

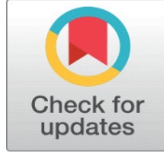
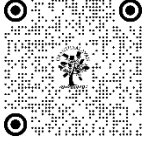


VĀSTUVIMARŚA IN MATSYAPURĀṆA

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of creation, following the primary creation (mukhya-sarga) and the creation of plants and animals (the tiryak-sarga), Brahmā created human beings endowed with intellect. Just as animals require shelter to protect themselves from cold, wind, and other natural forces, so too do humans need a dwelling place. Based on their economic condition, people construct homes according to their means. Although the subject of house construction is mentioned in the Vedas in various contexts, the detailed nature and guiding principles of such construction have been elaborated only in the Purāṇas and related treatises. This specialized knowledge came to be known as the science of architecture — Vāstuśilpa or Vāstuśāstra

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of creation, following the primary creation (mukhya-sarga) and the creation of plants and animals (the tiryak-sarga), Brahmā created human beings endowed with intellect. Just as animals require shelter to protect themselves from cold, wind, and other natural forces, so too do humans need a dwelling place. Based on their economic condition, people construct homes according to their means. Although the subject of house construction is mentioned in the Vedas in various contexts, the detailed nature and guiding principles of such construction have been elaborated only in the Purāṇas and related treatises. This specialized knowledge came to be known as the science of architecture — Vāstuśilpa or Vāstuśāstra

2. MEANING OF THE TERM 'VĀSTU'-

Veshmabhūḥ vāstur astriyām' — says the **Amarakośa**¹ | The term vāstu is derived by analyzing the expression vasanti atra ('they dwell here'), from the root vas (to dwell). According to the grammatical rule vasestun agāre ṇicā (Uṇādi Sūtra 1.15), the suffix tun is applied to the root vas in the sense of a place of dwelling. With the addition of the r-

¹Amarakośa 2.2.119

suffix and applying the grammatical rule *ata upadhāyāḥ* (Pāṇini 7.2.116), the form undergoes *vṛddhi* (strengthening), resulting in the word *vāstu*. The term thus signifies the science (*śāstra*) that emerged to facilitate the construction and conceptualization of houses, cities, and palaces — that is, the organized planning and building of human settlements and structures.

3. PIONEERS OF ARCHITECTURE

It is commonly seen in the Purāṇas that nearly all branches of knowledge were originally acquired by the gods from Lord Maheśvara (Śiva) himself. In the Matsya Purāṇa, beginning from Chapter 252 and continuing over six chapters, various aspects of house construction and Vāstu (architecture) are elaborated in detail. The founders or pioneers of this tradition of Vāstuśāstra are listed as eighteen in number within the Matsya Purāṇa. It is clearly stated there that these eighteen sages received the knowledge of Vāstuvidyā from Nārāyaṇa himself, in his Matsya (fish) incarnation. These eighteen sages are: Bhṛgu, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvakarmā, Maya, Nārada, Nagnajit, Viśālākṣa, Purandara, Brahmā, Kumāra, Nandīśa, Śaunaka, Garga, Vāsudeva, Aniruddha, Śukra and Bṛhaspati

“भृगुरत्रिर्वशिष्ठश्च विश्वकर्मा मयस्तथा।

नारदो नग्नजिच्चैव विशालाक्षः पुरन्दरः ॥

ब्रह्मकुमारी नन्दीशः शौनको गर्ग एव च।

वासुदेवोनिरुद्धश्च तथा शुक्रबृहस्पती ॥

अष्टादशैते विख्याता वास्तुशास्त्रोपदेशकाः।

सङ्क्षेपेणोपदिष्टन्तु मनवे मत्स्यरूपिणा ॥”²

Among these eighteen sages, Viśvakarmā is renowned in the Purāṇas as the divine architect of the gods, while Maya is celebrated as the architect of the Rākṣasas. The earliest praise and reference to Vāstu (architecture and dwelling science) in secular literature is found in the Rāmāyaṇa itself. It is clearly indicated in Rāma’s words that after constructing a new house, one should perform Vāstu-śānti (a ritual for the sanctification of the dwelling) before taking residence. After building a new *parṇaśālā* (leaf-hut) in Pañcaviṭi, Rāma instructs Lakṣmaṇa accordingly, highlighting the significance of ritual purity and auspiciousness in dwelling construction.

