



## Original research

# An Analytical Study of Temple Pillars from Cuddaph Region, Andhra Pradesh, India

Barun Mandal<sup>1\*</sup> , A. Anuradha<sup>2</sup> & M. Adinarayana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>3</sup>Retired Professor, Department of Fine Arts, Andhra University, Andhra Pradesh, India.

\*Corresponding author.

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Dept of Music & Dance, Andhra University, India.

### Abstract

Pillars and columns have played a vital role in shaping structural form from ancient to contemporary times. From caves and temples to home decor, pillars have served as supportive elements in the built environment. In the evolution of temple architecture, pillars have become decorative elements that showcase mythological narratives and social structures. As contextual patterns transcend symbols, art becomes a celebration of cultural understanding on pillars and walls. The significance of pillars, created between the fractal and connectivity with eternity through the algorithmic process, brings a logical connection to a new interpretation of devotees' myths, metaphorically. The contributions of *sthapatis* and artisans have developed the entire temple complex and its components. Heavy ornamentation, the use of human and animal figures, and representational iconography will endure, regardless of modern philosophies and ideologies. Pillar components are prominent within their architectural style and are unique. Artisans have proclaimed the linkage with main deities through the use of curves. This research article deals with the pillars of consciousness and their identical narrations, along with their proclaimed measurements from selected case studies, such as the Vontimitta temple, Pushpagiri temple complex, and Siddavatamkota, where various dynasties had ruled, explored their faith and beliefs for the masses, and carried forward religious practices.

**Keywords:** Art & Architecture, Anthropometric, Artist & Culture, Mythology, Pillars, Sculpture

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author/s declared no conflicts of interest.

**Funding:** No funding was received for this research.

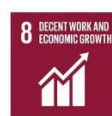
**Article History:** Received: 22 May 2026. Revised: 25 June 2026. Accepted: 26 June 2026. First published: 28 June 2026.

**Copyright:** © 2026 by the author/s.

**License:** License Aesthetix Media Services, India. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Published by:** Aesthetix Media Services, India

**Citation:** Mandal, B., Anuradha, A. & Adinarayana, M. (2026). An Analytical Study of Temple Pillars from Cuddaph Region, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Chitrolekha Journal*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.101.v10n103>



## **1. Introduction**

Temples serve as symbols of spirituality and carry the culture in which epigraphs, chiseled iconography, and traditional culture show the path of contemporary art, design, and cultural practices of the province, with their identical value. Architectural components, elements, design patterns, motifs, icons, narratives, and even the smallest details, such as curves, help communicate with devotees and provide scientific uses of space division. The placement of the pillars at the gopuram and mandapa follows the related mythological narrative of the main deities. Carving stone is not only about the product but also about its background study, which includes artisans' efforts, schooling value, learning methodology, providing hospitality, surveys of materials and their limitations, etc. Material culture developed from the puranas, which were used by the locality. The cultural diversity in India, spanning from ancient times to the present, is not only interconnected among devotees but also forms the foundation of cultural identity through the communication represented by sculptures.

Pillars from the Chola dynasty feature minimal carving on square-shaped (Brahmakanta) pillars in the early stages, later floral, divine figures, and geometrical motifs to showcase the design. Octagonal-shaped (Vishnukanta) and circular (Rudrakanta) pillars have also been carved. Composite pillars expanded in the later Chola period (Centre for Cultural Resources and Training [CCRT], n.d.). The Pandya dynasty introduced Yali pillars to showcase strength and remove negative energy from sacred spaces, and included deities, dancers, and a variety of motifs on mandap pillars (K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, 1929; Brown, P., 1942).

The extension Yali, composite, horse, and musical pillar, with highly decorative and elaborate carving, developed under the Vijayanagara and Nayaka Dynasties. Under the Vijayanagara Dynasty, these pillars were used to create a dramatic effect that emphasised richness (Brown, P. 1965). All representations of pillars followed a tala system derived from the Manasara, idealising the human body with canonical proportion units called *talamana*, which creates a homology between built and human form. The *Shilpashastras* also defined proportions and described the temple as a cosmic body by applying its materialisation.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

The aim was to identify the sociological and cultural structures of the medieval period in the Cuddaph region by referring to its pillars by following the case study throughout the Cuddaph region to find out-

- The identical approaches of representational iconography in several scales and proportions compared to the main deities on pillars.
- The type of precautions did the artist take to show the narratives?
- To determine the development of Dravidian pillars from the Renadu Chola to the Vijayanagara dynasty in the period from the seventh to the sixteenth century CE in the temples from Vontimitta, Pushpagiri, Siddavatamkota, Gandikota and Tadpatri.

- The use of anthropometrical elements and Elements of design to fasten aesthetics in visualisation and communication to the devotees.
- Application of artisan skills and creative thoughts to showcase the cultural identity through pillars.

### **3. Hypothesis:**

By following Shilpa Shastra and Mansara, pillars have been carved to precise measurements, and this curvilinear form is structurally functional, incorporating narratives of mythological stories. It is highly decorative, harmonious, scaled and proportioned, and symmetric, with rhythmic balance. Mathematical knowledge and geometrical understanding, combined with aesthetics, showcase the craftsman's carving techniques and technological skills. Anthropometric knowledge helps to understand the narration in certain places of the level by comparing human proportions.

### **4. Limitations of the study:**

This study is conducted through a case study of pillars at specific sites across various temples in the Cuddaph region. It focuses primarily on visual observation and measurements taken by hand and with a measuring tape. Information on the carvings and their mathematical distribution has been documented. Findings from the case study may differ from those of other parts of Indian temple architectural studies. These studies excel in qualitative and quantitative analysis of artistic determinants and cultural implications, but are inherently limited by the difficulties associated with analysing ancient and immobile artefacts.

