



Some Bhumija Temples of Karnataka

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Abstract The article deals with a style of temple architecture called Bhumija, which originated and developed in Central India, and spread over a vast area comprising Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka with regional overtones. It explains the meaning of the term Bhumija, mentions *Silpa* texts which give details of this style and considers examples of temples which have this style of *Sikhara* on the *mulaprasada* (shrine proper) and of its models on the walls of the temples in Karnataka. Four temples, i.e., Kasivisvesvara temple at Lakkundi, Siddhesvara temple at Haveri and Nagesvara and Chennakesava temples at Mosale Hosahalli are described as they have Bhumija style of *Sikhara* as models on their walls. Here I have classified the type of Bhumija according to the description given in the *Silpa* texts along with the illustrations of the models present on the walls of temples. A reference is made to the only inscription which mentions Bhumija style. A table containing information about sub-types of Bhumija as described in the two *Silpa* texts *Samaranganasutradhara* and *Aparajitaprccha*.

Introduction The Bhumija style of temple architecture belongs to the Central Indian School of temple architecture. Though conforming in certain details to Nagara style, the *sikhara* obtains distinguishing feature of a Bhumija temple. It is generally believed that the Bhumija style originated in Malwa region. But the style was extensive in the space and time and spread across the region of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in early medieval times. It is but natural to expect that this style spread over so wide an area would exhibit regional traits.

‘Bhumija’ etymologically means “earth-born” or “country-born”. The style was first recognized by Stella Kramrisch in her book, *The Hindu Temple* in which she interpreted it as the native style of Malwa.¹ On the other hand Krishna Deva interpreted the Bhumija style as “of earthly or secular origin”.² However, it is possible that the term may have drawn its name from the *bhumis* or storeys which are well demarcated in the superstructure of this style of temples.

The *Samaranganasutradhara* and the *Aparajitaprcchha* are the two important works which refer to Bhumija Prasad in detail. The *Samarangana*, applies the description *kramagata* (well established and traditional) to Bhumija style and this would recognize that the style was well established and mature. The occurrence of large number of temples of this style over a wide geographical-chronological range

gives credence to this description. This apart, the work has an entire chapter (chapter 65) dedicated to discussion on Bhumija temple. So also, the *Aparajita* has a special chapter delineating the features of sub-varieties of the Bhumija (Chapter 171).

Dhaky suggests that the Bhumija form was, if not originated in Malwa by the Paramaras, at least was perfected and favoured in the Malwa country by them.³ Later, it was employed in the neighboring state of the Yadavas of Seunadesa. Under the Chalukyas of Kalyana, who themselves built some temples of this style in the region of their core authority around Basava Kalyana, their other subordinates like the Silaharas in the Western Deccan and coastal area, the Kakatiyas of Warangal in the Andhra Desa, and the Hoysalas of Halebid to some extent in Karnataka. The form is entirely absent from Tamilnadu, Kerala and coastal tract of Karnataka. It should also be noted that no southern *vastu* texts such as Manasara, Mayamata etc., mentions the Bhumija style.

In upper central Karnataka, the knowledge of Bhumija temple form is first noticed on the Kasivisvesvara temple at Lakkundi. It is also mentioned in the Kotipura Kaitabhesvara temple inscription, the only epigraphic reference to Bhumija known from India. The form underwent changes in Karnataka soon. A few instances of full-fledged constructions like the northern side *mulaprasada* of the Banasankari temple at Amaragol are known in this region but unfortunately the superstructure has not survived on any of them. The Hoysalas however built some of the sub-varieties of Bhumija form with regional overtones. The most ambitious of them was the Chennakesava Temple at Belur, erected by Vishnuvardhana in 1116-17 CE. But after Hoysala period it disappeared. After the Hoysalas, no Bhumija temple seems to have been built in Karnataka, save a temple in Nippani.⁴ However, in Maharashtra occasionally temples of Bhumija form were built so late as 17th-18th centuries, the Grishneshvara temple at Ellora built by Ahilyabai Holkar being a good example.⁵

Studies on Bhumija Style

As pointed out above, the *Samaranganasutradhara* and the *Aparajita-pirchchha* are the two works which detail the Bhumija Prasada. Apart from these two architectural texts, the *Prasada Mandana*⁶ also occasionally mentions the Bhumija. Indian and western scholars have also written about Bhumija style of architecture.

