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## Role of *Sthapati* in *Vāstuśāstra*

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### Introduction

Most of the Indian traditional sciences were the result of the combined observational experiments and precise theoretical knowledge. But when it developed from its scientific to practical phase, the ancient masters foresaw the possibilities of distorted usage and were doubtful about the progress of their scientific achievement. Therefore, they built up their findings on the basis of religious beliefs, which unfailingly grew up into a discipline in the above sciences. Some started practicing the sciences without proper knowledge and used it to cover up their ignorance. As a result it created the impression that Indian scientific thought was superstitious. Indian architecture today has acknowledged the greatness of the ancient science called *Vāstuśāstra*. In *Vāstuśāstra* the *Śilpis* are classified into four. There are *Sthapati*, *Sūtragrāhi*, *Takṣaka* and *Vardhaki* <sup>[1]</sup>. From these *sthapati* ranks first. His caliber presents top to bottom of construction. His imagination fulfills till the completion of the construction works.

### 1. *Sthapati*

The role of a *sthapati* begins with selecting a good site and continues throughout the construction period. A *sthapati* possesses the power of intuition to foresee the interior and exterior aspects of the site. However, a *sthapati's* professional talents are honed when they possess certain essential qualities. These qualities are described in architectural books and are crucial for a *sthapati* to be successful in their profession.

It well knows that the *Sthāpatya-Veda* derived from Atharva Veda. Later this renowned subject is deeply studied by eighteen sages like *Bṛgu*, *Atri*, *Vasiṣṭa*, *Viśvakarma*, *Maya*, *Nārada*, *Nagnajit*, *Viśālākṣa*, *Purandara*, *Bhraṇma*, *Kumāra*, *Nandīa*, *Śaunaka* and *Gaṛga*, *Vasudeva*, *Nirutha*, *Sukra*, *Brhaspati* <sup>[2]</sup>.

The ancient sages are the true mentors of the *sthapati* or architect, imparting essential knowledge and skills. To excel in their profession, *sthapati* must read all books related to architecture and possess the ability to discern various aspects of their work.

For the successful completion of a building, it is essential to have a team comprising of *Sūtragrāhi*, *Takṣaka*, *Vardhaki*, and *Sthapati*. The *Sūtragrāhi*, who is the disciple of *sthapati*, takes care of coordinating the various aspects of construction. The *Takṣaka* is responsible for making all the wooden articles required for the building, while the *Vardhaki* is in charge of the masonry works. However, for the project to be completed successfully there needs to be a tacit understanding and coordination between all the team members, including the *sthapati*.

Vitruvius, a well-known Roman architect, suggested that an architect should possess multiple skills, including ingenuity and a thirst for knowledge. They should also be proficient in writing and drafting, knowledgeable in geometry and optics, skilled in figures, and well-versed in history, natural philosophy, and moral philosophy. Additionally, they should have some knowledge of music, law, and physics, as well as the movements, laws, and relationships of heavenly bodies <sup>[3]</sup>. These words highlight the practical and artistic nature of a versatile *Sthapati*.

*Mayamata*, the South Indian masterpiece, states that the Architect who designs buildings must be a man of quality hailing from a renowned land, and should possess a diverse mix of qualities. He should have a sound knowledge of all sciences, be physically perfect, compassionate, disinterested, free from envy and without weaknesses. Additionally, he should be handsome, learned in mathematics, able to draw and must have knowledge of the entire

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country. He should be generous and not greedy, maintain good health, be attentive and free from the seven vices. A well-chosen name and the preservation of these qualities are also important. Furthermore, he must possess knowledge of the science of architecture to establish buildings effectively [4]. The *Silparatna*, authored by Sreekumara, emphasizes the same characteristics for a *Sthapati* as the *Mayamata* does. The *Sthapati* is considered to be at the pinnacle of Indian architecture, and their concentrated work is incorporated into the art and architecture of different religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Śaivism, and Vaiṣṇavism. Therefore, the masterful techniques of the *Sthapati* are integral to the entire art and architecture of India.

The role of *Sthapati* is indispensable in the field of Indian architecture. He dedicates his life to art and architecture and deliberately neglects his fame. 'The artist is considered an instrument by which things higher and greater than himself find expression in the forms that he creates, whether these be works of architecture, painting or sculpture [5]. With the instruction of the architect, moreover they consider his work as a holy deed of God Viśvakaṛma. The three with Guru called *Sthapati* attains beneficial. This tetra force accepts the guidance of *Sthapati*. Therefore, *Sthapati* shines more with his own talents and effort.