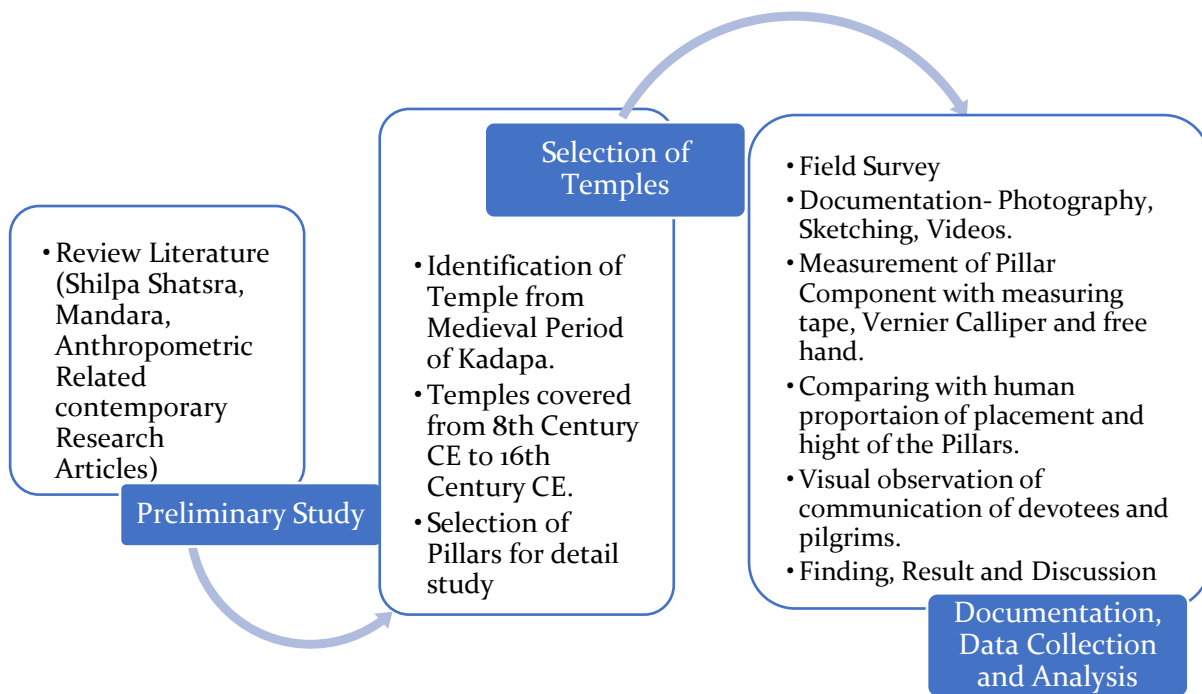
### **5. Study Areas and The Pillars from Temple Architecture in Cuddaph**

Primary data were collected through field studies, hands-on documentation, and a collection of collective manuscripts. The Cuddaph architectural form and components influenced the Vijayanagar pillars and architectural structures. From the 15th to the 16th centuries CE, five-part and three-square block pillars, as well as composite pillars, were developed (Verghese, 2006). Yali and horse pillars, as well as figural sculptural pillars, appear from the same period under the Vijayanagara dynasty, especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries CE. The pillars are extraordinary for their intricate workmanship on hard granite and the variety of colours. Reliable materials were used by the guild or artisans to carve in detail, which were more identical to connect. al to connect.

### **6. Methodology**

Alongside field surveys and digital resources, the methodology for analysing anthropometric features and artistic craftsmanship in the curvilinear pillars of the Cuddaph region adopts a comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis. Using digital heritage documentation techniques (Usharani Bhimavarapu, 2025), high-resolution imaging and geospatial validation are

employed to accurately capture the structural details of the pillars. Feature selection is conducted using advanced algorithms such as Ant Colony Optimization, which ensures the identification of significant morphological characteristics pertinent to craftsmanship and design patterns. The quantitative analysis of pillar dimensions and curvature employs statistical methods akin to those used in anthropometric studies (Manoj Tiwari and Noopur Anand, 2020), including principal component analysis and cluster analysis, to categorise and interpret variations in curvilinear forms. These techniques facilitate an understanding of the nuances of craftsmanship and regional stylistic differences. Furthermore, digital tools such as augmented reality and geographic information systems (GIS) are integrated to visualise and document the spatial and aesthetic attributes of the pillars, thereby enhancing heritage conservation efforts. This methodology emphasises a multidisciplinary approach that combines digital imaging, computational feature selection, statistical analysis, and spatial visualisation to systematically analyse the artistic craftsmanship embedded in the curvilinear pillars, contributing to both cultural heritage preservation and scholarly understanding of regional architectural artistry (Usharani Bhimavarapu, 2025).



**Figure-1. Methodological Approaches of conducting the study**

## 7. Theoretical Background and Scholarly Perspectives

Sculptural forms are transformed through iconography with various flavors, including human, animal, bird, symbols, shapes, and patterns. Carving the granite stambha attracts artistic attention and creates a ritualistic space connected with devotees and the stories under the Vijayanagar dynasty and Dwarpalika are common in the column. (Michell, 1995a). Some of the pillars are covered with Ramayana and Mahabharata along with individual compositions with separate blocks on monolithic stone. According to Mansara, pillar measurements depend on the adhistana, where pillar heights are  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $1\frac{3}{4}$ , or two times higher than the base and also spoke of twelve

types of verities pillars. The latter twenty sections of *Mansara* specified the dimensions of sculptural representations with the direction of anthropoid forms and vastu kala, and the last fifty sections with architectural apparatuses (Acharya, 1933). The thickness of a pillar is two to four times the breadth of the pilaster, where three to six angulas consist for a pilaster or wall-pillar (Acharya, 1933) (Ojjevaar, 2007a). Circular, square, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, sixteen sided- these are the six forms of pillars but also half cut pillars still exist at Indranatha Swamy Temple, opposite to Pushpagiri village and bank of the river Penna, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh (Ojjevaar, 2007b).

In his book *Measurement and Proportion in Hindu Temple Architecture*, Michael W. Meister argued that proportion and dimension were essential principles in the planning and construction of temples. He maintained that temple architecture was governed more by proportional systems than by absolute dimensions, which are deeply linked with ritual and symbolic perceptions (Meister, M. W. 1985). According to the *Kashyapa Shilpa Shastra*, the comparative standards of pillars and their components, such as bases, capitals, and shaft sizes, are determined by gradual tapering systems. The manuscript states that the upper portions of pillars should reduce proportionally towards the base to maintain structural and visual harmony (*Kashyapa Shilpa Shastra* n.d.).

The size of the structure determines the type of building materials used during the various construction phases. It also helps establish the proportions of the temple's dimensions. These standards also take religious considerations into account. The six types, also known as *Ayadivargaa*, are *Aaya*, *Vyaya*, *Yoni*, *Tithi*, *Vaara*, and *Nakshatra*. The *Acharyas* use these to determine the correct orientation and dimensions of the structure. The *Silpa Shastra* texts united art, aesthetics, geometry, spirituality, and craftsmanship into a coherent architectural philosophy. Their study revealed the connection between temple decoration, iconography, spatial geometry, and symbolic meaning. (Kalla, A., & Thakuriya, K. 2024).