The first scholar to write about Bhumija though in brief is Stella Kramrisch in her book entitled *The Hindu Temple* (1946). She has recognized the Bhumija style of temple and took it in the literal sense of earth-born or country-born and expressed it as the native style of Malwa, which later spread in west, east and south direction.

Krishna Deva was the next scholar to write about Bhumija style of architecture in his paper entitled "Bhumija Temples" published in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture* (1975). He has given a good amount of information and description about the Bhumija style – its characteristics, antiquity, etymology, description in *silpa* texts and its presence in different parts of India with regional affiliation like Malwa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan etc.

The next significant scholar to draw attention to Bhumija was M.A. Dhaky and his views are published in his work entitled *The Indian Temple forms in Karnata*

Inscriptions and Architecture (1977). In this work, he considers only the epigraphic record found in Kupputur (also called Kotipura) near Anavatti in Shikaripur Taluk, Shimoga District, Karnataka. The record refers to Bhumija style among others like Dravida and Pirudum Nagara.

Dhaky's study demonstrates that the architects of Karnataka had good knowledge of Bhumija temple form by way of illustrating full-fledged temples which have the Bhumija form of superstructure or models of Bhumija superstructures on temple walls. He gives examples of the Hoysala temples such as Cennakesava at Mosale, Sadasiva at Nugihalli, and Mulesankara at Turuvekere, apart from superstructure depictions on walls of Kasivisvesvara temple at Lakkundi, Siddhesvara at Haveri, etc. The same scholar, in the voluminous *Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture – South India. Upper Dravidadesa Later Phase. 973-1326 AD* edited by him, has identified some of the Bhumija temples and Bhumija models on temples walls while describing the temples of Karnataka.

Perhaps the most extensive attempt on identifications of Bhumija temples in Later Chalukya-Hoysala region were made by Gerard Foekema in his two books entitled *Hoysala Architecture* (1994) and *Calukya Architecture* (2003). He has identified some temples as Bhumija, such as Dattatreya temple at Chattarki (Vijayapura District), Mahadeva temple at Jalsangi (Gulbarga District), etc., though today they are bereft of superstructure.

Among the text-based studies on Bhumija, the most noteworthy is the work of R.P. Kulkarni. He has described in his work *Prasada-Sikhara* (2000) different forms of Indian temple superstructures in the perspective of different medieval silpa text. In relation to Bhumija, he has given the nature of Nishadha sub-type of Bhumija in addition to giving a table enlisting all the 25 sub-varieties of the Bhumija temple with their attributes such as name, shape, numbers of phalanas and numbers of *Bhumis*. In another work entitled *Prasada Mandana of Sutradhara Mandana* (2005) the author while dealing with the study of treatises on silpasastra from engineering and architectural point of view has here and there referred in brief to a few features of the Bhumija style.

Latest study related to the Bhumija is an article entitled “Origin and Antiquity of Bhumija Temples” (2009) by Naveen Gideon and Shampa Chabuey. It provides information about the origin, description given in *silpa*-texts and perceptions of different scholars about Bhumija with examples given by them and the essential artistic features of Bhumija style.

Kasivisvesvara Temple, Lakkundi

Kasivisvesvara temple is the most beautiful, outstanding and elaborately finished among all the temples of Lakkundi. It is one of the most ornate monument of later Chalukya period. The temple is a *dvikuta* with two shrines facing each other on the two ends of east-west axis. The western temple consists of a shrine, vestibule, hall and a porch, arranged from west to east. The hall is entered both from south and east, of which the southern entrance is also through a porch, now lost. The smaller eastern shrine consists of a shrine with vestibule connected to an open pillared hall, now lost,

arranged east to west in that order. The doorways are elegant and richly ornamented. The smaller eastern vimana sanctum doorway and its flanking wall-pillars are well preserved.

The principal temple stands on a double pedestal, *upapitha* (secondary pedestal) below succeeded by *pitha* (pedestal) proper on it. The body section starts immediately above the pedestal. The western vimana is exceptional in both ornamentation and design with three projections per side, the central projection provided with heavy pilasters. The aedicular composition of the first *tala* of vimana is repeated in the second with omission of *sala*. The upper part of the third *tala* has disappeared. The closed hall is simple with framing pilasters and lintels. The wall of the hall is decorated with Dravida superstructure models on a pair of pilasters and several Nagara superstructure models.

