



EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSAL SACRED SPACE IN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract: This Research Aims to create concept of a universal sacred space by studying different perspectives of Architecture and spirituality. This Research begins with explaining worship spaces and Its characteristics, which looks into the religious and cultural richness by means of understanding forms, symbolism that defines sacred spaces. An extensive examination of the architectural characteristics that set worship spaces apart serves as the exploration's starting point. This study examines the spiritual qualities of places of worship. The intricate use of light, music, and space in these settings to evoke emotions such as transcendence, wonder, and reverence is shown. Additionally, it looks at how houses of worship design a setting that supports communal worship, prayer, and meditation in order to foster a deeper connection with God. It also looks into where and how did this worship start. Religion and spirituality have an enormous, lasting effect on people's lives everywhere, sometimes in positive ways and sometimes in adverse ways.

This research aims to provide inclusive sacred space for all mankind. The aim is to create spaces with similarities of five major religions i.e., Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. This study of similarities in all religion is done by researching on existing religious spaces and its case study experiences and perspective of different people about religion.

IndexTerms - universal sacred space, communal worship, forms, five major religions, symbolism, spiritual qualities.

Aim: The aim of this study is to analyze the characteristics of different religious worship places and find similarities between them to create the concept of universal sacred space.

Introduction

This Research aims in investigating how cultural norms, religious traditions, and historical contexts affect the creation of sacred spaces in the study of architectural components in various religions. Religious architecture often shows the interaction between people and the divine and acts as an external representation of a community's beliefs and ideals. Different religious traditions have left a lasting impression on the architectural and the surroundings, influencing the aesthetic and spiritual experience of worshippers and guests alike from ancient civilizations to contemporary society.

Ancient people figured out the difference between what satisfied their hunger and what uncertain them. Collecting information that helped in survival like Water, Shelter, Stone Tools and Fire in their Minds. They began drawing inferences about the globe while imagining themselves to be in the center of a flat earth. They thought they might acquire an animal's spirit by eating powerful animals. When people started settling down and understood the power of stars, to tribute them they started to build temples – Bowed down to worship them, they believed that worshipping them would bring them closer to infinity. Depending on their understanding people worshiped stone, tree, animals, humans.

The History of different religion in ancient days spans thousands of years with lot of religious beliefs and practices. In ancient human society, religious beliefs were very common like people worshipping nature, animals, ancestors. As civilizations developed religions emerged with gods and goddesses. Mesopotamian cities emerged around 4000BCE. Overtime it became center for trade. It was marked by rich culture of literature art, and science.

One might consider the sacred as the complete opposite of the profane. Hence, a sacred space is one that was designed to allow people to create the references to a shared location from their usual daily lives. Sacred Spaces are places for worship, practices of faith, meditation, and remembering. Whether enclosed or not, they are locations where people have congregated since the dawn of time to experience a transcendent, supernatural, or divine power. Humans search for their spirituality and consider the meaning of life in sacred spaces. The major life events, including as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death, all take place at this area in the presence of the divine. It is also a place of commitment, including commitments to values, marriage, family, and community.

Some of the most spectacular and lasting monolithic structures in the world are found in sacred areas. Each and every one of the world's religions and cultures has developed a different and distinctive technique to communicate with God, and each one is just as successful as the others. this study identifies the similarities in the nature of their experiencing spaces, just as the various religions have similarities in their teachings, despite the disparities in the shape and architecture of the sacred spaces of the various religions. The character of the five main world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism—and their spaces are examined in the parts that follow. A Universal Sacred Space is being designed using the discovered commonalities.

1. Characteristics of Worshipping places

Religious architecture is a complex form of elements that efficiently combine cultural identity, spiritual symbolism, and communal utility. Religious architecture has a millennium-long history that reflects the development of human spirituality. This architectural tradition includes a variety of styles, each with distinctive qualities associated with distinct religions. Icons and symbolism play a crucial role; sacred motifs and figures adorn structures to communicate deep spiritual meanings. The way that religious buildings are laid out spatially creates a sense of reverence by separating sacred from secular areas. The skillful blending of sound and light produces multisensory experiences that deepen worshipers' spiritual connection. Stained glass windows, sculptures, and frescoes are examples of decorative elements that give religious stories and figures life.

2. Characteristics of Buddhist worship places

The Buddha made numerous trips across northern India to spread his ideas and gather adherents. Sacred places include Buddhist temples, also referred to as viharas, pagodas, or stupas. distinct nations and areas may have quite distinct Buddhist temple designs and characteristics, reflecting regional cultural traditions and historical influences while incorporating essential components that are in line with Buddhist teachings.