This influence was also adopted from the later periods of the Chalukya and Hoysala ethnicities. From two blocks, three block pillars were transferred to standard pillars. Monolithic granite was curved on all sides. According to Dr. Uday Dokras, the Vijayanagara pillars were a blend of designs from the Chalukya, Pandya, Hoysala, and Chola dynasties. *Vyalas* were used in passages to protect gods and temples. and temples (D Uday, 2014).

The overlapping curves on the monolithic stone were composed of round pillars, lamp pillars, composite pillars, and double pillars, among others, with the best (Kumar, 2018). The characteristics of musical pillars from Hampi still exist in Tadpatri, Andhra Pradesh, and hippogryphs. Without hippogryphs, the pillars were curved from all sides. Temples were the main centre for studies, teaching and learning; curricula filled with grammar, astrology, sacred texts, Vedas, Puranas and Epics, devotional chanting, singing of hymns, music, dance, which built a community educated and devotional, and these were apart from the educational institute (Michell, 1977). Numerous authors, researchers, and historians have worked in detail on temple structure, measurement, proportions, and mythological approaches. In addition to field surveys, contemporary scholars focus on digital analysis, helping to revisit and find ways to construct these religious structures and to interpret sastra with skill. Fractal geometry, symbolic presentation, religious beliefs, and rituals have a greater impact than construction (Shapes , Patterns and

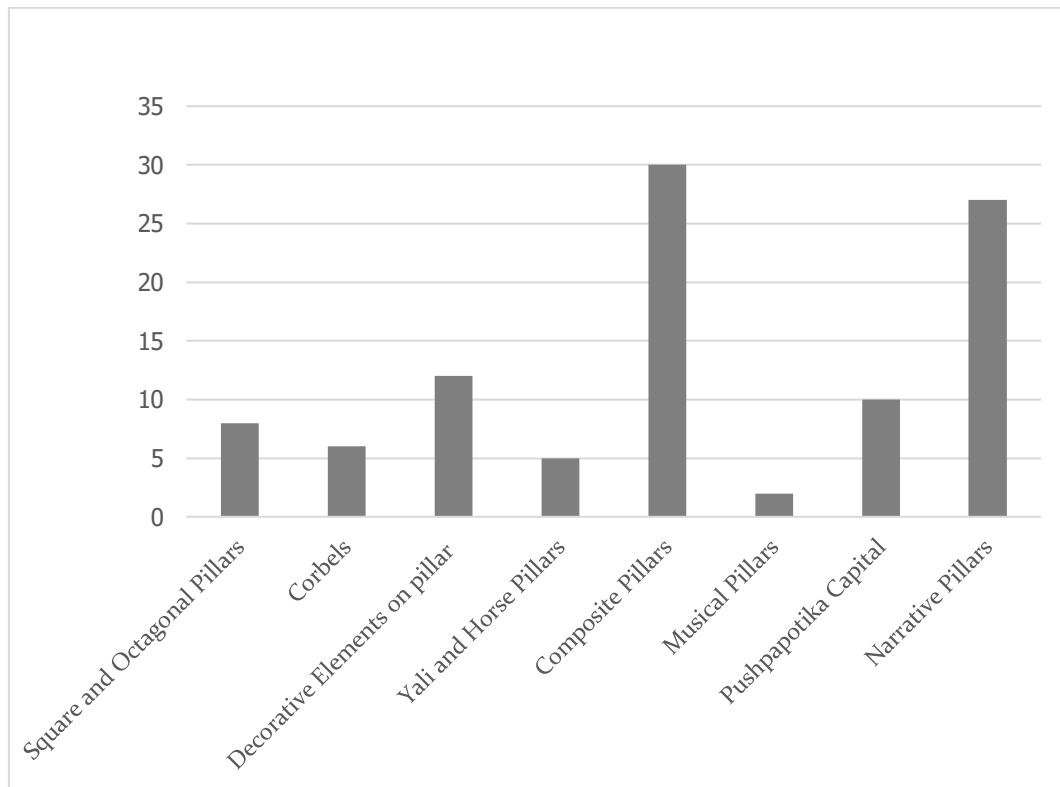
Meanings in Indian Temple Architecture, 2018). Iconographic tactics on the sculptural panels on pillars and walls endeavour to exhumate precisely the societal and ethical issues that create countenance not only in stone but also in viewers' minds, out of respect for the original context. Human–animal relations not only as cohorts in war or peace but also as prey in cultural contexts. (Morrison, 2001).

## 8. Findings and discussion

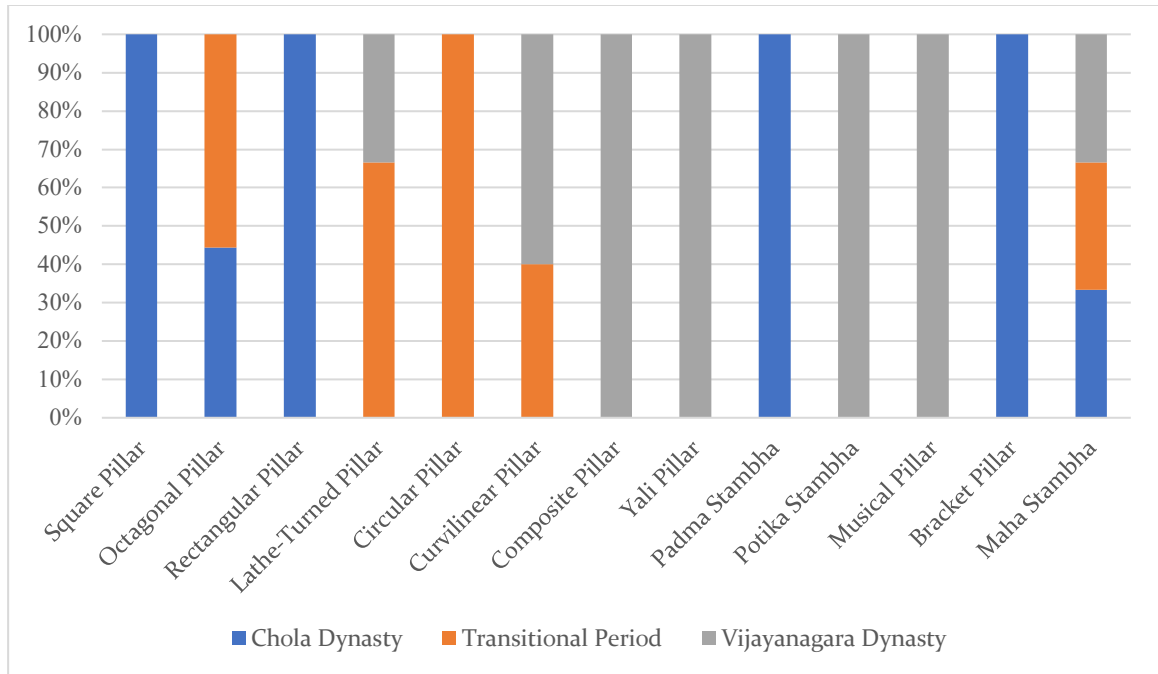
After a case study of Hindu temple architecture from the Cuddaph Region, which falls within the medieval period, and given the current geographical and political bifurcation of the region by district, the findings are summarised in various ways by counting placements and pillar types, and by identifying the particular dynasty in individual temples.

