1. INTRODUCTION

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In the discipline of archaeology, monuments in India have so far been investigated largely from the standpoint of chronology or architectural features, and at best in relation to political patronage. In the discipline of art history, the focus has been on the study of styles and schools, through detailed iconographic and stylistic analysis; for the most part the monument continues to be treated as a piece of historical evidence for tracing the development of structural or artistic forms, styles and motifs. In contrast have been studies on the monument and site as manifestations of a deep spiritual experience and a specific religious tenet or dogma. Meanwhile, those interested in cultural history have explored creative literature in regional languages, poetry, drama, the performing arts of specific region in a particular period, usually without relating these either to political history or to data on monuments and inscriptions.

For the devotee — the person who participates in rituals, rites, fairs and festivals — the monument is neither archaeology nor history, nor is it sculptural programming. It is a living presence, and abode of the divine, where physical space and finite time are transmuted to a plane of ceaseless eternal play, here and now as also in the beyond.

How does one grasp the totality of a material phenomenon and a single monument, which works concurrently on many different planes, each valid and yet partial if seen in isolation? It was in response to a recognition of the inadequacy of one-dimensional and single-disciplined approaches that the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts initiated two projects under the general rubric of Kṣetra Sampada. In both projects, the endeavour has been to explore all facets of a particular area, with a temple or a monument at its centre, and to identify the spatial and temporal dimensions of the evolution and development of a regional cultural unit. There could be no better examples of such regions than VaJa in the north and Tañjāvūr in the south. If Govindadeva ji or Kṛṣṇa resides in VaJa and Vyāvāna, Śiva and the liṅgam reign in Tañjāvūr and Bhādiśvara. The two regions or kṣetras have served as places of both convergence and radiation of many movements over many centuries. Major temples have been at the centre of these regions, and these have attained a special status both on account of their architectural grandeur and because of the continued enlivenment of the presence of the divine through a highly sophisticated system of rituals, combined with a wider and more popular calendar of fairs and festivities that punctuate time — daily, monthly and yearly.

Obviously no study of a region can be restricted either to the socio-political history of architectural styles and techniques or to contemporary rites, rituals and fairs. The diverse and multiple dimensions of the monuments and the region form in fact a single unified whole. The encompassing vision, the process of expression and the final artistic forms have to be identified and studied not only singly but together. A necessary prerequisite is the study of the history of the monument as physical form and as the abode of the deity. The architectural monument undergoes changes and modification, so do the rituals and the fairs and festivals. In the case of Govindadeva ji the deity has travelled far and wide. In the case of Bhādiśvara, although the liṅgam is immovable, the monument and the cultural history of the monument and region covers a span of over eight hundred years. The goal of comprehending all these aspects together has been a daunting task.
Understandably, on account of specialization in single disciplines it would be difficult to find a single scholar who could encompass the totality or would have the technical skills of analysing all aspects. A multi-disciplinary team was essential, and some element of aggregation as opposed to integration could not be avoided. Over the last six years, however, in collaboration with the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana in Vrndavana and the EFEO Pondicherry, with Shrivatsa Goswami as the director and coordinator of one project, and Dr. R. Nagaswami as the director and coordinator of the other, it has been possible to undertake a programme of architectural studies and socio-economic investigations.

These have been based on the primary material of inscriptions, land grants, and the sculptural and iconographic programming of the temple, as well as on research and documentation of ritual texts relevant to each temple and systematic studies of the daily, weekly, monthly and annual rites and rituals. Since the culinary arts, the visual arts of drawing and painting, the ephemeral arts of rice flour and mud and paper drawings, the music and the dance and drama are an essential part of the life of the region with the temple as centre, independent but interconnected studies of these are in process. Equally important is the rich resource of human memory, carrying on the traditions in both regions. The people who carry this information in their memories are a link in a continuous transmission of values, content, styles and techniques. Outside the immediate environs of the temple, a variety of artistic skills, crafts, stone and metal work, beads, garlands, costumes, headgear, and much else support and in turn are affected by the temple. Each artefact has a role to play in the reenactment of the ceaseless cosmic drama, be it the rāsālīlā of Kṛṣṇa in Vrndavana or consecration as the kumbha-abhiṣekam of the great liṅgam in Bṛhadīśvara.

