



# HIDDEN JEWELS OF ANCIENT TIMES: A STUDY OF THE TEMPLES OF BENGAL

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## Abstract:

Art of Bengal, which was mainly religious in nature, was expressed through the medium of temples. Brick temples of Bengal (built between 16th and 19th century) forms one of the most distinctive groups of sacred monuments in India. Due to multiple artistic influences acting upon the region during this period the Brick temples of Bengal show wide range of forms and techniques of construction. Hence the temples constitute a coherent series in their architecture and sculpture, characteristically expressed in brick and terracotta. The chronological span also significant coinciding with the emergence of the new Bengali culture. "In fact, the Bengali temples may be viewed as one of the most important manifestations of this regions culture, closely associated with contemporary movements in religion, literature and the arts as well as with broader political, social and economic developments." Due to the political unification and consequent independence of Bengal; a unique Bengali style of monumental architecture was created which was also an expression of the local idioms. "Another important result of this change was the combination of Hindu and Muslim elements as intrinsic part of Bengali culture: thus, Muslim rulers and monumental Islamic architecture, but Hindu revivalism and religious poetry." When Muslims came to India in the beginning of 13th century, under Sikander Shah, Bengal became an independent entity for the first time and for the next two centuries distinctive Bengali culture developed which was evident in literature and architecture of Bengal. In combination with large domes and corner minarets, local characteristics of curved cornices taken from bent bamboo eaves of village huts and indigenous terracotta decoration was added. Structurally also there was a significant shift from the old Hindu corbelling system to Islamic vaults, dome and keystone arches. By the end of the 16th century, a uniquely Bengali style of temples architecture and sculpture had established itself as the Hindu artistic expression of the new social, religious and Cultural Revolution. "The wide range of temple styles embraced elements of both change and continuity, typical in the dynamic but traditionally based Bengali society." Furthermore, the temple decoration depicted the aspects of everyday life of the contemporary society, particularly the ambitions of the temple builders. Clearly temple building was the result of an intense concentration of economic and artistic resources, as well as public means of expressing power. Temples built in the later part of eighteenth century were smaller in size and also had less terracotta decoration mostly having it only on the front façade. This was due to the economic and social change that Bengal experienced, because of the increase in overseas trade.

## INTRODUCTION:

The oldest known temple of Bengal, belonging to the group of the so-called Gupta temples, is the brick temple (mandir) of Balgram (Dinajpur district, Bangladesh), which can be attributed to the Vaishnava sect-but only remains of ruins are preserved. At the same time, the two – also largely destroyed – temples of Mahasthan Gokul (District of Bogra, Bangladesh), which are most likely to be attributed to Buddhism due to the remains of found figures. Both temples have a square floor plan **with an equally square Cella (garbhagriha), which was enclosed by a prostrate dormant and formerly covered handling (pradakshinapatha).** Perhaps from the 9th to the 11th century, but perhaps only much later, several temple buildings were built in the south of West Bengal, which are clearly influenced by the

architecture of Odisha[citation needed]– perhaps the most significant of them are the tower-like temples (deul) of Satdeulia and Raidighi (Jatar Deul), but also the Ichai Ghosh Temple is remarkable.

After the arrival of Islam in northern India, which regarded Hinduism as 'pagan' and 'idolatrous,' many older temples were destroyed and hardly any new buildings were built.[3] In the early 17th century, however, the attitude of the Mogul ruler Jahangir (reg. 1605-1627), as well as political and military weaknesses of the Mughal Empire and the great distance to the courts of Lahore, Agra or Aurangabad exploitative – reinforced with the construction of temples, which represent within the Hindu temple, a completely unique architectural type. Here, the temples in Bishnupur, the ancient capital of the Malla dynasty, as well as the temple districts of Antpur and Kalna, are to be mentioned in the forefront, but also the temple complex of Puthia, Bangladesh, deserve special mention.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Which were the important ancient temples of Bengal?
2. Which ruling dynasties were the founders of such temples?
3. Which regions in particular, in Bengal, are these temples mostly located in?
4. What was the architecture of these temples?
5. What were the materials used in the construction of such temples?
6. How did the temples survive invasions?
7. Who were the invaders of these temples?
8. How were the local people dependent on these temples?
9. Who were the main deities of worship in these temples?
10. Did these temples house any precious jewels or treasures that attracted invaders from different parts?