### 8.1 Forms of Pillars found in Cuddaph Region up-to medieval Time Period

Types of pillars in temple architecture from the Cuddaph region up to the 16th century show a variety of pillars and columns, each with its own uniqueness and uses. Carvings on the base depict mythological stories, following the shastra and relating to an anthropometrical approach. Figure no. 2 indicates the variety, whereas figure no. 3 provides specifications for individual temple complexes from this district.



**Figure 2: Types of pillars at temple architecture in Cuddaph region, Andhra Pradesh.**



**Figure 3: Percentage of variable pillars in temple architecture from Cuddappah region.**

| SI No | Name of The Pillars | Sanskrit Term    | Characterization of Pillars                                 | Dynasty                        | Found Areas                                     |
|-------|---------------------|------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| 1     | Square Pillar       | Chaturasa        | Plain Square Shaft with Simple Molding                      | Early Chola                    | Pushpagiri, Vontimitta, Nandalur                |
| 2     | Octagonal Pillar    | Ashtasra Stambha | Eight-sided shaft with decorative bands                     | Chola, Transition Vijayanagara | Pushpagiri, Siddavatam                          |
| 3     | Rectangular Pillar  | Ayatasra Stambha | Minimal carvings with rectangular section                   | Chola                          | Pushpagiri Temple complex, Vontimitta, Nandalur |
| 4     | Lathe-Turned Pillar | -                | Symmetrical form with highly Polish                         | Transitional to Vijayanagara   | Pushpagiri, Vontimitta                          |
| 5     | Circular Pillar     | Vritta Stambha   | Polished Rounded Shaft                                      | Transitional Periods           | Devuni Kadapa, Pushpagiri                       |
| 6     | Curvilinear Pillar  | Vakra Stambha    | Bulbous middle, rhythmic contours                           | Vijayanagara                   | Pushpagiri, Devuni Kadapa                       |
| 7     | Composite Pillar    | Kumbha Panjara   | Multiples small pillars attached with having gap in between | Vijayanagara                   | Vontimitta                                      |

|    |                              |                    |  |                       |                                     |
|----|------------------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 8  | Yali Pillar                  | Vyala Stambha      | Yali Sculpture carved with high relief and gigantic size | Vijayanagara          | Vontimitta, Gandikota               |
| 9  | Lion Pillar                  | Padma Stambha      | Lion Projections on Pillar                               | Chola to Vijayanagara | Trikuteswara, Vontimitta, Gandikota |
| 10 | Bracket Pillar               | Potika Stambha     | Supported Beams with highly Ornamental Brackets          | Vijayanagara          | Vontimitta                          |
| 11 | Musical Pillar               | Saptaswara Stambha | Musical Tones while Struck                               | Vijayanagara          | Early Vaishnava Temples             |
| 12 | Pillar, Based on Lotus Shape | Padma Stambha      | Lotus Medallion base and Capital                         | Chola                 | Tadipatri                           |

**Figure 4: Description of pillars on Temple Architecture found from Cuddaph Region**

## 8.2 Evolution of Pillars in Siddavatamkota, Vontimitta and Pushpagiri Temple Complex and Tadpatri

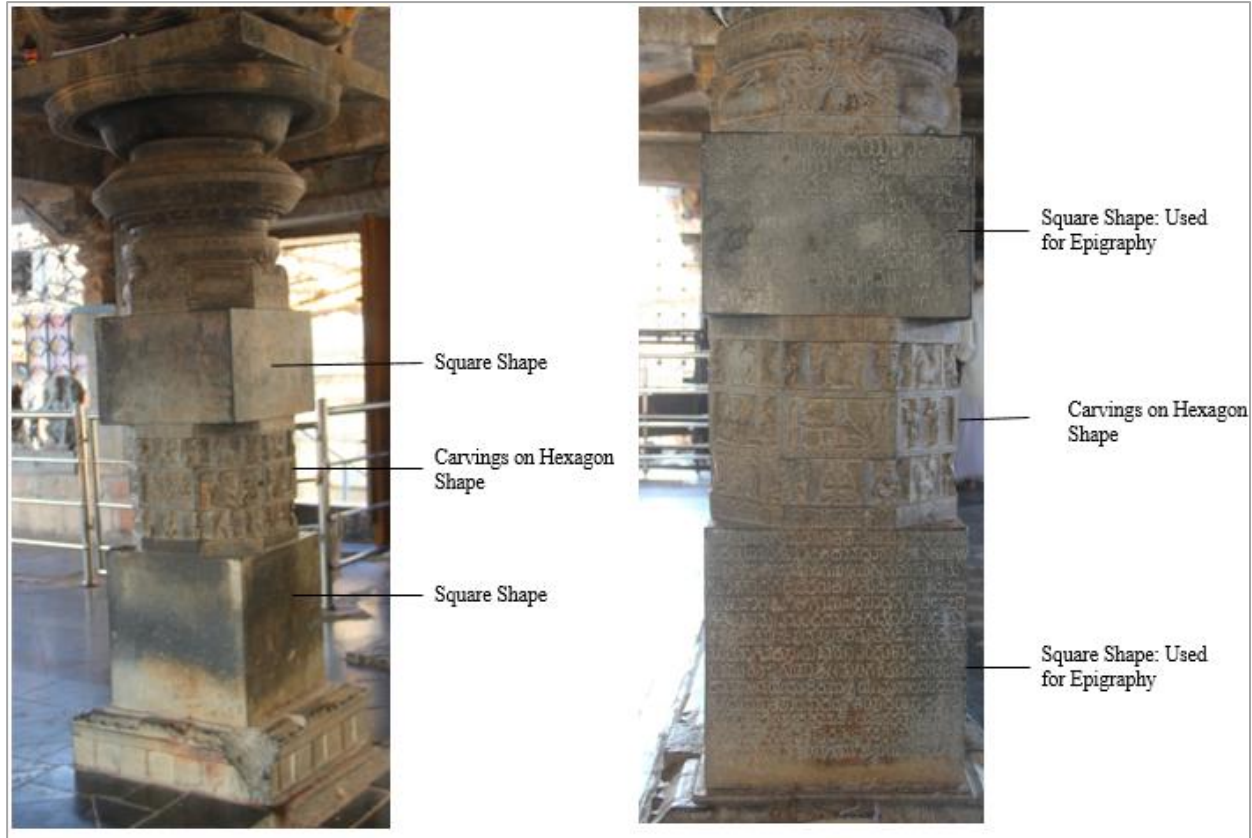
In the Vijayanagara empire, yali pillars were introduced in the Kadapa region, and some still exist in the Vontimitta and Siddavatam temple areas. The word “yali” derives from Sanskrit and Tamil for “fierce monster,” a well-known form in late medieval South Indian temple architecture, where animal figures, such as elephants and lions in a victorious pose, are incorporated into pillar structures, mostly to evoke anxiety and admiration. From the Nayaka dynasty to the post-Vijayanagara period, the yali emerged as a decorative element, typically rising two to three metres in height, with a wide mouth, protruding eyes, and a rider with a sword or bow, considered a protector or shield against threats.