Each branch of Buddhism has its own form of architecture depending on the social, environmental, and cultural conditions unique to that branch. Regardless of the particular architecture, the temple is always a representation of majesty and sturdiness. The Buddhist temple is where devotees of the religion pray, study the Buddha's teachings, meditate, and chant either collectively or privately. Buddhist temples can be single buildings or substantial groups of buildings arranged in a sacred enclosure.¹² The majority of temples are situated in breathtaking natural settings (figure 3). If there are no natural features on the location, the temple's precinct is used to develop gardens and water features.

The sequence of rooms and spaces from the entry to the sacred precinct leading to the shrine, which serves as the destination of the pilgrimage and is where the Buddha statue is located, make up the main components of temple architecture. The sizes of the spaces we travelled through and the various degrees of ornamentation, with the sanctuary having the most symbols and ritualistic objects.

The path leading from the precinct entrance to the shrine is a metaphor for the path to enlightenment; it might be direct, indirect, or circumbinary. All additional activities are located on the sides of the straight walk that leads visitors from the entrance to the sanctuary. On the approach to the sanctuary, the worshipper can enter via the circulatory path after travelling along a number of smaller paths that pass via various locations and entrances on the indirect path. The gateway, the bodhisattva hall, the meditation hall, courtyards, and gardens are among the locations seen on the way to the main temple. The visitor experiences a variety of impacts as the lighting and height/volume of the space change along the journey. The main sanctuary, which is where the journey ends and where it begins, has the tallest roofline and most volume.

The most noticeable feature of the temple is the main sanctuary. It is both the biggest and most ornately adorned area. An altar, statues, musical instruments, a place for offerings, candles, and incense is all present in the sanctuary. The altar, which is located in the sanctuary's back center and contains a statue of the Buddha, serves as its focal point. The statue is substantial and lavishly adorned typically carved in stone or in gold. On either side of the statue are the gongs, drums, bells, and other instruments used during worship and prayer. Rows of worshippers are seated in front of the altar on the ground, carpets, cushions, or kneeling pads.

The numerous areas of the temple are all planned in proportion to one another and are connected by particular modules. Buddhist temples are frequently composed of both wood and stone. The perimeter of the temples is lined with covered verandas and enormous overhangs.

The sanctuary, which contains the primary deity and serves as the focal point for prayer and meditation, is the culmination of a hierarchical development of spaces with straightforward geometry. Along with water and religious symbols, nature is a significant element. The monumental temples are built differently from regular constructions. They radiate an environment of tranquilly and tranquilly that is ideal for reflective meditation.

3. Characteristics of Christian worship places

Churches and other religious buildings frequently include distinctive architectural designs and customs exclusive to Christianity. Stained glass windows, Gothic and Romanesque architecture, and basilicas are a few of the architectural elements frequently seen in Christian temple architecture.

A church or chapel is the name of the Christian house of worship. Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, Seventh-Day Adventist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and Unitarian Universalist are just a few of the diverse denominations that have emerged within Christianity during the 2000 years since its founding. The many faiths differ in their methods of worship, how they interpret Christian doctrine, and how clergy are used. The places of worship all contain some common characteristics, such as a meeting room with seating, a sanctuary with an altar, lectern, and pulpit, a space for baptism, a music section, and other supporting areas. The planning and design of church spaces underwent significant alterations between 1962 and 1965 as a result of the second Vatican Council. Increased congregation engagement in rituals was the most significant alteration, which required designing the main area such that people could congregate around the altar and moving the altar closer to them.

Church seating arrangements have undergone significant alteration. In the past, the pews were arranged so that they faced the altar, one behind the other. In modern churches, the congregation is frequently seated on three sides of the altar to symbolize that they are no longer just an audience but an active participant, as well as that the priests and ministers are also there.

Large and boasting tall ceilings is the main place of worship. With advancements in building technology, the ceilings can now be virtually any shape or style and are typically vaulted or domed. The lighting is layered inside. Symbolic stained-glass windows let in daylight. Candles and electric lighting are available for extra lighting. The interior of the church is darker and more ethereal than the outside due to the lovely colored light that stained glass windows let in and the harsh glare of the direct sun that they block out. Stained glass is a narrative design component that is also utilized to tell stories about the bible, patron saints, and the neighborhood. Depending on the faith it represents and the saint after whom the church is named, churches vary in their level of decoration and symbolism.

The Christian church stands out from the neighborhood's regular buildings thanks to its larger size and bold facade. It is a structured experience to move from the entrance to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is the most significant area; it is made up of large volumes and symbolic decorative accents and evokes feelings of adoration and silent awe in all who enter.