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To study about the ancient temples of Bengal.
2. The study about the kingdoms which constructed these temples.
3. The architecture and the materials used in the construction of such temples.
4. The regions in Bengal in particular where the temples were mainly constructed.
5. The reasons that led to the invasion of these temples.
6. To study about the Duel temples in particular.
7. The main deities of worship and what materials were used in the construction of these deities.
8. The present condition of these temples.
9. The measures taken by the government of west Bengal to revive its old glory.
10. The dependence of the present population on these temples for their survival.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal by DAVID J. MCCUTCHION talks about Bengal being a land of temples, the extant ones belonging mostly to the late medieval period. These monuments came in for a detailed and systematic study by David J. Mccutchion, who devoted himself to the task with almost a missionary zeal. At the invitation of the Society he delivered and illustrated lecture on 20th May, 1970 before our members who evinced keen interest on the subject. The present monograph is the outcome of that lecture. Though the manuscript was made available to the Society as early as April, 1971 the matter could not be taken up due to David's absence from India till September 1971. However even when the entire text was composed and made over to the author by 20th December, 1971 for scrutiny, the cold hand of death unfortunately snatched him away from our midst on 12th January, 1972. Naturally the work was held up till the proofs, two forms of which could have been corrected by the author himself, were

recovered from the custody of the British Council in Calcutta, who had taken charge of all his belongings on his sad and sudden demise.

Land of Two Rivers: A History Of Bengal From The Mahabharata To Mujib by Nitish Sengupta chronicles the story of one of the most fascinating and influential regions in the Indian subcontinent. The confluence of two major river systems, Ganga and Brahmaputra, created the delta of Bengal—an ancient land known as a center of trade, learning and the arts from the days of the Mahabharata and through the ancient dynasties. During the medieval era, this eventful journey saw the rise of Muslim dynasties which brought into being a unique culture, quite distinct from that of northern India. The colonial conquest in the eighteenth century opened the modern chapter of Bengal's history and transformed the social and economic structure of the region. Nitish Sengupta traces the formation of Bengali identity through the Bengal Renaissance, the growth of nationalist politics and the complex web of events that eventually led to the partition of the region in 1947, analyzing why, despite centuries of shared history and culture, the Bengalis finally divided along communal lines. The struggle of East Pakistan to free itself from West Pakistan's dominance is vividly described, documenting the economic exploitation and cultural oppression of the Bengali people. Ultimately, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971. Land of Two Rivers is a scholarly yet extremely accessible account of the development of Bengal, sketching the eventful and turbulent history of this ancient civilization, rich in scope as well as in influence.

Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal by Pika Ghosh richly-illustrates detail, identifies a radical new style of temple architecture in 17th-century India and relates it to cultural, political, and religious currents of the time.

The Early History of Bengal by F.J. Monahan also illustrates the rich history of Bengal and its temples.

Temple and Legends of Bengal by P.C. ROY CHOUDHURY is an attempt to cover comprehensively the temples of highly developed and cultured area like Bengal demands some knowledge of the cultures of the different populations groups in Bengal along with those of the neighbouring regions, the trends of historical and social development, the routes and channels by which different religious thoughts became diffused, the invisible links that exist between the different parts of India particularly through temples and legends, the influences which they exert upon one another and various other factors. There is common affinity between the temples and legends of one region with another, at a time when communication routes were not well developed, it were the pilgrim centers that brought the different parts of India together in spite of the differences in languages, social customs and cultures. The temples and legends have always had a tremendous integrating influence on the different regions that make up India. They still continue this great mission unchanged despite the various regional peculiarities and the different metamorphosis that they have undergone. The temples and legends of any one region express an inner homogeneity of different religious creeds and thoughts and that could be traced in the temples and legends of other areas. This book which is extremely modest in scope does not aspire to meet the demands of a specialist. It is only an introduction and is meant for the interested layman. The reader is recommended to the various books that have been mentioned in the texts if he wants to know more about the factors that have sponsored the temples in Bengal and the temples themselves. Only very few of the temples have been covered in this book.

In the Temples of Forgotten Glory by Sekar Venkataraman the author, who has travelled extensively in his religious tours in south India who got enthused and guided by age old literary inputs, visited some of the "not so widely" known temples located in the state of Tamil Nadu and catalogued the generalities and specialties of those temples. This book is the result of his lifelong mission in this pursuit, his strong acumen to find something unique, special or rare in those temples and his desire to contribute to the society. It will be a boon to the needy persons, religious travellers and students of history, heritage and archaeology.