### 8.2.1. Types of Pillars and Narrations

Pillars are primarily structural supports, found in *garbhagriha*, *antharala*, *mandapa*, and *gopurams*, whether freestanding, attached, or monolithic, and in various shapes, such as round, square, projected square, triangular, or octagonal. Pillar types include Yali from the Vijayanagara style, among others. Pillars are classified by geometrical shape and divided into many stages. Chalukya pillars depict stripes on cylindrical forms, whereas later Chalukya pillars use square and round chakras. Square areas are used for inscriptions or epigraphy, and chakras are rarely functional in a circular way. Pillars stand in front of the *garbhagriha*, belonging to the main deity, where mythological stories related to the main deity are placed. Epigraphical information, such as donations, the king’s name, the time period, and village or area names, is embossed. Some areas are covered with flora, fauna, animals, birds, and anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometrical representations.

### 8.2.2. Pushpagiri Temple Complex, Cuddaph

The Pushpagiri Temple complex features multidimensional pillars spanning the Chola to the Vijayanagara dynasties. The combined geometrical shapes of the mixed pillars not only support the weight of the ceiling but also connect with eternity.



**Figure 5: Pillars from the Pushpagiri Temple Complex. (Source: Author)**

The Vijayanagara Emperors contributed to the Chenna Keshava Swamy temple at Pushpagiri, where the yali pillar is not noticeable, whereas the Pallava, Renadu Chola, and Yadav dynasties contributed shaped-based pillars. Each of the approximately two to four pillars standing in front of the main deity depicts a story. To convey these narratives, artisans chose the hexagonal or octagonal section, situated in the middle of the pillar, and left the remaining square shape empty or used it for epigraphy. The main temple complex at Pushpagiri consists of twelve pillars dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Shiva, and Uma Maheshwar.



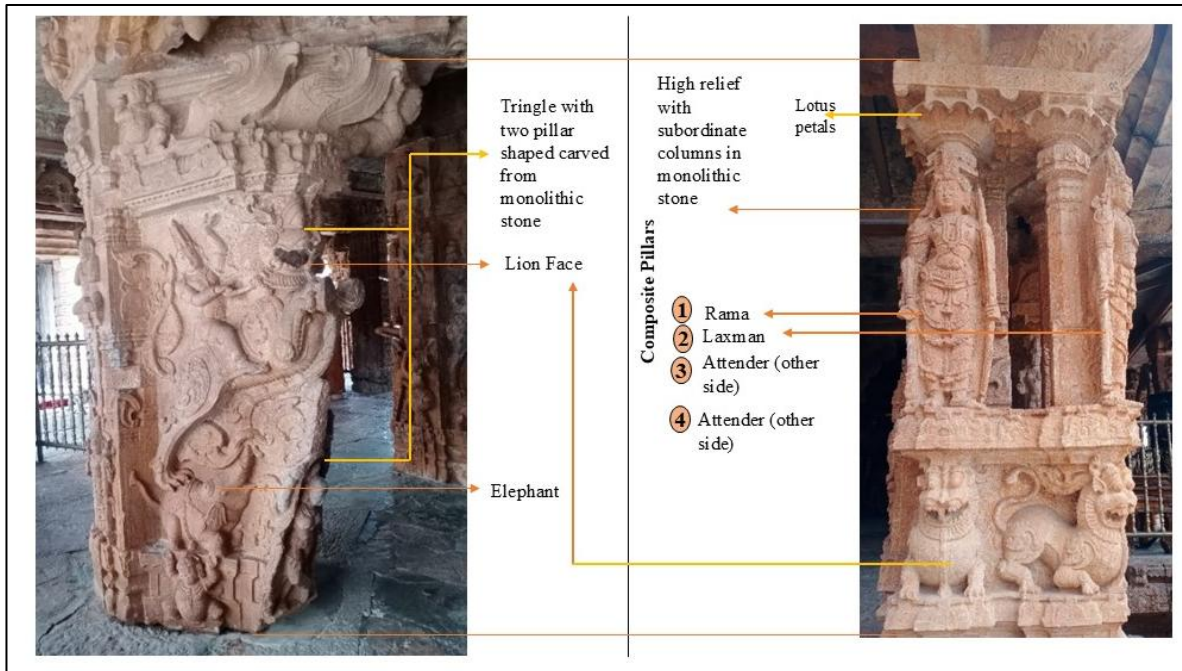
**Figure 6 & 7: Pillars from the Pushpagiri Temple. (Source: Author)**

Each of the four pillars is carved with a related narrative story featuring the main deity. For Lord Vishnu, Anantashayana Vishnu is depicted in the centre with a Naga, and Brahma is shown seated on a lotus, framed by a pattern. The avatar of Vishnu, Narasimha, is placed on the other side (Fig. 3 and 4). In the *mukhamandapa*, there are twelve pillars carved with detailed narratives and artistic skill. Harmony and rhythm bring movement to the surrounding spaces, which are accessible to devotees as well, enabling them to connect with spirituality.