“रोणेयं मांसमाहृत्य शालां यक्ष्यामहे वयम्।

सौमित्रे वास्तुशमनं कर्तव्यं भूतिमिच्छता।”³

Vāstu-puruṣaḥ and Vāstu-puruṣa-śāntiḥ-

During the battle between Śiva and Andhakāśura, Lord Maheśvara created Bhairava, who devoured all the Rākṣasas. Even after consuming all the demons, Bhairava—whose body was capable of engulfing the three worlds—remained unsatisfied. Fearing the destruction of the universe, Śankara (Śiva) initially restrained him by rendering him motionless. Thereafter, for the protection of the world, Śiva transformed Bhairava into Vāstudeva, assigning him the role of guardian of dwellings. He declared that at the conclusion of the Vaiśvadeva ritual, as well as at the time of house entry (*gr̥hapraveśa*), an offering (*bali*) would be made to him, which would serve as his sustenance. Thus, Bhairava, a partial manifestation of the Supreme Lord, became known as Vāstu, the divine spirit presiding over all habitations. To appease him, the ritual of Vāstuyajña must be performed.

“येन यत्रैव चाक्रान्तं स तत्रैवावसत्पुनः।

निवासात् सर्वदेवानां वास्तुरित्यभिधीयते ॥

आहारो वैश्वदेवान्ते नूनमस्मिन्भविष्यति।

वास्तुपूजामकुर्वाणस्तवाहारो भविष्यति ॥

अज्ञानान्तु कृतो यज्ञस्तवाहारो भविष्यति।

²MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 252-264 P.1744

³Śrīmad-Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyākāṇḍa, verse 56.22 P.980

यज्ञोत्सवादौ च वलिस्तवाहारो भविष्यति ॥”⁴

Rules of Vāstu for the construction of a house-

A house is generally designed with four entrances (*catuśśālā*), meaning doors should be installed in all four directions to allow for smooth entry and exit. Even though the absence of a door in one direction may not cause significant harm, a house with four doors is considered most auspicious. Specific names and connotations are given to houses missing a door in a particular direction:

- A house without a southern door is called Vardhamāna (prospering),
- One without an eastern door is known as *Svāstika* (auspicious),
- One without a northern door is Rucaka (pleasing), and
- One without a western door is Saumyaśālā (gentle or serene).

Among these, the absence of doors on the south or west is not considered particularly inauspicious. However, a house without space to the north is said to lead to untimely death, and one blocked in the east is regarded as fear-inducing or ominous. Placing a śullī (oven or hearth) in the east or west may also bring about death, according to tradition. Similarly, components like the bathroom (*snānaśālā*) should be constructed appropriately as per the layout. Moreover, the central portion (the middle third) of the house should not be obstructed by a corridor (*vīthikā*), ensuring smooth energy flow and spatial harmony.

In such a house, images or icons of deities should be installed above the doorway according to scriptural guidelines. Decorative motifs such as lotus creepers (*padma-vallī-latā*), full pots (*pūrṇa-kumbha*), and similar auspicious designs should be painted or carved on the pillars. A balance or weighing scale (*tulā*) should be placed above the pillars, proportionate to their height. It is ideal for the entrance of the house to face south so that the resident enters facing south, or alternatively, one may enter facing west. If a street (*rathyā*) directly intersects or cuts through the entrance (*vedha*), it can lead to the destruction of the lineage (*kulasya vaṃśanāśa*), and promote discord and hostility. If such intersection or piercing occurs in relation to a temple or shrine (*ālaya*), it may result in the destruction of women or the loss of a husband. However, if there is a distance of twice the house's length between the house and the obstructing path or building, the *vedha-doṣa* (architectural flaw) is considered nullified.

“वासगेहानि सर्वेषां प्रवेशे दक्षिणेन तु ।

द्वाराणि तु प्रवक्ष्यामि प्रशस्तानीह यानि तु ॥

पूर्वणेन्द्र जयन्तं च द्वारं सर्वत्र शस्यते ।

याम्यं च वितथं चैव दक्षिणेन विदुर्बुधाः ॥”⁵

Two doors should not be installed directly opposite each other in such a way that, when opened, they touch or collide. Doors should be positioned to avoid such contact, following prescribed measurements and spatial guidelines. Doors should be proportionate to the size of the structure—smaller for residential houses and larger for palaces or grand buildings. Once a door is properly installed, it should not be removed or displaced arbitrarily, nor should it be kept permanently closed. A house situated directly in the middle of a pathway or road (*mārga-madhye*) is considered inauspicious and is believed to bring about the destruction or downfall of the householder.