The eastern vimana is an integral part of total plan of the temple. It has similar mouldings for *upapitha* and *pitha* proper but the exterior contour of the plan of the *pithas* and details of corresponding wall and superstructure differ. While the principal offsets, *karna* and *subhadra* are executed with pilaster frames, the intermediary offsets on either side of the central offset are formed by heavy embedded bhadrakatype pillars turned by 90° to the wall, hence pointing to the viewer. The corresponding *kutas* on these embedded pillars are dwarfed Nagara-kutas, their angles also pointing to the viewer.

The temple is of great interest as the Dravida architectural articulation includes elements inspired by Nagara architecture – decorations, *pitha* etc., which produce an exotic effect. The temple has ample representation of varieties of temple forms on sham-niches at the *karnas* which show Dravida, Vesara and Bhumija all of which are faithfully rendered after true examples.

The vimana of Kasivisvesvara temple is covered with sculptures of gods, goddess and demi-gods in different postures. The *upabhadra* parts of the walls are filled with mono-scenic narrative sculptures of Saiva themes – *Kailasaharana*, *Andhaka-samhara*, *Gajasamhara*, *Natesa* – as also *Mahabharata* – Bhima's encounter Bhagadatta's elephant, etc. There are also damaged sculptures on walls of the hall, such as those of Nude Parvati seated on snake, worshipping *atma-linga* held in hand; *bhikshatana* Siva, etc. Diminutive narrative depictions of Ramayana episodes are found on pedestal of the south porch.

The interior of hall is plain with ceiling has large lotus and the ornate shafts of the four central pillars are bell-shaped. In the sanctum is a *linga*.

The inscription found on a lintel of the closed hall dated 1152 CE⁷ refers to the reign of Tribhuvanamalla Taila III and to the gifts for continuation of religious activities in the temple of god Kavatalesvara, which was the original name of the deity. The plainer parts of the temple were possibly earlier in date, perhaps 1050 CE, the earliest reference to the *sthanacharya* of god Kavatalesvara being in an inscription of 1064 CE.⁸ The temple was probably rebuilt at the time when Lakkundi became a Hoysala capital in 1193 CE under Ballala II.

Bhumija Models on the Temple

The temple has the two most faithful realistic representations of Bhumija superstructure form on the corner aedicules (*karna*) of the principal vimana wall (Fig.1 and Fig.2). These may be the earliest representations of Bhumija in this part of the state. Minute details are shown with considerable care and precision. As in case of a real Bhumija-sikhara the miniature Nagara *kutas* are supported by wall-pillars. It is a *tribhauma* (three-storey) Bhumija-sikhara model with three *kutastambhas* in each quadrant. It is based on square plan. According to *Aparajitaprchhha*, this would be classified under the *Simha* or *Nanda* type of Bhumija, which are supposed to have three *bhumis*.



Fig. 1



Fig.2

Siddhesvara Temple, Haveri

The Siddhesvara temple in Haveri is a relatively small but ornate *ekakuta* temple with a sanctum, open vestibule and an open hall. The *vimana* has four *talas* and faces west. In the first *tala* a *chhadya* is added which divides the *vimana* into a *jangha* (wall) and a *sikhara* (superstructure). Below the *chhadya* there is wall with pilasters and wall-pillars above the *chhadya* the upper part has tiny architectural components repeated three times. The *vimana*, *sukanasa* and hall have additional second *panjara*-roof with scroll framing.

In aedicular composition of the *vimana* has five projections and four *talas* with a giant *vedika*-cum-kuta roof. The closing roof has multi layered *padma* cap with a *kalasa* missing. The *sukanasa* has three *talas* and is crowned by a *vedika*-cum-sala roof with *nasis*. Much of the figural sculpture on the superstructure is deliberately obliterated probably for sectarian reasons.

The wall below the *chhadya* show shrine models over the niches in the central offsets of each side of *vimana* and *toranas* in the recesses. The shrine models on north and east are realistic Karnataka-Dravida models and the one on south side is Bhumija model. The recesses have Dravida towers on a pair of pilasters and Nagara towers on single pilaster sheltered under *torana* and small figural sculpture. The open sides of the hall have a parapet with pedestal and a plain *kakshana* (stone back-rest).