On the other side of the Pushpagiri Temple complex are three main temples: Trikueswara, Indranatha Swamy, and Vaidyanatha Swamy. As it was built by the Cholas, there is a variety of pillar representations. The mahamandapa at the Vaidyanath shrine comprises 16 pillars arranged in two squares. Meanwhile, the Indranatha Swamy Temple has 12 pillars, and the mukhamandapa is supported by 16 pillars. The Trikuteswara temple was built around 1255 CE and features a nandi housed on a pedestal supported by four pillars. Only a few of the 108 sivalings that once filled the Pushpagiri temple complex remain. Inscriptions and highly polished carvings, up to 6 feet high, extend to the joining portions of the columns.

### **8.2.3. Konda Ramaswamy Temple, Ontimitta/ Vontimitta. Cuddaph.**

The Vontimitta temple is dedicated to Lord Rama and is known as the Konda Ramaswamy Temple, with narratives related to the Ramayana and Avatars. Pushpapotikas capitals hold the rhythm of the pillar capitals, and three types of pillars have existed for a long time, such as Chitrakhanda, consisting of three-square parts with a measurement of approximately one foot each, placed alternately on the shaft over a base. Pushpapotikas, virakhanta, phalaka, padma, tadi, Kumbha, and lasuna covered the polygonal parts. A lady seated on a lion, coming out of the frame, was an addition to Chitrakhanda. The third type of structure was placed inward with a gajasimhavyala rider. The variety of subjects portrayed through relief sculptures, including those in yali pillars and animals at the corners in mandapam called madhyarangeradapam or Ranga mandapam, consists of 32 pillars, Avatar, Venugopal, vyalas, devotees and dancers.



**Figure 8: Composite Pillars depicting Rama and Laxman from the Vontimitta Temple. (Source: Author)**

The second row on the same side featured many figures, including *kumbha panjara* on *bhittistsmbha*, seated Narasimha, Kaliyamardanakrishna, seated Vishnu with his consort, and Balakrishna. Balakrishna in a dancing pose, Narasimha in a yogic posture, rishis, female attendees, Sridevi, Bhudevi, Vaishnavi, and Govardhan were placed on the south façade of the mandapam, while Garuda/Anjali mudra, seated Ganesha, *vyalas*, lady musicians, and geometrical motifs were in the second row. The inner row showcased the artisans' skill in curving, while following the mould provided by the shastra. The posture and thickness of each were important in conveying the identity of the particular icon, such as Sridevi in the *Tribhanga* pose, standing and seated Vishnu, Shalavanjika, and many figures at different scales. Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita were placed in the bracket figures of the pillars that stood on the outer edges of the *mahamandapa*.

The (A, 1990) architrave with huge struts of Vishnu. The marvellous four pillars centralised the ankana and supported the architrave with huge struts of Vishnu. Central filled with latapatras and bekibhairava figures. Panel frames carry Anantashyana Vishnu, Gopala, Rama and Sita, Lakshmana, Lakshmi Narasimha and Rati Chitra, sages and devotees, etc., and lotus covers the ceiling with four concentric circles. Three cubical parts alternating with polygonal parts with a strong base of the pillars. Three cubical parts alternating with polygonal parts with a strong base of the pillars. Seated Vishnu, standing Vishnu with four hands, vyalas, Kaliyah daman, etc., were placed in the northeast pillar; Devi, Vanaras, Beki-Bhairava, devotees, Gopala, Rama, Lakshmana, rishi, maharishis were placed in the southeast pillar. The northwest pillar belongs to Vishnu, Narasimha, Balakrishna, seated devi, cows, geometric pattern, floral design, etc.

#### **8.2.4. Siddavatamkota (courtyard), Cuddaph region**

Most of the existing pillars from Siddavatamkota belong to the Vijayanagara dynasty, with several yali pillars set up at Vontimitta following suit, whereas Pushpagiri is different from the other two. Before entering the demolished king's palace area, both sides are filled with yali and square pillars. Avatars like Kurma and Narasimha, along with narrations from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, have been showcased on pillars. The detailed carving of flora, fauna, and design elements brings aesthetic appeal to reach out and connect with the dynasty, artist, and their skills. (Udaykumar. S, 2019). A slide outcast of the Cuddaph,

Dwarpalika on a column at the Chintala Venkataraman complex and Ramalingamswera Temple at Tadpatri are softer, with a super curve and body carving, and with jewellery and hairstyles, bringing the artisans' connection with soul stone and devotees' connection with narrations and attentions before entering the temple. The pillars are one-of-a-kind, following the Vijayanagara style, apart from the gopuram.

#### **8.2.5. Arrangements and Narrations on Pillars in detail**

Narrations on pillars emerge from their fractal geometry and scientific approaches. The space division is formulated from square to rectangular to circle, each connected with its divine spirituality and guiding the deities towards edification.

- According to George Mitchel, author of *The New Cambridge History of India*, 1.6: *Architecture and Art of South India-Vijayanagara and the successor states*, mentioned some of the pillars that belong to Vijayanagara are less complex compared to the later Chalukya period, especially the three sections.(Michell, 1995b).
- The representations of animals in art, which proportionately meet the human need for animal contact, lead to tangible intimacy with natural monarchy.
- The use of fractal geometry with mythological narration on a pillar through the implementation of symbolic concepts to inherit both.
- Sthapatis developed temple architecture with due respect to the provided rules, along with the deity and sculpture. Some of the small-scale relief sculptures not only communicated but also brought balance to the pillars.



Figure 9, 10 & 11: Square, Yali & Composite pillars on courtyard from Siddavatamkota (Source-Author).

