves a number of elements from the northwestern tradition of the Khusana period. One of these is the so-called "penthouse-type" roof (actually a pyramidal roof rising from a square base), known as the *phamsana* type. This form is later to be seen in Kashmir, suggesting an early widespread dispersal of the convention". The sanctuary of this much dilapidated temple is raised on a high terrace, the sides of which are carved with basement mouldings and niches. The niches contain mostly worn out sculptures. It was once surrounded by a passageway, possibly with a *mandapa* at the eastern front, but nothing survives today. A pyramidal masonry roof with a capping *amalaka* rises above the sanctuary. There are three large arch-like windows on each side of the roof. It is not known to whom the temple was originally

dedicated, as no image was found in the shrine and most of the exterior decoration is lost. "Originally, this *sandhara* shrine was enclosed by a circumambulatory passage, as was the "Parvati" temple at Nachnakuthara, although, like that of the earlier temple, this enclosure is now in ruins". The sculptures remain at Gop consist of a Vishnu and a Skanda, two door keepers, a Rama, and a seated woman in one of the *gavaksas* of the roof.

There is a Siva temple of the 7th century at Bileswar. This important example of early Hindu temple architecture in Gujarat is the largest extant monument dating from the Maitraka period. "It is contained within a later enclosure but still serves as a place of worship. The sanctuary has a multi-storey tower of a pyramidal design comparable to the earlier scheme presented at Gop. Large arch-like motifs are positioned in the middle of each side of the tower; similar but smaller motifs appear at the corners and at the summit. Plaster coating obscures much of the original decoration". A group of small temples at Roda in northern most Gujarat belongs to the late 8th century. They are small and *nirantara* type (without circumambulatory passage). Their front porches are surmounted by telescoping versions of *sukanasas*, triangular, although decorated with *gavaksas*. One of the temples has a closed hall as well as a porch there is a far-projecting *sukanasa*, with double telescoping over the remainder of the hall, and then again over the porch. The curved towers are covered with *mesches* of arch-like motifs; *amalakas* are positioned at the summits. To the east of the temples 2 and 3 is a large tank with dilapidated sides and double flights of steps leading down to the water. The HarischandraniChauri temple, constructed in the ninth century, is the oldest intact temple at Samalaji. "A sanctuary adjoins an open porch with balcony seating. The clustered tower over the sanctuary still preserves its mesh of arch-like motifs. A short distance away is a gateway with two sculpted columns, these support a lintel fashioned as a double- curved arch which contains flying musicians". But the figures are highly mutilated. Numerous blue schist sculptures of the divinities and attendant maidens dating from the sixth century were found here. Some of these sculptures are preserved in the museums at Mumbai and Vadodara (Baroda).

The Surya temple at Modhera is one of the finest Hindu temples in Gujarat. This is the first great achievement of the Solanki era. It might have been built in CE1027 or sometime later. In spite of its ruination and partial reconstruction, the monumental conception and rich ornamentation of the temple are still apparent. It has lost its *sikhara*. It is very well known with its superb holy tank, its steps, platforms, terraces, and miniature shrines. "In the underground cella of the sanctum stands the pedestal of the Surya image. The *rangamandapa*, a hall for the performance of music and dance, is later. Many other fine shrines, unfortunately few with their *sikharas* intact, survive throughout the area, from the far west (Kiradu) to deepest Saurashtra". The basement mouldings have elephant and horse friezes and miniature figures. Wall panels are flanked by pilasters and capped with miniature eaves and pediments. The images of Agni (south) and Surya (north) are better preserved. The outer walls of the porch have bands of scrollwork and figural panel beneath including seating slabs. The columns on the periphery and within the *mandapa* are richly ornamented. Beams and friezes support ceiling panels. The central corbelled dome is a reconstructed one. Columns and brackets are adorned with miniature figures, foliage and scroll work.