THE CAVE TEMPLES OF INDIA by JAMES FERGUSSON and JAMES BURGESS The Author Reveals That He Spent Ten Years As An Indigo Planter In India, The Profits From Which Allowed Him To Embark Upon A Second Career As An Architectural Historian. Although He Had No Formal Training, He Became One Of The Most Respected Researchers In The Field, Particularly In Indian Architecture. He Made Numerous Trips Around India In Order To Study And Document Its Cave Temples, Publishing His First Book On The Subject In 1845. In 1880, He Returned To The Subject,

Collaborating With The Archaeologist James Burgess (1832-1916) As Part Of The Archaeological Survey Of India. It Was Fergusson Who First Categorized The Temples, Suggesting That They Could Be Classified Through Reference To The Religious Order And Function. From Kashmir To Tamil Nadu, We Round Up A List Of Eight Strikingly Beautiful Cave Temples Around India That Demand Your Visit. These Rock-cut Cave Temples Aren't Just Rich In History, They Also Boast Of Remarkable Architectural And Artistic Qualities That Will Make You Wonder About The Civilizations That Pre-date Modern India. Perhaps The Most Famous Among India's Cave Temples, Ajanta Is Estimated To Have Been Constructed Between The 2nd Century B.C.E. And 7th Century C.E. Consisting Of About 36 Separate Cave Structures, Constructed In Sets During Different Periods In History, Ajanta Also Features Unique Preservations Of Mural Paintings From Ancient India. Featuring Over 100 Caves, Of Which Only 34 Are Open To Public. Ellora Is One Of The The Largest Rock-cut, Monastery-temple Cave Complexes In The World. Featuring Intricately Detailed And Elaborate Carvings Of Various Religious Figures, These Cave Structures Are Architectural Marvels Unlike Any Other. Illustrated With More Than 150 Maps, Plans And Drawings, This Work Of Impressive Scope Remains Of Relevance To Students Of Indian Architecture And History.

Culture of Bengal Through the Ages- Some Aspects by BHASKAR CHATTOPADHYAY talks about the Bengali culture originated and developed in the land where the growth of Bengali language and literature had occurred. The land was bounded by the Himalayan countries, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan in the north, the Brahmaputra in the north-east, Dwaravanga (Darbhanga) in the north-west, the chain of Garo-Khasia-Jayantia-Tripura-Chattagrama hills extended to the south sea in the east, the mountainous forest-infested plateau of Rajmahal-Santal Pargana-Chhotangpur-Manbhum-Dhalbham-Keonjhar-Mayarbanj in the west and the Bay of Bengal in the south. This land, inhabited by the Bengali speaking people, comprised a number of Janapadas in the early period, of which Gauda, Pundra and Varendra lay in the north, Radha and Suhma in the west, and Vanga, Vangala, Samatata and Harikela in the east. The Bhagirathi-Hooghly, in its downward course to the Bay of Bengal, marked the boundary between Radha and Vanga. The Muslims, having conquered North and West Bengal, named the territory under their possession as Lakhawati that had two wings on either side of the river Ganga (Gang) viz. Radha (ral) on the western side and Varendra (Barind) on the eastern side. The Portuguese, having brought coastal Bengal under their occupation in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, referred to Chattagrama as the City of, Bengala. Bengala was most probably derived from Vangala. The Portuguese referred to the people of this country as Bengalas and their language as Bengali. The nomenclature originally applied to coastal Bengal was later used for the entire land stretching from the foot of the Himalayas to the coasts of the Bay of Bengal. The history of the culture of Bengal may be traced from the pre- and proto-historic age. This is evident from the discovery of Paleolithic, microlithic, Neolithic and chalcolithic tools and implements in different parts of the country. While the Paleolithic men in Bengal, as in other parts of India, were at the stage of savagery, collecting food from jungles and leading a community life, the Neolithic men learnt the art of producing food, manufacturing potteries, igniting fire and cooking their meals and thus reached the stage of barbarism. "Indian type of feudalism" that had its beginning in early medieval Bengal was consolidated under the Sultans of Bengal. Rural economy based on agriculture was the foundation upon which was set up the super-structure of Bengali culture. Agriculture, along with small industries, constituted the self-sufficiency of the village-economy. The extent of landholding determined the social status of the people. The position of poor peasants, the degraded sudras, was reduced to that of serfs. The Serfs and the women-folk were deprived of social and religious rights and privileges. Sri Chaitanya was the first man who started a movement with an objective to establish an equality of rights and privileges. "The Renaissance which we owe to English rule in the nineteenth century had a precursor- a faint glimmer of dawn no doubt two hundred and fifty years earlier" and that is 'Chaitanya Renaissance'. The 'Nineteenth Century Renaissance' in Bengal was infact, the creation of the English-educated middle class people. The cultural development centered in and around Calcutta and had the remotest link with the villages inhabited by the eighty percent of the population of Bengal. The renaissance, of course, reflected the intellectual attainment but failed to bring about any change in the society and economy. European mercantilism touched on the fringes of the society. The predominance of the village-based agrarian economy remained undisturbed. Neither the peasants and artisans in the villages, nor the labourers and small traders living in Calcutta itself, could participate in the cultural progress of nineteenth century Bengal. The regeneration in society and culture did not grow from the roots in the soil. The type of education that the English rulers had introduced in Bengal was for the privileged few. The vast mass of illiterate people wallowed in complete ignorance. In this background, socio-religious reforms or social legislations,