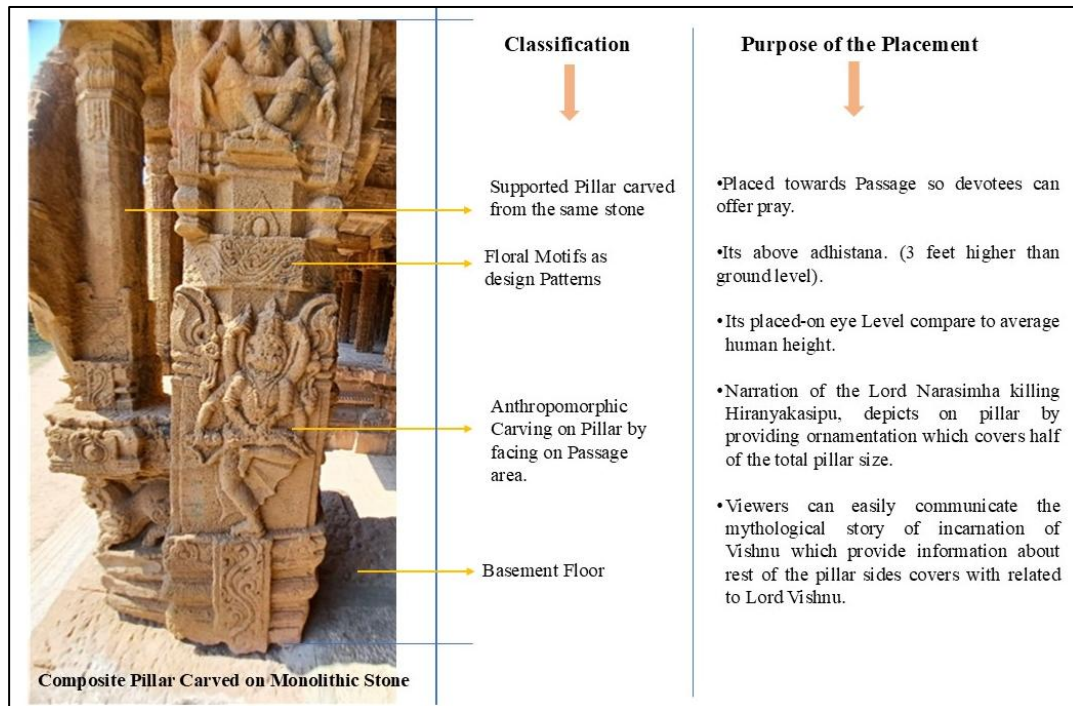


Fig-9: Composite pillars of Narsimha at the courtyard of Mandapam of Srimad Siddavatamkota (Source-Author).

## 9. Significance of The Animals on The Pillar

Pillars define temple space, creating volume, light, and sound, whether inside or outside. Two pillars define the entry or passage, bringing movement and barriers. Animals also define the meaning of using them in the proper place; for example, a lion defines an open space. Horses carry the identity of a dynasty, and elephants are used to show power as well as the belief in goodness. Etc. According to Andersen and Bochicchio, all animal-inspired forms and topics are increasing in contemporary art practices (Andersen & Bochicchio, 2012). Animal themes on the pillars are often common to represent them in a mythical and realistic manner, and eccentric *yali*, ithyphallic beasts, lion bodies with humans, hooks, and coiling tails are also counted. Animals are clearly defined with riders, detailed weapons, and costumes (Michell, 1995a).

The representation of animals' ranges from cave paintings to sculptures and then to iconographical forms, which evolved in parallel with human development. These aspects were also carried forward by the dynasties and transformed from realistic to abstract for communication and narration. The resemblance of the Vijayanagara dynasty, followed by the Chola and Pandya, fulfils the aspect of Dravidian-style art and architecture (Thakur, 2013). Yali pillars, known as Hippogryphs Pillars, are weight-bearing and have an animal's head with a refined necking, a *kumbha* with elegant curves, a wide abacus, and heavy brackets on the capital to hold the balance (Kumar, 2018). The hybridisation of mixed animals, such as lions, horses, and elephants, conveyed power and strength, adding aesthetic appeal to the pillars. Pillars with horses and riders bring more elevation to create the volume and connect devotees (Udaykumar. S, 2019).

The power of purity, peace, and joy in construction radiates from its specific, measurable proportions. Scale and proportion not only bring perfection to construction but also provide harmony and rhythm by encircling all incongruities and transforming to visualize the details of the architecture. The purpose of a proportional classification is not purely equilibrium but also to manifest a sense of consistency and synchronisation among the fundamentals of the sanctuary as a whole. Proportional synchronization of design is of utmost importance in the construction of a temple, as mentioned in Mayamata. If it follows a mathematical system, there will also be precision in the cosmos (D Uday, 2014). Hoyasala sculptors strictly follow the measurements in vital aspects of deities and sculpture with a standard unit of measurement.

## 10. Artisans' skill and limitations

'The real craft of stone carving is a 'visual song' that cannot be planned or repeated because the vibration of the stone itself tells the carver how it should be shaped. The carver must become one with the stone, and then the music of the stone expresses itself through him.'- Ganapati Sthapati (Sthapati, 1996). '*Sthapanadhi patihy yasmay tasmay sthapaty ruchyate*'- He, who is empowered or entitled to do design and contractions is Sthapati.(Acharya, 1934). Dr V Ganapati Sthapati, in his book 'Sthapatya Veda', defines the term 'Sthapati'. It is a title used for the traditional design practitioner, builder and sculptor. And Vastu Shastra highly recommends this word at the highest pedestal of "Director General of Architectural Establishments." Modern scholars interpret Sthapati as qualified art and architecture; however, it is more profound than assumed (V. G. Sthapati, 2005). George Michell in his book 'The Hindu Temple An Introduction to its Meaning and Forms'

mentioned artists' value, intensity and their personal interpretation. Artists valued the visible form rather than self-expression and personal interpretation. The artist works as an executor and is guided by sastra to find the forms and expression in all aspects like architecture, sculpture or painting. To approach a highly visible form of sacred images, the artist needs to go through transcendental principles, and the efforts come through stone, wood, metal, or painted images, etc. A palm-leaf manuscript from the thirteenth century mentions guilds, craftsmen, temple builders, and their salaries, rules of conduct regarding the particular project. They functioned as a group called guilds, which were followed by generation to generation, where families depended and acquired knowledge, skills, techniques, and traditions. The chief stone man and the chief image maker coordinated with sculptural and architectural portions, came under sutradhara, whereas sculptors were involved with judging and exhibiting their skill. Several stonemen were associated with cutting stones in size, artisans who transformed fashion into architectural form, and sculptors involved with finest chisel work. Remuneration was provided on the basis of work, contract-related work, supervising, project superintendent, and the stages of projects. Remuneration was provided on the basis of work, contract-related work, supervising, project superintendent and the stages of projects. Leave facilities were also available during the rainy seasons. Leave facilities were also available in rainy seasons. If there were any internal disputes or delays in completion or delivery of materials, there were officials who punished and fined. If there were any internal disputes or delays in completion or delivery of materials, there were officials who punished and fined. Availability of hospitality provided, like a doctor for the injured, barbers, men for refreshment for workmen who worked with a chisel, an additional squad for providing water, oilmen for torches and lamps during the night. Patrons appointed the experts, who were involved in calculating building axes, designing the alignment and four-sided lines which controlled the carving, grinding and polishing materials, pigments, and coloured preparation for paintwork. A group of artisans led by a master craftsman worked on the sanctuary and outer walls, whereas the design and composition of panels were worked out by a single artist. (Michell, 1977).