The four central pillars inside the hall are voluptuous sober bell-shaped. Flowers decorate most of the ceiling but some part has figure sculpture, noteworthy

being the depiction of Natesa surrounded by dancing *ashtamatrikas*. The antarala doorway has side screens and a *torana*. The sanctum doorway has *stambha-sakhas* and above the lintel are five miniature towers, three Dravida and two Nagara. The sanctum enshrines a *linga* on a pedestal. Other sculptures in the temple include a beautiful Ganesa and image of an ascetic locally called *Siddha*, both being products of 12th Century. The original temple may have been commissioned in 11th Century but seems to have undergone renovation at a later period.

Bhumija model on the temple

Of specific interest for our purpose is the depiction of a full-fledged Bhumija temple model over the wall niche. This is found on the southern side wall of the *vimana* (Fig. 3). This is a complete Bhumija model with base and wall. It is exquisitely carved showing minute details. The plan is stepped, but with steps of unequal size. The larger ones are articulated as thin pillars crowned with small Nagara *sikhara* with smaller ones alternating and crowned with Nagara *sikhara* placed in horizontal rows. In frontal view the model is crowned with seven horizontal rows of four stories each with small Nagara *latina-sikharas* and an elegantly decorated central band. The pedestal-cum-base is Nagara with a *kumbha* divided in two parts by a horizontal ridge. It is a basically *pancharatha*. The model has only four storeys instead of five or seven as one would expect in this case, but this may have been due to want of room or space above. As such the architect may have desired to present a *Malayadri* or *Mandara* or *Prabhamani* class of Bhumija, which are based on square and would have five *bhumis*. Otherwise, because it has only four storeys, it represents a *Nishadha* class Bhumija temple.



Fig. 3

Nagesvara and Chennakesava temples, Mosale Hosahalli

The Nagesvara and Chennakesava temples are the two ornate almost identical temples in form, differing only in the deities in the sanctum and a few decorative details. Former is dedicated to the god Nagesvara, a form of Siva, in which the deity is adored by or sheltered under the serpent, while the latter is for the god Kesava, the first of the twenty-four forms of Vishnu. Both the temples are richly decorated with graceful superstructures and *kalasa* at the top of the *vimana*. The *vimana*, *sukanasa*, hall and porch are all well preserved. The aedicular composition of both temples is almost identical.

Both the temples with *tritala* vimana have beautiful creeper-curls on walls which produce lively effect. The *chhadya* and kapota above it are plain all around the temples which gives a prominent look to the superstructures above and the walls below them. The walls below *chhadya* have niches with a large variety of attractive kutas of Karnataka-Dravida, Bhumija, Dravida, Varata and fusion of open halls and Nagara *sikharas* with inset divinity and related figures also at the *kutastambas*. The temples have good numbers of inscribed wall-images many of which are damaged. These suggest *Sakta* overtones in the case of Nagesvara temple. Below the wall section both the temples have *vedika*, *vyalamala* and undecorated pedestal moldings. For our purpose, the Bhumija models on the temple wall are of interest.

Bhumija model on temple

There are at least two Bhumija superstructure models depicted on these temples, one on each. In addition to these, the Nagesvara has some more resembling the Bhumija but probably representing Varata class superstructures.

The west wall of the Chennakesava temple has a Bhumija model (Fig. 4). The *sikhara* superficially appears to be *ashtabhadra* (auspicious with offsets on eight sides) with the *kutas* here with subdued *stambha* (pillar) bases. The model has five-stories. It resembles the superstructure of the Sadasiva temple at Nuggehalli, but there the number of storeys is only three. But since the wall details of the Bhumija model on Mosale Chennakesava is not known it is difficult to ascertain if it is intended by the architect to represent *ashthabhadra* class or *vritta* (circular) class. If it is *viritta*, (stellate in this case) then, the model presents *Kamalodbhava* sub-class of Bhumija, since there are five storeys. Otherwise, if it is *ashtabhadra* class then, it may be *Svastika* or *Vajrasvastika* sub-class of Bhumija.



Fig. 4

On the west wall of Nagesvara temple, above the Sadasiva image is another model of Bhumija (Fig. 5). It is like that described above, but the *stambha* (pillar) bases are square and visible. On eight sides there are bands reaching the *kalasa*. This also is of vritta class and would have resembled the Belur Chennakesava superstructure, now non-existent. Hence it can be easily identified as *Kamalodbhava* sub-class of Bhumija.