engineered by the upper class in collaboration with the government, could hardly be appreciated by the majority of the people. The emancipation of women and Sudras, that was promised by the reformation movement of Chaitanya, was echoed in the speeches and writings of the nineteenth century Bengali intellectuals. Vivekananda's programme of upliftment of the poor and downtrodden and Rabindranath's experiments in rural reconstruction remain yet to be fulfilled. Tagore's efforts for the revival of rural economy by the application of modern science and technology and also for the regeneration of rural culture comprising folk art, dance, music and literature, with somewhat urban sophistication and refinement, indicate the trends in the twentieth century Bengali culture.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

The name of Bengal or Bangla is derived from the ancient kingdom of Vanga. West Bengal is endowed with distinct natural attractions like an impressive mountain range, virgin forests, a variety of wildlife, verdant tea gardens and much more. The oldest known temple of Bengal, belonging to the group of the so-called Gupta temples, is the brick temple (mandir) of Balgram (Dinajpur district, Bangladesh), which can be attributed to the Vaishnava sect-but only remains of ruins are preserved. At the same time, the two – also largely destroyed – temples of Mahasthan Gokul (District of Bogra, Bangladesh), which are most likely to be attributed to Buddhism due to the remains of found figures. Both temples have a square floor plan with an equally square Cella (garbhagriha), which was enclosed by a prostrate dormant and formerly covered handling (pradakshinapatha). Perhaps from the 9th to the 11th century, but perhaps only much later, several temple buildings were built in the south of West Bengal, which are clearly influenced by the architecture of Odisha[citation needed]– perhaps the most significant of them are the tower-like temples (deul) of Satdeulia and Raidighi (Jatar Deul), but also the Ichai Ghosh Temple is remarkable. After the arrival of Islam in northern India, which regarded Hinduism as 'pagan' and 'idolatrous,' many older temples were destroyed and hardly any new buildings were built.[3] In the early 17th century, however, the attitude of the Mogul ruler Jahangir (reg. 1605-1627), as well as political and military weaknesses of the Mughal Empire and the great distance to the courts of Lahore, Agra or Aurangabad exploitative – reinforced with the construction of temples, which represent within the Hindu temple, a completely unique architectural type. Here, the temples in Bishnupur, the ancient capital of the Malla dynasty, as well as the temple districts of Antpur and Kalna, are to be mentioned in the forefront, but also the temple complex of Puthia, Bangladesh, deserve special mention.

Some of the important temples of Bengal are detailed below:

#### 1.Kalighat Temple

Touted as one of the greatest and most famous religious sites in Kolkata, this holy place is a beautiful spiritual retreat for the people of Kolkata who pray to Goddess Kali with great devotion. Located adjacent to the banks of river Hooghly, this temple is thronged by a profusion of pilgrims every day. Dating back to the 15th century, it is one of the 52 holy Shaktipeeths in the country. Goddess Kali is the Mother Goddess of the city and is worshipped with great dedication and faith by its locals and tourists alike. The sanctum sanctorum houses the statue of the Goddess, composed of black stone, embellished with gold jewelry. The temple attracts thousands of devotees during the holy months of Bhadra, Paush, and Chaitra.