The present volume on Govindadeva temple in Vṛndāvana is the result of a seminar jointly organised by the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana. It heralds a series of studies on Vṛndāvana, the kṣetra. As the Editor’s Preface states, the conference brought together scholars from around the world: historians concerned with literary and documentary evidence, other scholars who have been fascinated and puzzled by the temple’s architectural features and yet other artists who celebrated Govindadeva temple as a living presence through performance of the rāsālīlā and dance offering in the great maṇḍapa of Govindadeva ji. It was a rare meeting of scholars with varied backgrounds and areas of specialization and linguistic skills. Each had so far perceived the monument through his or her particular window. Now possibilities of other viewpoints and perceptions was evident both through the presentation of new historical material and also detailed work on the monument. No volume can capture the lively discussions that were stimulated by this meeting. The papers presented in the present volume, however, which have been revised as a result of the mutual interactions at the conference, may be classified under the following groups:

First, essays that look at the architectural features of the monument. These have been a matter of considerable controversy. Some scholars have doubted whether the temple was ever completed, while others have held differing opinions on its subsequent desecration and reconstruction. These essays address issues of style as reflecting political dialogue or syncretism and the evolution of a new idiom of temple forms.

Second, essays that present primary material of great historical importance, such as farmāns from the imperial court telling us of land grants, and records in Persian and other languages that elucidate the history of succession of the Gosvāmīs. Material from Rājasthānī sources also illuminate the adventurous journey of the icon from Vṛndāvana to Jayapura (Jaipur).
Third, essays that deal with the texts of ritual — the bhoga, pūjā, utsava, and śriṣāra of Govindadeva — and also describe contemporary rituals in both Vindāvana and Jayapura.

These three broad sections are woven together in a concluding essay by Shrivatsa Goswami as “Govinda Darśana: The Lotus in Stone”. He identifies six petals of this lotus — the history, the power and politics, the ritual, the architecture and paintings, and the final sixth petal of dialogue (samvāda). The metaphor of the lotus takes us into the structure of the temple and its multilayered meaning, form and technique, and also provides a very meaningful insight into the methodological problems of viewing a monument through a unified vision as well as multiple perspectives.

In the essays of the first group the focus is naturally on the architectural form. As part of the larger project, Nalini Thakur and her team have prepared detailed plans and elevations, measured drawings that highlight the special architectural features of the temple. Precise sectional and axonometric drawings have been drawn, the latter being particularly valuable. The detailed photographs of Robyn Beeche, which form a photographic essay in conjunction with Nalini Thakur’s words, draw our attention to features of the temple that are not readily evident to the visitor. She has held her camera around, in, under, and over every part of the structure, to show us the richness and complexity of its design and construction.

Nalini Thakur’s essay points out the architectural antecedents of the temple, and points out that Mughal architecture of the period was a complex experiment with different forms. The Kacchavāha rulers, beginning with Rājā Bhagavannadīsa, contributed significantly to the building programme of several Vaiṣṇava temples, including this one. Govindadeva temple is a unique expression of the fusion of many streams and a splendid example of a traditional trabeate structural form that retained some of the traditional features — the śikhara (now lost), the bracketed openings and strongly moulded exteriors — but introduced some important elements, most notably the high vaulted arch and central dome, which are apparent departures. What was created was a new kind of ritual space for the performance of the rāslīlās. In addition to describing the features of the temple, Nalini Thakur speculates on what is missing, particularly the lost śikhara and the missing sanctum.

This analysis prepares us for George Michell’s essay on the missing sanctuary, in which he attempts to reconstruct its original place, size, and shape. He also takes us through the history of demolition, modifications and reconstruction of the temple over a period of three hundred years. John Burton-Page’s essay returns to the debate of Hindu-Muslim synthesis, rejecting the idea that the builders consciously set out to synthesize two styles. Nevertheless he recognizes that different architectural styles, both Hindu and Muslim, were available to the builders of the temple, and that many mosques and tombs had already assimilated the Gujarātī style. Taken together, these three essays make it evident that there is considerable scope for further dialogue on the vital issues of completion, incompleteness, precedents in synthesis or otherwise of Hindu and Mughal elements and, of course, evaluation of the work of F. S. Growse in restoring the temple in the nineteenth century. Catherine B. Asher exposes a hitherto less known aspect of Māna Sinha’s (Man Singh’s) contribution as a patron of temple architecture, in the light of various shrines built by him. Taken with the other three essays, it makes it clear that identification of the authentic sources for the emergence of a particular architectural form is itself a complex matter. Many factors play a role and no easy resolutions can be found.