According to the ancient text *Vāstuvīdyā*, the *Sthapati* must possess a comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of architecture. They should be physically perfect, virtuous, kind, and free from envy and competitiveness. In addition, the *Sthapati* should have expertise in occultism, mathematics, and *purāṇas*, as well as possess a skillful artistic ability. They should have knowledge of all provinces and be sincere in telling the truth. The *Sthapati* should have control over their sense organs, be free from illness, and not possess any bad habits or signs of madness. In summary, the *Vāstuvīdyā* provides a detailed description of the various characteristics and qualities that a *Sthapati* should possess [6].

When selecting a site and plot for construction, the *Sthapati* must exercise great caution. It is crucial to avoid placing walls or pillars in the vital parts of the *Vāstupuruṣa*, as this can cause significant trouble. Such trouble may first turn towards the king, causing him to become angry. It may then harm innocent cows and cause destruction to the Brahmins. Finally, it may bring harm to the *Sthapati* and their family members. Therefore, the *Sthapati* must take earnest steps to understand the various segments and vital parts of the *Vāstupuruṣa* to avoid such problems.

## 2. *Sthapati Lakṣaṇa*

स्थपतिः स्थापनार्हः स्यात् सर्वशास्त्रविशारदः।  
न हीनाङ्गोऽतिरिक्ताङ्गो धर्मिकस्तु दयापरः॥  
अमात्सर्योऽनसूयश्चातन्त्रितस्त्वभिजातवान्।  
गणितज्ञः पुराणज्ञः सत्यवादि जितेन्द्रियः॥  
चित्रज्ञः सर्वदेशज्ञश्चानन्दश्चाप्यालुब्धकः।  
अरोगि चाप्रमादी च सप्तव्यसनवर्जितः॥  
सुनामादृढबुद्धिश्च वास्तुविद्याब्धिपारगः।  
स्थपत्याज्ञानुसारी च सर्वकर्मविशारदः।  
सूत्रदण्ड प्रतापज्ञो मानोन्मानप्रमाणवित्॥<sup>[7]</sup>

## 3. *Sūthragrāhi*

The *Sūthragrāhi* (master-craftman) should be proficient in construction techniques using by stone, wood and bricks.

मृत्कर्मज्ञो गुणी शक्तः सर्वकर्मस्वतन्त्रकः।  
तक्षितानां तक्षकानामुपर्युपरि युक्तितः॥

## 4. *Takṣaka*

*Takṣaka* is a sculpture who implements cuts and polishes adequate and subtle objects. The word "Thachan", which is universally known in Kerala, may originated from the word *Takṣaka*.

The *Takṣaka* must be proficient in Mud-technology. Knowledge in mathematics also is required and must be good habitual and strong. He must be willing to do all things without other help. *Takṣaka* should be able to build up structures with soil and other materials.

## 5. The Good character of *Sthapati*

According to Bhoja, the duty of a *Sthapati* (architect) can only be entrusted to an individual of high moral character. A true architect must be free from hindrances such as annoyance, envy, greed, and laziness that could hinder their evolution in this field.

“शिलावान् पूजितो लोके  
शिलावान् साधुसम्मता।  
शिलावान् सर्वकर्माः  
शिलावान् प्रियदर्शनाः॥”<sup>[8]</sup>

Mānasara asserts that the architect is the primary and most powerful figure in the construction of a perfect house. According to the text, there are four divine architects who have originated from the four faces of Brahma - Viśvakaṛma, Maya, Tvaṣtri, and Manu.

## Conclusion

For successful execution of architectural projects in the traditional Indian system, the roles of *Sthapati*, *Sūthragrāhi*, *Takṣaka*, and *Varḍdhaki* must adhere to a clear understanding and mutual respect. The subordinates of the *Sthapati* should maintain faithful obedience to their superiors in accordance with their designated roles, while adhering to the established structure and hierarchy. The conclusion proves that role of *Sthapati* is indispensable in the field of Indian architecture. The life of *Sthapati* is a specimen for modern engineer too.

## End Notes

1. स्थापतिः सूत्रग्राही। तक्षकस्व वर्थकीः क्रमशः
2. स्वेचितकर्मणि दक्षा, ग्राह्यास्ते कारवक्षचतुर्धैति॥
3. भृगुरप्रि वसिष्ठस्व विश्वकर्मा मयस्तथा। नारदो नमजिच्चैव
4. विशालास्वः पुनन्दरः। ब्रह्मा कुमारो नन्दीश शौनको गर्ग एव च
5. Preface by Prasanna Kumar Acharya, p.25 (Architecture of Mānasāra)
6. Mayamata, translated by Bruno Dagens, p.10.
7. The Hindu Temple - An introduction of its meaning and forms, George Michell, p.54.
8. *Vāstuvīdyā* Ch.I,Sl. 12, 13, 14, 15.
9. *Mayamata* Ch.3
10. *Samarāṅgaṇasūthradhāra*, 45.2

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