## 2. Jatileswar Temple

This famous temple in the Dooars area of North Bengal is one of the oldest temples in the region. It has religious as well as historic significance. The main temple was built during the time of the Gupta rulers of Bengal around 320 AD to 600 AD. The temple is dedicated to Jatileswar or Lord Shiva. It is under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India. The temple is located about 10 km from the Maynaguri town of Jalpaiguri district. It is situated on the western side of river Jaldhaka close to the highway connecting Maynaguri with Dhupguri. The location of the Temple is about halfway between the two towns. About 8 km after Maynaguri on National Highway 31, you will reach Husludanga crossing. Leave the National Highway and take the right-hand road to Husludanga which is a small village. From here a small village road to your right will take you to the Jatileswar Temple. Despite its historical significance, the Jatileswar temple is not visited by lots of tourists. As a result, the temple compound is not commercialized. There is no entry fee or fixed Dakshina that you have to pay. The temple compound is very large and full of trees. There are two water bodies within the temple complex and the main Shiva temple is located in the middle of a large pond.



## 3. Jalpesh Temple

The Jalpesh Temple is one of the oldest temples of Jalpaiguri, as well as Bengal. It was founded by Bisu Singh, king of Cooch Behar in 1524 AD. The temple was rebuilt by Maharaja Narayan, son of Bisu Singh, in 1563 AD. It was again rebuilt by Pran Narayan in the year 1663 AD. The main attraction of Jalpesh temple is the elephant-shaped archway at the entrance of the temple. A replica of Lord Shiva is seen balanced by the trunks of the elephants. As one enters the temple complex, there are many shops where you can buy 'samagri' for offering puja. The Shiva Linga – called 'Anadi' – is located underground in the sanctum sanctorum. To touch the Shiva Linga, one has to completely lie down on the ground in prostrate position. During monsoons, the entire sanctum sanctorum is submerged in water, yet people come in large numbers to offer their puja here.

The 'Shraboni Mela' or Jalpesh Mela (as it is popularly known) is very famous in the region and attracts lakhs of devotees during the month of Shrabon (July-August). Maha Shivratri is also an important occasion where devotees congregate at this temple.



#### 4. Mahakal Mandir

Located near the Gorumara National Park, Mahakal Mandir in Lataguri is a popular attraction for devotees and tourists alike. Located off National Highway 31, the ambience of the temple is 'surreal' and 'adventurous' to say the least. Tall sal trees surround the array of stones, smeared in sindoor, alta and other puja samagri, the 'deity' at this 'pagan' setting. It is assumed that tourists entering the forest offer their prayers here for a safe journey. A small break in your journey, this ideal setting will also satisfy the photographer in you, apart from your spiritual bearings.



#### 5. Pareshnath Jain Temple

One of the most sacred and visited places in Kolkata for the Jain community, Pareshnath Jain Temple consists of a group of 4 temples, of which the main one is dedicated to the 10th Jain Tirtankhar, Sri Sheetal Nath. Apart from being known for its religious sanctity, the place is also known for its architectural magnificence, the beauty of which is enhanced by mirror inlaid pillars, coloured stones and marble flooring. The temple complex also houses a beautiful garden with colourful flower beds, fountains, a reservoir that is home to some fishes and a mesmerizing stream flowing through it.



#### 6. Dakshineswar Temple

Out of the umpteen holy places to visit in Kolkata, the Dakshineswar Temple, located near the Bally Bridge, on the banks of the River Ganga, is one of the most famous. Spread over a sprawling 25 acres of land, the temple is renowned for its association with the great philosopher Sri Ramkrishna Paramhans. It is believed that this is the divine place of Paramhans' holy enlightenment; the place where he received a spiritual vision and had a holy glance of Mother Kali.



### 7. Belur Math

Belur Math is one of the important pilgrimage places established in 1938 by Swami Vivekananda, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, as a gesture of paying homage to his guru. The temple encompasses a big prayer hall, where you can find the towering statue of Ramakrishna, a beautiful monastery and several temples dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda. The temple was built on the principle of universal faith, which can be seen in its architectural design that exhibits a blend of temple, church and mosque motifs, as a symbol of religious fraternity. Today, the architectural wonder stands as the hub of the world-famous spiritual movement, Ramakrishna Movement, and is thronged by thousands of tourists from India and abroad, every day.