Fig. 5

Two more examples found on the Nagesvara temple-wall which superficially resemble Bhumija may be noted here. The first of these is on the south wall of the temple (Fig. 6). The model represents a superstructure of a *prasada* based on square, which may be described as *pancharatha*. It has five storeys of equilateral triangle *sikhara* rows without *stambha* or pillar, except in one case. This may be a mistake and all the *sikharas* were intended to be without *stambha*. Hence this model answers to the Varata class of superstructure, called Simhapanjara, Nandyavarta, Purnaksha, Pataka and Nandana sub-class in the *Aparajitaprchhha*. All these sub-classes are supposed to have five storeys and five *phalanas*, the difference being in the placement of water chutes.⁹

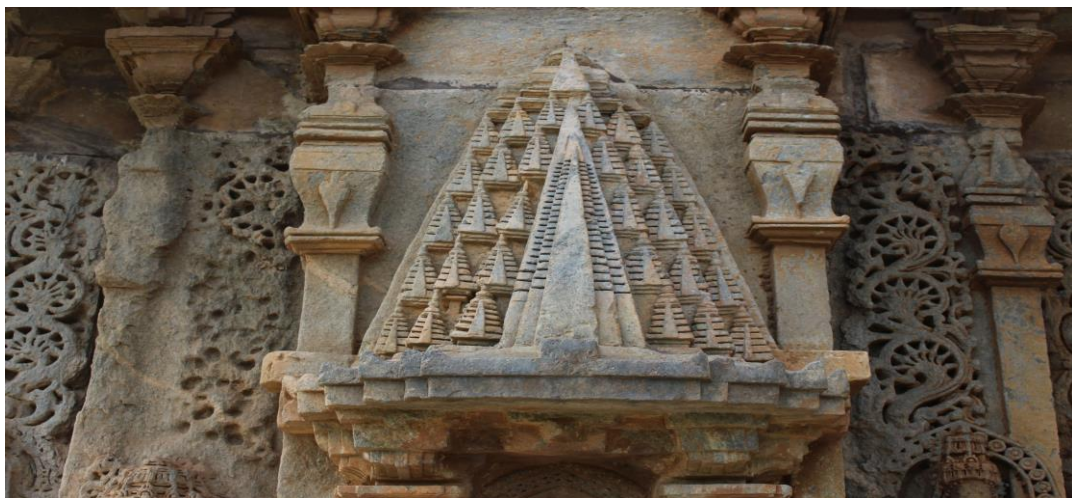


Fig. 6

The second model, also found on the Nagesvara, presents a stellate example of five storeys (Fig. 7). It resembles the Bhumija model on the Chennakesava temple, but for the absence of emphasis on supporting *stambhas*. Thus it likely represents one of the five sub-classes of the Varata class superstructure which are mentioned above.



Fig. 7

Epigraphic Reference

The only epigraphic reference to the Bhumija style is in an inscription found in the Kotisvara temple, dated 1231 AD from Kupputur (also called Kotipura) in Sorab taluk, Shimoga district, Karnataka. The relevant passage, in old Kannada, is quoted here followed by its meaning:

. . . . *Kailas-adriya Visvakarmane Bhavamg-end-oldu sad-bhaktiyol bhadradim kandarisittan-embu negal-aneka Dravidam Bhumijam Piridum Nagaram-embu bahuvidhada bhadropetadim*

(. . . . Visvakarma himself, as it were, with great devotion carved out for Bhava (Siva) the secure Kailasa mountain (i.e., the Siva temple) whose offsets were decorated with variety of depictions of Dravida, Bhumija and Piridum-Nagara (styles of superstructures))¹⁰

The Kotisvara temple is a monument in typical later Calukya Karnata-Dravida style of about 1100 AD., anticipating in many respects the Hoysala style. It is surprising that despite the claim made in the above epigraph, the decorations of superstructure models on the vimana of this temple hardly represent any sub-class of Bhumija temple superstructure. Hence, it may be construed that the composer of the record was a learned person in architecture, familiar with various temple forms including Bhumija. It may be noted that architects were well acquainted with the

various temple forms like Dravida, Nagara and Bhumija by this time, as has been shown by the examples mentioned above.

Bhumija in Vastu Literature

The *silpa* texts of north India of the medieval period like the *Samaranganasutradhara*, *Aparajitaprccha*, *Laksana-samuchchaya* and *Kshirarnava* describe and classify different styles of temple forms which includes Bhumija form invariably, but stands apart from the other styles. Bhumija is the only style attributed in *Aparajitaprccha* to human kings purely secular in origin as opposed to other forms which were believed to be of a divine or super natural origin. *Samaranganasutradhara*, the architectural manual of the Central Indian style and *Aparajitaprccha* (third quarter of the 12th century A.D.) are the two works which refer *inter alia* to Bhumija-prasada.