Thus we return to the question of defining a kṣetra, a region, and whether the characteristic architectural features are reliable indicators. Govindadeva temple, with its antecedents and parallels such as the other temples built by Māna Sinha, point
to the active dialogue between patrons and artistic styles both within and outside the region, ranging from Uḍiśa (Orissa) and Bihāra in the east to Gujārāt in the west, yet resulting in a distinctive Vṛndāvana character.

Shrivatsa Goswami’s essay on the iconography and the programme of the sculptural reliefs of the temple draws our attention to the fact that the temple was not merely an experiment in assimilating artistic forms, but was the place and space for arresting in stone the joy and ecstasy of the eternal play, or īlā, of Kṛṣṇa as Govindadeva ji. Panel after panel recreate the īlās of Kṛṣṇa, made more visible here than to the observer standing before the doorway, thanks to the photographs of Robyn Beeche. The pilgrim who enters the temple is familiar with these īlās through scripture, story, and the performance of rāsalīlās in Vṛndāvana. The frozen stone is another suggestive reminder, and the panels then begin to reverberate with life. Although sculptural reliefs of Kṛṣṇa īlās are known elsewhere in Indian temples, they are mostly on the exterior walls and are not within the context of a vibrant living tradition. Here they move inward and enliven the maṇḍapa with their presence.

The essays of this first section gently reveal the dynamics of the interplay of the physical and the psychical. In the last analysis, the temple with its plans and elevations, its dome and mouldings, its motifs of lotus and īlās, provides the space for experiencing the presence of Govinda — Kṛṣṇa — and his companion Rādhā, for the priest, the devotee, the pilgrim and the lay participator, through the daily, monthly and annual rituals in the service of the Lord. The physical plan of the temple, although definable and measurable and finite, is transubstantiated through ritual into the cosmic space of Govinda ji, symbolizing Nitya Vṛndāvana, his divine abode and the eternal arena for the rāsalīlā. The dialectics lie in constructing a physical edifice with the explicit and implicit goal of transmuting the physical element to an emotive and spiritual plane. Although many great monuments of diverse traditions — Buddhist, Jain, Hindu and Islamic (particularly of Indian origin) — have received the attention of scholars either as monuments or as places of pilgrimage or even as milestones of a spiritual journey, few scholars have attempted to comprehend the process of emergence of a cultural concept into a concrete structure, and how the physical structure in turn becomes the place and space for an experience that transcends place and specific time.

The essays of the second group are of a different order. They provide basic information from primary sources, farmāns, land grants, and official records of Mughal and Rājasthānī courts. These are proof of an active interest taken by the imperial power not only in the building of the temple but also in the lives of the Gosvāmīs. Irfan Habib’s essay is an impressive documentation based on the meticulous and diligent work done jointly with the late Tarapada Mukherji. We also get a vivid account of the life of the successive Gosvāmīs and convincing proof of imperial support in G. N. Bahura’s account citing various farmāns and land grants issued by Akbar’s court. It is clear from these that mutual dialogue and support was more the rule than the exception in the sixteenth century. These documents should dispel erroneous impressions created by some that there was only conflict between people belonging to different faiths.

The essays by R. Nath and Monika Horstmann reconstruct the journey of the image from Vṛndāvana to Jayapura. R. Nath narrates the history of the building of successive Govindadeva temples until the image was finally installed in Jayapura. Monika Horstmann gives us additional information about the transportation of images from the Govindadeva temple at Vṛndāvana to Rājasthān, and about the adhikāris (custodians) of this shrine from Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī onward down to Nilāmbara in the eighteenth century. Comparing the Rājasthānī documents that she has investigated with the
Introduction

Persian ones examined by Irfan Habib it is interesting to note the difference of emphasis. Whereas the latter are interested in official decrees and the personal history of the Gosvāmīs and issues of succession, the former are more interested in the safety of the icon, the symbol of the divine.