“स्वयमुत्पाटिते द्वारे उन्मादो गृहवासिनाम्।

स्वयं वा पिहिते विद्यात् कुलनाशं विचक्षणः॥

मानाधिके राजभयं न्यूने तस्करतो भवेत्।।

द्वारोपरि च यदद्वारं तदन्तकमुखं स्मृतम् ॥

अध्वनो मध्यदेशे तु अधिको यस्य विस्तरः।

वज्रन्तु संकटं मध्ये सद्यो भर्तुर्विनाशनम् ॥”⁶

⁴1. MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 252 14,17, P.1746

⁵MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 225/9.8 P. 1764

⁶MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 225.157 17 P. 1765

4. UNSUITABLE BUILDING AREAS-

A house should not be constructed too close to temples, the dwellings of wicked or deceitful people, the residences of government officials, or public squares (*catvāra*). This guideline remains highly relevant even today. Proximity to temples often results in heavy crowds during festivals and events. Living near a deceitful or violent person can be harmful. Likewise, residing near the homes of government or royal officials can lead to trouble or disturbances due to increased surveillance or interference from guards and officers. Additionally, public squares are frequented by carts and vehicles, causing dust pollution, and the open space increases the risk of damage or destruction to nearby houses. Therefore, selecting an appropriate location for constructing a house is essential for safety and well-being.

“न देवधूर्तसचिवचत्वरणां समन्ततः।

कारयेद् भवनं प्राज्ञो दुःखशोकभयं ततः॥”⁷

Environment in Vāstuśāstra-

The Matsya Purāṇa also describes which trees are suitable and which are to be avoided within a house's premises. It mentions the names of specific trees that should be planted outside the house at certain times of the day. One should not cut down trees personally for the purpose of constructing a house. According to directional recommendations:

- A vaṭa (banyan) tree is ideal in the eastern direction,
- An udumbara (cluster fig) in the south,
- A pippala (sacred fig) in the west, and
- A plakṣa (Indian fig) in the north.

Thorny trees and milky-sapped (*kṣīriṇa*) trees should not be grown near the house. If such undesirable trees have already grown, they should be removed and replaced with auspicious and beneficial trees in the same location. This guidance reflects the environmental sensitivity present in the Vāstuśāstra traditions.

“भवनस्य वटः पूर्वे दिग्भागे सर्वकार्मिकः।

उदुम्बरस्तथा याम्ये वारुण्यां पिप्पलः शुभः ॥

प्लक्षश्चोत्तरतो धन्यो विपरीताः त्वसिद्धये।

कण्टकी क्षीरवृक्षश्च आसनः सफलो द्रुमः ॥⁸

भार्याहानौ प्रजाहानौ भवेतां क्रमशस्तदा।

न च्छिन्द्यात् यदि तानन्यानन्तरे स्थापयेच्छुभान् ॥

पुंन्नागाशोकबकुलशमीतिलकचम्पकान्।

दाडिमी पिप्पली द्राक्षा तथा कुसुममण्डपान् ॥

जम्बीरपूगपनसद्गमकेतकीभिः

जातीसरोजशतपत्रिकमल्लिकाभिः ।

नालिकेरकदलीदलपाटलाभिः

युक्तं तदत्र भवनं श्रियमातनोति ॥”⁹

5. CONCLUSION

In the following chapters, the Vāstu specifications for constructing Śiva and Viṣṇu temples are described. These specifications are based on the Agama scriptures. According to the Purāṇas, practices that deviate from the Agama texts are not to be followed. The characteristics of idols and altars are also outlined in the Purāṇas, but whether these should

⁷MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 256/2 P.1769

⁸MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 256 20 P.1766

⁹MatsyaPurāṇa, verse 256 20 P.1766

be followed exactly or with modifications is not clearly stated. Regarding house construction, there are instructions on door placement, door dimensions, the impact of roads (vīthī-vedha), and considerations of direction and proportions. The dimensions of the house are also discussed, and these principles are still followed in modern construction, evident in many contemporary building practices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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