"The celebrated Hindu pilgrimage centre of Somanatha, PrabhasPatan, is situated on the shore of the Arabian Sea, east of Veraval. The chief focus is the great Siva temple, now completely rebuilt in the traditional Solanki style. The new stone carvings on the monument testify to the continuity of artistic traditions in Gujarat up to the present day. The holiness of this spot, which is considered to be the site of one of Siva's *Jyotirlingas*, also extends to a nearby confluence of three rivers, where devotees come to bathe. Ruined gateways, other shrines and numerous wells and tanks are found in the vicinity". Originally founded in the tenth century, the Somanatha temple, was subjected to successive demolitions followed by renovations; its proximity to the sea may also have contributed to its decay. Its wealth attracted many invaders, the first of whom was Mahmud of Ghazni, who destroyed the sanctuary in 1026. The temple was reconstructed by the Solanki king Kumarapala(1143-1172).

The Navalakha temple at Sejakpur was erected in the 12th century. It is one of the finest Hindu temples of the Solanki period. It has a high basement with multifaceted mouldings and elephant friezes. The wall panels are framed by pilasters with pediments above; one of the finest is the figure of dancing Siva on the western side. Columns, brackets and ceilings are exuberantly carved throughout. A twelfth century Siva temple called RudraMahalaya temple is located at Shidpur. Constructed by the Solanki king Jayasimha (1094-1143), this temple was a magnificent multi-storeyed sanctuary with eleven subsidiary shrines. A short distance to the north is a well preserved gateway with two high columns. "Hindu sculptures from various sites in Gujarat are displayed in the museum collections at Vadodara. 6th century blue schist figures from Samalaji indicate the influence of Gupta traditions of central India. The finest of these Samalaji carvings are a delicately modeled Siva with Nandi, standing Ganesa, and several gracefully posed maidens holding children or with attendants. From Roda come a number of eighth century sculptures. Also of interest is the skeletal Bhairava figure from Lodal dating from the eleventh century. Bronze figurines from Akota are an important part of the collection; these are mostly Jain images and are datable to the 6th-8th centuries. Standing, Risishabanatha, seated Ambika and a female devotee holding a fly-whisk are among the finest". Dwaraka is considered as a sacred place due to its connection with the life of Krishna. "It is believed that Krishna settled here with his people after fleeing the wrath of Jarasandha at Mathura. Thousands of pilgrims visit the temples at Dwaraka, especially on Krishna's birthday, Divali and Holi. Though parts of some temples belong to the Solanki period, most of the towns architecture dates only from the 19th century, when Dwaraka was developed as a popular religious centre by the Gaikwar rulers. Among the numerous shrines and rest-houses two temples, now much renovated, are of particular importance". The Rukmani temple, originally built in the 12th century or sometime later, consists of a sanctuary on a stepped plan and a columned *mandapa* with later infill walls and a dome like roof. The wall panels of the sanctuary are mostly defaced. The superstructure has many turrets rising above the wall projections, where part of the original ornamentation survives. The high basement, balcony seating, *mandapa* columns and sanctuary doorway are all finely carved. The Dwarakadhisha temple seems to have been originally constructed in the twelfth century and renovated and rebuilt in the sixteenth century. Traces of the twelfth century are seen on the walls of the sanctuary. There is a tower, with a height of 165 cms., added probably in the sixteenth century. The multi-storeyed *mandapa* with richly modeled columns has a succession of open balconies on the exterior, each with seating and overhanging eaves". Excavations in the island of Bay, Dwaraka have revealed evidence of occupation going back to the period of the Indus Valley civilization which flourished in the second millennium BCE.