### 8. Rameswara Siva Temple

Builders of most of the 18th Century big eight-roofed (atchala) temples were very rich. One such specimen of undistorted form of traditional atchala temple stands at 51, Nandaram Sen street, Shovabazar. The temple carries five stone plaques. Two atone tablets at the entrance of the temple carry the inscription which reads “ Bengali San 1061 date 30 chaitra” i.e.1655 A.D. Sri Purna Chandra Dey mentions that this date is erratic. It has been estimated from the architectural point of view that the temple had been build sometimes around mid 18th century. “Rameswara Siva Temple” was founded by Nandaram Sen, who acted as assistant to Raalph Sheldon ; Receiver of Revenues in the early decades of the 18th century, still stands on the street bearing the name of its founder.



### 9. The twin Temple of Bhukailash Rajbari

These twin heritage temples were built by Zamidar Joynarayan Ghosal more than 200 years ago in Kidderpore's Bhukailash Rajbari Estate in 1781. The 18-foot-tall Shivalinga installed in the temple has been carved out of a single kashti stone and is believed to be the tallest (I personally think Durgasher Shib at Ramjan lane is the tallest one) Shivalinga of its kind in Asia. The Temples come up soon after Joynarayan Ghosal shifted his estate from Fort William to Khidderpore. The Bhukailash Rajbari here used to sprawl over 150 Bighas. The temples Krishna-chendreshwar and Rakta-kamaleshwar were dedicated by Joynarayan Ghosal to the name of his father and mother. Besides the twin Shiva temples, the estate also houses an ancient Kulodevi Patitpabani Durga temple which was built in 1782. This Durga idol here is made of Astadhatu ( eight metals).



### 10. Ancient Temple at Mahendra Nath Sen Lane.

Not much is known about the structural details of these four ruined, delapidated temples. Stated to have been built by Baburam Ghosh in early 19th Century. There are five temples, build in typical ATCHALA style of the Bengal school, of which three are crumbling. Stucco work, with three terracotta panels at the entrances of the temple. Several smaller terracotta on the upper walls of the temple. The terracotta sculptures are very artistic, the well-crafted terracotta panels on the side wall tell many stories. The social changes are depiction along with stories from the religious texts.



## CONCLUSION:

There were four different styles of construction followed in Bengal.

1. Traditional style
2. Hut style
3. Pinnacled style
4. Flat roof style

### Traditional style

The temples of pre-Muslim period have few remaining evidences from which it can be said that tall curvilinear rekha deul temples were predominantly built. The earliest temple still standing of this group is Siddheshvari temple at Barakar. This type of temples went on developing up to the end of twelfth century, increasing in height and complexity. Examples of later complexity in Bengal are the dilapidated deul still standing at Satdeuulia (Burdwan), Bahulara and Sonatapol (Bankura), or Deulghat (Purulia). Another Equally common group of temples found in Pre-Mughal Bengal are temples with tiered pyramidal tower known as pirha or bhadra deul. A combination of pirha deul surmounted by a rekha shikhara (Rekha deul) temple evolved later. During the earlier and later Hindu period religious changes took place in Bengal which also brought some changes in temple architecture. Hence from the above designs rekha deul continues to be built in large numbers. In their places of the other temple styles appeared two entirely new styles – hut style and pinnacled style. Hut style which was based on imitation of common village house with thatched roof and pinnacled style was closest to the Islamic style. Both these styles incorporated Islamic construction features like domes, vaults, arches etc and also took over the local features that were current on the mosques: curved cornices and terracotta decoration in low relief with prominent moldings.

### Hut style

A simple form of domestic hut is been reproduced in case of hut style temples in Bengal. The struts supporting the gable ends and bamboo framing done for the walls are often reproduced as a decorative feature in brick temples. 'Even the bamboo rafters on which the thatch rests in case of hut may be reproduced on the inner vault and supporting poles on the inner vault. This design is referred to as ek-bangla or do-chala. Two such huts, one as a porch in front of the other as shrine constitute as jor-bangla or char-chala design–Bengal's most distinctive contribution to temple architecture.' Another reason behind the imitation of vernacular hut form for temple