The *Samaranganasutradhara* and *Aparajitaprccha* devote whole chapter on detail study of the plan, elevation, proportions of the doorways, *pitha* and the decorative schemes of Bhumija temples. Along with it these texts also mention in detail about the sub-varieties of this style. The three varieties of plan are *caturasra* (orthogonal), *vritta* (circular) and *ashtasala* (of eight *bhadras* or principal offsets). The existing monuments of three varieties viz., *caturasra*, *vritta* and *ashtasala* follow the description given in the text closely while dealing with the plan, composition and elevation but differ in details of proportions and measurements.

Samaranganasutradhara assignable to the first half of 11th century is known to have been authored by the famous Paramara king Bhojadeva. A scholar has recently tried to identify the author with Bhoja, the Silahara king of Kolhapura, Maharashtra.¹¹ But the relevant portion of the inscription cited by him is beset with compositional problems, thus making the attribution difficult to accept. The *Samaranganasutradhara* is the earliest text that refers to and describes in detail the Bhumija style. It has a separate full-length chapter no. 65 which deals with the ground plan, elevation and ornamentation of the Bhumija temple. In this text, the Bhumija style makes its appearance in a well-defined and established manner.¹² The style may have developed in the latter half of the 10th century CE. The temple at Onkar Mandhata in Malava is the earliest Bhumija style temple so far, assignable to the second half of 10th century.¹³

The *Samaranganasutradhara*, Chapter 65, lists and describes sixteen types of Bhumija temples in three groups:

1. *Caturarsa* (based on square plan): these are four in number, viz.,
 - 1) Nisadha
 - 2) Malayadri
 - 3) Malyavan
 - 4) Navamalika
2. *Vritta* (circular): these are seven in number having *tribhauma* (3 storeys) to *navabhauma* (9 storeys), viz.,
 - 1) Kumuda
 - 2) Kamala

- 3) Kamalodbhava
 - 4) Kirana
 - 5) Satasrnga
 - 6) Niravadya
 - 7) Sarvangasundara
3. Ashtasala (with eight *bhadras*, octagonal) there are five types in this category viz.,
- 1) Svastika
 - 2) Vajrasvastika
 - 3) Harmyatala
 - 4) Udayachala
 - 5) Gandhamadana

*Aparajitaprccha*¹⁴ is a post-*Samaranganasutradhara* work which enumerates 25 types of Bhumija temples but the treatment in it is based on *Samaranganasutradhara*, in summary. It increases the four *caturarsa* (square) types to ten by adding the following

- 1) Simha
- 2) Nanda
- 3) Malaya
- 4) Madana
- 5) Prabhamani
- 6) Prthvidhvaja

Both the texts furnish identical list of seven types of *vritta* (circular) class. *Samaranganasutradhara* deals more elaborately with five *ashtasala* (with eight *bhadras*) types whereas *Aparajitaprccha* deals with eight by adding the following:

- 1) Sritilaka
- 2) Trailokyabhusana
- 3) Prthvibhusana

Apart from these two *silpa* texts no other text has details of the Bhumija style of temple architecture. Therefore, one must rely upon the information provided by the texts discussed above in respect of classification, plan and appearance.

Bhumija Prasadas and their Character (Consolidated)¹⁵

Name of the temple	Shape	No. of phalanas	No. of Bhumis
Nishadha, Simha, Nanda	Square	Three	4,3,3
Malayadri, Mandara, Prabhamani	Square	Five	5,5,5
Malyavan and Malaya	Square	Seven	7,7
Navamalika, Prthvidhvaja	Square	Nine	9,9
Kumuda and Kamala	Circular	Three	3,4

Kamalodbhava, Satasrnga Saravangasundra	Circular	Five	5,7,9
Kirana and Niraveda	Circular	Seven	6,8
Svastika, Vajrasvastika	Octagonal	-	5,6
Harmyatala	Octagonal	-	7
Sritilaka, Vdayodbhava, Prthvibhusana	Octagonal	-	9,9,9
Gandhamadana	Octagonal	-	9 + 1 Sringa on each bhadra
Trailokyabhusana	Octagonal	-	9 + 2 Sringa on each bhadra

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6. Nagesvara Temple, Mosale; South wall, Varata model.
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