Jain and Buddhist Monuments

As said earlier, Gujarat state abounds with numerous sacred sites of the Jain faith. There is a 13th century Jain temple at Bhadreswar, the seaport of Gujarat. The sanctuary and attached *mandapa* of this temple stand on a courtyard surrounded by small shrines. These subsidiary shrines are capped by towers which reproduce on a smaller scale the clustered scheme rising over the principal sanctum. The elaborate mouldings of the basements, the niches of the walls and the mesh of arch-like motifs covering the towers are all typical features of the evolved western Indian style. The complex is entered through a double-storeyed gateway. This seems to be a later addition with Islamic arches, geometric ornamentation on the balconies and parapet, and domes above. Junagadh was the capital of Gujarat during second and fourth centuries under the Kshatrapa kings. Many monastic complexes dating from this period were excavated into the rocks in Uparkot, the old citadel. These rock-cut monuments were associated with Jain or Buddhist faiths. There is a Jain complex of the second century, called Babapayara caves. Numerous cells and columned *varandahs* opening of rock-cut courts comprise this Jain complex. One of the chambers is large and apsidal ended. There is another rock-cut complex used by the Buddhists. It is dated back to 3rd-4th century CE. Small square cells are arranged on two levels, connected by a winding staircase. They surround a number of excavated courts. Six richly carved columns on the lower level have garlands over pot-like mouldings at the bases; groups of figures, in a defaced condition, appear at the capitals.

The Girnar Mountain which rises to the height of 900 metres from the ground level is a sacred site of the Jains. Girnar was an important religious centre from the 3rd century BCE onwards as indicated by the

inscriptions on a boulder beside the path at the foot of the hill. These record the edicts of Emperor Asoka, as well as the proclamations of the later Kshatrpa and Gupta rulers. The hill is completely surrounded by ridges. Gateways, shrines and tanks have been built at various points along the principal path that leads upwards to the central peak. "Tejpala and his brother Vastupala have often been called the "Medicis of India" because of their extensive patronage of art and architecture in favour of the Jains. These two wealthy laymen are credited in epigraphic and literary sources with the building of numerous Jain monuments, a few of which survive, including a triple-shrined temple of Vastupala at Girnar". This temple known as Mallinatha temple was erected in the 13th century. Though it has been much renovated, the building preserves portions of the original basement mouldings, wall niches and overhanging eaves; subsidiary clustered towers are positioned at the corners. The corbelled domes of the *mandapa* are typical of the Solanki style. A trio of fifteenth century temples at Girnar is largely reinterpretations of the Solanki style. "On a rocky shelf at a height of about 650 m is a group of sixteen Jain sanctuaries; the largest is dedicated to Neminatha. The principal temple of Neminatha stands in the middle of a rectangular court surrounded by a colonnade with seventy chambers. The passageway around the sanctuary and the adjoining *mandapa* follow a stepped plan. Few of the original mouldings and sculptures have survived; the clustered tower is a later addition. The *mandapa* is roofed with a pyramid of miniature pot finials. The decoration displays the elaborate detail typical of the Solanki period, particularly the corbelled dome over the central bay". At the summit, on Goraknatha peak, is a dilapidated shrine dedicated to the goddess Ambika. Several Hindu shrines line the path.

Kumbharia is one of the great Jain centres in Gujarat. Five Jain temples at this site date from the Solanki period. All these temples were built of marble. Each temple consists of a sanctuary that adjoins one or more columned *mandapas* with projecting porches. They stand in the middle of rectangular courts surrounded rows of miniature shrines; the entrances to the courts are usually multi- storeyed gateways with balconied porches. The Mahavira temple built in c. 1062 CE has a well proportioned sanctuary and tower of the clustered type capped by an *amalaka* and a pot finial. The adjoining *mandapa* is roofed with a pyramid of miniature *amalakas*. The doorways and columns are finely carved with seated Tirthankara and yaksa and yaksi figures. Many large panels depicting scenes from the life of the Tirthankaras are also seen here. Sculptures of dancers, musicians, elephant and horse riders and flying *vidyadaras* are also found in this monument. The Shantinatha temple, built in c. 1082 CE, closely resembles the Mahavira temple both in plan and design. The pillars and brackets within the *mandapa* are elaborately decorated. There are scenes of teaching of the Tirthankaras surrounded by divinities, men and animals. There is a votive pillar, within a miniature shrine of later addition, covered with miniature sculptures of seated Jinas. The Parsvanatha temple, erected inc. 1105, is somewhat larger than the above mentioned two temples. It exhibits the evolved form of the Solanki style. The pillars, lintels, doorways and ceilings are richly carved. The evolved Solanki style is indicated by the sharpness of carvings on the pillars, beams and ceilings of the Neminatha temple built in c.1134 CE. The *mandapa* and the entrance porch of this temple are two storeyed structures.