Illuminating as these essays are, they still leave room for further investigation into the question of the exact moment of the emergence of the yugala mūrti (the divine couple) as an icon to be worshipped. Although the Uḍīśā connection — the gift of a Rādhā image by Puruṣottama Deva, son of Pratāpa Rudradeva — is undeniable, the installation of a representational image of Rādhā continues to be an enigma. G. N. Bahura’s essay pertinently draws attention to the influence of Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda and the role of the Gosvāmīs in installing Rādhā as Āhlādī Śakti of Kṛṣṇa, but this is an avenue requiring much greater research. How and when does Rādhā become deified and why does the yugala mūrti become central to the worship in Vṛndāvana?

We know that the Gita Govinda travelled to all parts of India; in Gujārāt, Kerala, Kārnātaka, Āsām (Assam), and Mahārāṣṭra, the icon of Rādhā did not enter the inner sanctum. It was only in Vṛndāvana that worship of her began, though later it travelled to Manipura and other places. No doubt Caitanya and his followers, the Gosvāmīs, elevated the conception of Rādhā to deity and enunciated the sakhi bhāva, but the transition of a character from the text of the Gita Govinda to its presence in commentaries by the Gosvāmīs, to icon and deity to be worshipped, raises many fundamental questions about processes of deification yet to be investigated in depth.

The essays of the third group deal with the texts of ritual followed in Vṛndāvana and Jayapura. Asima Krishnadasa makes a detailed comparison of the rituals prescribed in the Haribhaktivilāsa of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and followed by Rādhārāmaṇa temple, and the Śrīgovindavāsikadvādaśakam, which relates exclusively to the worship in Govindadeva temple in Jayapura, and clearly brings out the points of convergence and divergence. Both Asima Krishnadasa and Chandramani Singh give vivid accounts of the adornment of Rādhā Govinda on each occasion and the special food to be offered. The paṇicopacāra (fivefold), the daṇḍopacāra (tenfold) and ṣoḍaṇglpacāra (sixteenfold) worship are standard to the system of daily pūjā and special celebrations in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples. Although the fundamental symbolism remains universal, the details vary from text to text and from temple to temple. These two essays, read together, exemplify once again how in fundamentals the texts and the rituals agree, but in details there is vast scope for change and the incorporation of local practice. This is another example of the constant flow of tradition along with change. Dynamics of the frozen and the fluid, the text and practice (śāstra and prayoga) is an aspect of the ritual which has far-reaching ramifications for comprehending Indian traditions in many other spheres. Ritual enlivens the stone, gives it its life and breath so that the stone becomes the living presence of the deity.

These essays will be of great value to those interested in ritual studies. Of late there has been worldwide interest in ritual as a means of understanding the functions and cultural context of statues and sculpture, even where ritual has become extinct. The contemporary practice of pūjā in Rādhārāmaṇa temple, including the entire methodology, sequence and configuration throughout the annual calendar, is meticulously designed to evoke and invoke the deity. Govindadeva temple may well have followed a similar if not identical pattern of sevā (worship).

The wheel comes full circle with this. A conception is articulated in stone; socio-political factors, the vicissitudes of history, play a part; the monument and the ritual undergo changes in place and time. Yet through the very process the eternal is experienced. It is through ritual that frozen stone and image are enlivened, given presence, empowered, and to which the devotee surrenders himself. Time and
place are consecrated in finitude to suggest the experience of trans-time and the infinite.

 Appropriately, Shrivatsa Goswami's essay on the six petals of Govinda Deva temple concludes the dialogue, or one may say brings to a pause the continuing dialogue. It was taken up in a subsequent conference entitled "The Continuing Creation of Vraja," and many of those papers were published in the *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 3:1 (1994). There, as here, the editorial task was challenging. Matters of transliteration and variations of spelling that were decided upon for this volume may disturb some readers, but they will no doubt understand that here also the spirit is more important than the particularities or changing tastes. And the spirit calls for a beginning, to move from a linear to a cyclic approach, from a one-dimensional to multidimensional approaches, so that each discipline will begin to play the role of a particular gopi in the rāsamaṇḍala of Vṛndāvana scholarship.