construction was the evolution of local cults that occurred during the same period. Most of the local deities in Bengal which were worshiped in huts, when transformed incorporating the services of Brahmins, were housed in brick temples copying its original form. "This progression from mud and thatch to brick was later continued in stucco and concrete construction. If on the roof of a char-chala temple, a miniature temple is built then the temple is called as at-chala. This typical hut form when imitated in bricks or stone the result is more decorative than utilitarian. For construction of a char-chala roof, a square plan is covered internally by a dome on pendentives to give it a hut shaped roof. In case of at-chala temples on elongated base, the chamber roof extends lengthwise from a central dome on arches and narrow corbelled vaults. Do-chala design is also supported on similar type of large vault with curved ridges and lower edges construction. This type of construction was also used for porches of at-chala temples. Even though jor-bangla design was developed from ek-bangla, examples of latter very rarely exist. 'During the Mughal period do-chala roof should have been taken up by Muslims, and even exported to other parts of India, where it became a prominent feature of seventeenth century architecture of Delhi, Lahore, Gulburg, from where it passed in the eighteenth century on to the palace balconies and garden pavilions of Rajashtan.' In Bengal this form was majorly used for entrance gateways to temple enclosures, or for subsidiary buildings as in case of Madan-Mohana bhoga-mandapa or as it is used in repetitive way around huge Rasamancha built in sixteenth century at Bishnupur.

### **Pinnacled style**

Pinnacled or ratna style design has the same lower structure as in case of chala – but the roof is more or less flat and is surrounded by one or more towers or pinnacles called ratna. The simplest form has a single central tower called eka-ratna, to which four more towers can be added at the corner which is called as panchratna. 'By thus increasing the number of stories and corner turrets the number of ratnas can be multiplied through nine, thirteen, seventeen, and twenty-one up to maximum of twenty-five (panchavimshati-ratna)'. Ratna style seems to emerge in sixteenth century and was a favorite style of a Malla king of Bishnupur.

### **Flat-roofed style**

Apart from the above three types there existed one more minor category with lotus shaped domes or spires called flat roofed temples. In nineteenth century Bengal architecture came under European influence in which structures were domed internally but internally spanned by shallow vault and latterly flat ceiling. Porch resting on two or more pilasters was replaced by clustered pilaster. The arches were cusped and facades were designed as those of chala and ratna designs with plastered terracotta decoration. Common example of flat roofed temple is the sixteenth century Durga dalan built for annual pujas. Over a period of time these temples lost their traditional characteristics, becoming a brick built room similar to those of modern domestic architecture. Innumerable such temples have been built in late nineteenth and twentieth century.

Articulation on the facades of Bengali temples appears to be figurative as well as ornamental. Carvings appear in panels above arched entrances, as well as on surrounding walls, raised bands and pilasters, bases and cornices, columns and arches. There is more uniformity in the decoration of the facades, particularly in their sculptured details, than in the diverse temple types, which were evidently invented by architects with particular flair for improvisation and experimentation.

After the middle of the eighteenth century there was an emergence of neoclassical forms in temple articulation. The popularity for European styles in dress and education among the wealthy Bengalis also found an expression in architecture. Many neoclassical Italianate urban and country houses came up all over Bengal, and many neoclassical details of these houses were imitated in nearby temples, reinforcing the link between religious and domestic architectural traditions. A continuous friezes form one of the most common subject in temple art of Bengal. Subjects

like royal processions, boating, receptions; hunting with variety of animals can be found on temple facades. There was more emphasis on war scenes, warriors with contemporary weapons, music, dancers and instrumentalists. Foreigners too were common subject, easily recognizable by their dress and headgear, weapons they hold or ships they navigate. By depicting scenes from upper strata of the society on his temple, the patron connected himself with this powerful, leisured class of the society. General scenes of village and urban life were showed in a mythological context.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the increasing westernization of wealthy Bengali people, and emergence of Calcutta as the capital of the new British India there was decline in temple patronage. Hence architects and artisans who were always dependant on these local patronage found themselves without work and were forced to turn to other craft such as wood or scroll painting or to give up work altogether. By the middle of nineteenth century terracotta work on the temples were already replaced by stucco work. In twentieth century the traditional art of temples building with terracotta and brick has vanished with the adoption of modern materials like steel and concrete. Today the temples are mostly disfigured and also covered with ugly concrete additions.

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#### KEYWORDS:

Ancient, temples, Bengal, architecture, history, invasions, kingdoms, Hindu, Bangladesh, East Pakistan, Dooars, North Bengal, deities, Guptam empire, Bengal style, Deul style, Atchala style.