## 11. Conclusion

The religious significance, definitions, meanings, and uses of pillars have long been documented, from ancient to medieval and into the contemporary period. Their shape, materials, and curving treatment showcase historical continuity, and the shadows cast by the medieval pillars of the Cuddapah region of southern India reveal the rich mix of architectural and sculptural ethnicities that emerged during the Chola to Nayaka dynasties. These are among the foremost components of temple architecture, used to showcase the imperial ambitions of royal culture. The innovative tendency is purely visible in their types, forms, and complexity, which respond to spatial division and light resources, including the *pradakshina* path for devotees. The significance of pillars in the Cuddapah region moulded the visual identity by enhancing the magnificence of mandapa, compound walls, courtyard, and piety, transforming knowledge from one to another by visualising sculptural panels and the ideology of holy places.

Further, the details of pillars may be studied by observing the placement of panels, people's aesthetic reactions, and comparative studies of epigraphical and sculptural pillars and their placement, alongside strategies of conservation.

## Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the Archaeology Survey of India (South Zone) for permitting them to document the temple and the temple stakeholders, priest, and devotees for providing information and help to visualise. Author uses AI for the development of language improvement.

## References

- Acharya, P. K. (1933). *Architecture of Mānasāra: Translated from the original Sanskrit*. Oxford University Press.
- Acharya, P. K. (1934). *Indian architecture according to Śilpaśāstra and Mānasāra*. Oriental Book Reprints Corporation.
- Andersen, K., & Bochicchio, L. (2012). The presence of animals in contemporary art as a sign of cultural change. *Forma: Revista d'Humanitats*, 6, 12–23.
- Bhimavarapu, U. (2025). Enhancing cultural heritage documentation with AI and computer vision. In *AI applications for cultural heritage* (pp. 77–100). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-0204-1.ch004>
- Brown, P. (1942). *Indian architecture: Buddhist and Hindu periods*. D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Company.
- Brown, P. (1965). *Indian architecture: Buddhist and Hindu periods*. D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Company.
- Centre for Cultural Resources and Training. (n.d.). *Chola dynasty (FAQ)*. Centre for Cultural Resources and Training.
- D. Uday. (2014). *The pillars and maṇḍapa of Hindu architecture*.
- Gurumurthy, A. (1990). *Sculpture and iconography: Cuddapah district temples* (1st ed.). New Era Publications. [https://ia601900.us.archive.org/17/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.162125/2015.162125.Sculpture-And-Iconography-Cuddapah-District-Temples\\_text.pdf](https://ia601900.us.archive.org/17/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.162125/2015.162125.Sculpture-And-Iconography-Cuddapah-District-Temples_text.pdf)
- Kalla, A., & Thakuriya, K. (2024). Interdisciplinary outlooks on Śilpaśāstras: Integrating art, aesthetics and spirituality. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(ICETDA24), 393–399. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.iICETDA24.2024.1333>
- Kashyapa Shilpa Shastra study*. (n.d.). Wisdom Library. Retrieved June 25, 2026, from <https://www.wisdomlib.org>
- Kumar, M. (2018). Pillars (*Stambha*): The supportive elements of Hindu temple. *International Journal of Current Research*, 10(6).
- Meister, M. W. (1985). Measurement and proportion in Hindu temple architecture. *Artibus Asiae*, 46(4), 248–258. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3249613>
- Michell, G. (1977). *The Hindu temple: An introduction to its meaning and forms*. University of Chicago Press.

- Michell, G. (1995a). *Architecture and art of southern India: Vijayanagara and the successor states*. Cambridge University Press.
- Michell, G. (1995b). *The New Cambridge history of India: Vol. I.6. Architecture and art of southern India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morrison, K. D. (2001). Coercion, resistance, and hierarchy: Local processes and imperial strategies in the Vijayanagara Empire. In *Empires: Perspectives from archaeology and history* (pp. 252–278).
- Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. (1929). *The Pāṇḍyan Kingdom*. Luzac & Co.
- Oijevaar, K. J. (2007a). *The South Indian Hindu temple building design system: On the architecture of the Śilpa Śāstra and the Drāviḍa style*.
- Oijevaar, K. J. (2007b). *The South Indian Hindu temple building design system: On the architecture of the Śilpa Śāstra and the Drāviḍa style*.
- Shapes, patterns and meanings in Indian temple architecture*. (2018). <https://doi.org/10.12691/ajcea-6-5-6>
- Sthapati, G. (1996). *Temple of space science* (S. P. Sabharathnam, Ed.; 1st ed.). Vastu Vedic Research Foundation.
- Thakur, P. (2013). Interdependence of animal and men in the 14th-century Vijayanagara Empire as represented through sculptural reliefs. *Bhatler College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3, 9–18.
- Tiwari, M., & Anand, N. (2020). An anthropometric study of young Indian men for bottom wear sizing. *International Journal of Forensic Engineering and Management*, 1(1), 24. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJFEM.2020.109207>
- Udaykumar, S. (2019). A study of art and architecture of Avudayar Kovil Temple of Pudukkottai District, Tamil Nadu. *Art Style / Art & Culture International Magazine*, 1, 101–116.
- Verghese, A. (2006). Temple pillars: Their evolution and style under Vijayanagara and its successors. In N. Rao (Ed.), *Sangama: A confluence of art and culture during the Vijayanagara period* (pp. 29–81).

---

Barun Mandal, a research scholar in the Department of Fine Arts at Andhra University, India, has completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts in Painting, and is currently pursuing his PhD in Fine Arts. His areas of interest include heritage, art and architecture, design and art aesthetics, and the history of art. Apart from research, he is also involved in teaching. His books, 'Juxtapose in Art & Design' and 'Ancestry Dilemma - A Dilemma between Heritage and Self', provide knowledge on parallel visual thinking and aim to bring together contemporary practices from ancient times to the present, offering a dynamic way to think and see. Along with several awards and exhibitions, he has published and presented articles in peer-reviewed journals on national and international platforms.

---