4. Characteristics of Hindu worship places

Hindus congregate in temples for worship, education, and encounters with the many distinct forms of their gods as well as the formless gods. The Hindu temple has a complicated shape and purpose. It is drawn from the Vedas, the holy books of Hinduism, and has developed through many years. Hindu temples are best situated in picturesque natural settings, places where the gods once lived or may visit; in urban settings where this is not possible, this is replicated within the temple's precinct. The temple's design was inspired by the mandala, a sacred geometric pattern with a grid of 64 or 81 squares that is similar to sculptures that are often constructed of stone. The temple's primary deity is positioned in the middle. Shrine to the other gods is located on the outside squares. Hinduism incorporates mathematics, astronomy, and astrology, all of which are used to position and orient the temple's many components. The temple is always built with its east-west axis towards the rising sun, the source of energy, for the entry. A visitor must pass through several locations on their way from the temple's entrance to the main shrine. Each space's volume and floor level increase as well. The primary deity's shrine is the destination's highest point and journey's conclusion.

The mandapa, a gathering spot, is the area that is just a few steps higher. Compared to the Ardhmandapa, the mandapa is more enclosed and has a lower ceiling. The Garbhagriha, which meaning womb, is the last area. The major deity of the temples is housed in the Garbhagriha, which serves as the sanctuary. The area is the most enclosed and dark. Here, the emphasis is on the god, which is typically intricately sculpted and carved out of stone. The area that is just a few steps higher is the mandapa, a gathering place. The mandapa is more confined and has a lower ceiling than the ardhmandapa. The final part is called garbhagriha which means womb. The garbhagriha, which acts as the sanctuary, is home to the main deity of the temples. The area is darkest and most enclosed. Here, the focus is on the god, who is usually expertly carved and sculpted from stone.

A temple has an exterior that is of colossal beauty, stability, and permanence. A visitor passes through a variety of chambers with shifting volumes, lighting effects, and climbing floor levels on the way to the primary deity. The many areas serve as a bridge between the mundane outer world and the sacred inner world, providing the visitor with time for reflection and a final destination of spirituality.

5. Characteristics of Islamic worship places

A mosque is the name of the place of worship for Muslims. It is the location where Muslim adherents gather to worship together. Mosques differ depending on the environment in which they are constructed. Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam are split. There are

numerous branches of these two sects, including the Ahmadiyya and Boras. All branches of Islam practice the same fundamental prayers, they all adhere to the Koran (Islam's holy book), and their places of worship are comparable. The fact that the worship area is clearly demarcated and that prayer is performed while facing Mecca is the most significant aspect.

Raising the structure above the street level gives it definition from the outside. You must ascend a few steps to get inside. In comparison to the nearby structures, it stands out due to its elevated location and grandiose architecture. Libraries, classrooms, a place for the Imam, the head of the Muslim faith, to live, and visitor lodging are all on a mosque's grounds.

Islam allows for both indoor and outdoor worship. According to the climate, the mosque may be enclosed, open air, or a combination of both. The open-air mosque has a rectangular floor design with a covered colonnaded section on each of its four corners. The enclosed mosque often has a square floor plan and solid walls that are covered in a sizable dome. The building's symmetry and central location are highlighted by the dome, which represents paradise. In the worship, the ceiling is the tallest provides the area a majestic quality and a sense of the sublime. Columns surround the spacious square worship area on all sides.

In the Islamic faith, men and women are segregated during worship. Only men are permitted in the main worship area. Women pray on one side's galleries or on a mezzanine level. Each prayer is offered while standing in a queue towards Mecca. A wall niche known as a mihrab serves as a marker for this direction. To lead prayers, religious talks, and sermons, the imam stands at the mihrab.

A courtyard greets you as you enter the mosque's compound. The mosque's outer walls are typically simple, solid planes without any decorations. The minaret, a visual representation of a mosque and the location where the Imam invites the faithful to prayer, is visible to visitors in the courtyard. People enter the building by an iwam, or gateway, which serves as the entrance to the sacred precinct, from the courtyard. Visitors first walk to a room where they remove their shoes, wash their hands, faces and feet before entering the structure. Before entering the prayer room, which is a clean and pure space, the cleanliness of the body represents the cleansing of the mind. Typically, there is a shoe storage room here.

The mosque's interior is ornamented but devoid of statuary, stained glass, artwork, or other decorative elements. The decoration is completed with the use of geometric shapes, calligraphy, wood carvings, brickwork, and tile patterns. Islam forbids idolatry and depictions of any living thing. The phrases of the Koran and geometric designs are employed as decorative. Islamic architectural features. People can stand in orderly rows facing Mecca thanks to the floor's layout. This is accomplished through the use of floor tiles, carpet patterns, and stone inlay work. The mosque's symmetrical arrangement along its axes represents both the peace and order that characterize the universe as it was created by God.

Islamic elements in architecture. Thanks to the structure of the floor, people can stand in neat rows facing Mecca. Using floor tiles, carpet designs, and stone inlay work, this is achieved. The serenity and order that define the universe as it was created by God are both represented by the mosque's symmetrical arrangement along its axes.