Satrunjaya is one of the largest Jain centre in India. "According to local tradition, Adinatha, the first Tirthankara, visited the hill several times and the first temple was erected by his son Bharata. The Jains believe the hill to be particularly holy because Pundarika, the chief disciple of Adinatha, obtained enlightenment here. Numerous temples occupy the twin summits of Satrunjaya hill, which rise about 600m above the plain; the hill is approached from the town of Palitana, which lies 2km to the north". Most of the temples here are grouped together in fortified enclosures or tuks. They are all named after their founders, usually wealthy merchants, and have elaborate gateways and corner bastions. Most of these temples are not earlier than the sixteenth century. The notable among these temples are the Adinataha temple, NandisvaraDvipa, Vallabhai temple, Motisah temple, Adisvara temple, etc. The Adinatha temple is the central monument of the Kartharavasituk. Quadruple Tirthankara images housed in the sanctuary are approached through four entrance porches. Over the sanctuary rises the slender curvilinear tower. The Ajitanatha temple at Taranga, built in 1166, is one of the best preserved Solanki monuments. In spite many renovations and white washing the

temple maintains most of its original features. The interior of the temple has finely carved ceiling panels. Another Solanki monument, the Adinatha temple at Vadnagar is completely renovated and reconstructed.

Islamic art

The Gujarat style of Muslim architecture became the largest and most important of the Provincial style chiefly because of its Muslim rulers took great interest in architecture and the people of the province had great artistic traditions. The aesthetic sense of the builders themselves contributed more than anything else to the fine results. The rulers employed skillful native artisans and workmen. For this reason the Gujarat style became the most Indian of all its Provincial modes. The Juma Masjid at Ahmedabad was built in 1423 by Sultan Ahmed Shah I (ce1411-1442), the founder of Ahmedabad. Its open court is 87096 sq.feet in area and its prayer hall contains 256 pillars and 76 pilasters. A Gujarati specialty was the perforated stone screen, nowhere seen in greater brilliance than in the decorative tree motif of the SidiSayyid Mosque at Ahmedabad (1516). During the same period, in Gujarat, illustrated manuscripts of the Jain texts were produced. As Gujarat was ruled by the Muslims at that time, the manuscript paintings of that region was influenced by the Persian art. As both the countries had trade contacts, the painters employed by the Jain traders undoubtedly came into contact with the Persian miniatures. Hence, a mixed painting tradition was evolved which spread to other areas such as Mandu and Jaunpur.

Step wells

There are numerous step wells in Gujarat. The step well, Rani Va (eleventh century), outside AnahilvadaPatan, is perhaps the earliest and most ornate, lined as it is with images in the niches like the walls of a shrine. Its monumental conception and ornate architectural treatment suggest that it also served a ritual ceremonial purpose. The slightly later SahasraLingaTalav has the impressive remains of an intricate network of canals and sluices with bathing steps and shrines. This consists of an elevated podium and two rows of pillars set into a water channel. The MadhavaVav in the Surendranagar district of Gujarat, to a different design and belonging to the thirteenth century, is fairly well preserved but has hardly any sculpture inside. The Mata BhavaniVav in Ahmadabad is named after a small Hindu shrine set into the rear wall of the circular well. The water is approached by a long flight of steps above which rises a sequence of two, three and four storeyed open pavilions. The Dada HarirVav, together with that at Adalaj, is the finest example of the Muslim period in Gujarat. The VikyaVav (12th century) is one of the largest step wells in Gujarat. As in other examples, it also served as a water sanctuary. A long stair case descends to the part circular well.

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