6. Characteristics of Judaism worship places

The synagogue is the name given to the place of worship for Jews. It serves three purposes: prayer, instruction, and gathering.³⁷ A synagogue's floor plan is typically rectangular and always faces Israel. With the entrance on the west and the direction of worship facing east, North American synagogues are constructed on an east-west axis. Typically, windows on the east wall face Israel in a symbolic manner. Typically, there are twelve windows, representing the twelve tribes. The name for the Jewish congregation's venue of worship is synagogue. It is used for gathering, instruction, and prayer. The floor plan of a synagogue is usually rectangular and always faces Israel. North American synagogues are built on an east-west axis with the direction of worship facing east and the entrance on the west. Symbolically, the east wall's windows usually face Israel. There are often twelve windows, which stand in for the twelve tribes.

7. Similarities in worship places

All of the world's religions have unique prayer practices, doctrines, holy sites, and scriptures, yet they all share the pursuit of spirituality as their overarching objective. While the places of worship of different religions often differ greatly from one another, there are a few subtle similarities that do exist.

- I. Their distinctive character unlike vernacular structures, both in form and interior spaces. They are set apart from their surroundings.
- II. Open spaces for gathering people
- III. The approach to the sacred space within the sacred zone is through a planned journey in variety of ways
- IV. Elements of nature i.e., landscape and water bodies are an integral part of the sacred zone inside and outside
- V. Monuments scale and character, different from everyday use spaces
- VI. Sacred spaces have a focal point regardless of religion
- VII. Have special lighting effects integrated
- VIII. Symbols specific to their religion

The scale and design of religious structures, as well as their interior sacred areas, varies greatly from the vernacular. The structures are usually larger than other structures and are meant to be breathtaking. In comparison to other rooms, the sanctuary and the fearful spaces are spacious and have higher ceilings. The religious edifice serves as a marker and identifier for the neighborhood because to its size, shape, and height.

The interior focus is shared by all of the religions' Sacred Spaces. As an illustration, consider the altar in a church, the ark in a synagogue, the mihrab in a mosque, and the garbhagriha/deity in a Hindu temple.

Light is typically employed to draw attention to significant religious components, such as illuminating a god or serving as the object of contemplation, expressing the divine abstractly. Light is a common metaphor for awakening, divinity, the metaphysical, and even spirituality itself. It is intended to set a contemplative attitude that is distinct from both the profane and the fearful surroundings outside. An atmosphere that is truly divine can occasionally be produced by the interaction of light and darkness.

To conclude, the five major religions' structures share the following characteristics: a distinctive character, open spaces, a planned trip to the sacred place, natural elements, an interior focal point, massive scale, unique lighting effects, and symbols unique to each religion.

8. Case Study

8.1 MATRIMANDIR

The Matrimandir was designed by French architect Roger Anger, and later completed by the architect's collaborator, Piero Cicionesi. The design was heavily influenced by the principles of Sri Aurobindo and the mother, the founders of Auroville, who envisioned it as a symbol of human unity and a place for inner spiritual work.

The Matrimandir holds great spiritual significance for Auroville residents and visitors. It is often seen as a symbol of human unity and the pursuit of inner transformation. It's not affiliated with any specific religion and is open to people of all faiths or those with none, making it a place of universal spirituality.

The architecture of the Matrimandir is characterized by its iconic spherical shape and golden exterior. The structure is surrounded by twelve gardens, representing the twelve powers of the Mother or the Divine Consciousness. The Matrimandir does not belong to any particular religion but serves as a symbol of unity, human aspiration, and the search for higher consciousness. The main highlight of the Matrimandir is its inner chamber, known as the "Inner Chamber of the Mother." It is a large, quiet space that serves as a place for individual meditation and contemplation. The Matrimandir incorporates sustainable design principles, including the use of solar power. The central inner chamber is naturally lit by sunlight that enters through an opening at the top of the structure called the "solar urn." The architecture of the Matrimandir in Auroville reflects the vision of its founder, Mirra Alfassa (also known as "The Mother"), who envisioned it as a place for spiritual growth and inner exploration, transcending religious boundaries and emphasizing the unity of humanity

9. Conclusion

This study has explored the characteristics of diverse religious worship places and successfully identified shared elements that contribute to the concept of a "universal sacred space."

The idea that religious architecture could encourage diversity and harmony across cultural and religious boundaries is represented by the concept of a universal sacred space. These kinds of places have the capacity to act as connections for communication and understanding between different religions. They provide a feeling of unity and connection between different religions.

The idea of a universal sacred space is becoming more and more important as religious diversity continues to impact our global society. We can design surroundings that speak to people of different cultural and religious backgrounds and create interaction by accepting and making use of these commonalities in architectural practice and design. This idea develops our knowledge of religious architecture while also advancing the more general objective to create a more secure world.

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