

## [Master Builder Uncovers Striking Similarities In Indian and Incan/Mayan Sacred Structures](#)

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# Master Builder Uncovers Striking Similarities In Indian and Incan/Mayan Sacred Structures

## Ancient Architects Employed Analogous Design Doctrines and Masonry Methods

"Sri V. Ganapati Sthapati," read Deva Rajan's fax to our Hawaii editorial office from Machu Picchu high in the rugged Andes Mountains of Peru, South America, "has just measured with tape, compass and a lay-out story pole, two ancient Incan structures at Machu Picchu: a temple and a residence. He has confirmed that the layout of these structures, locations for doors, windows, proportions of width to length, roof styles, degree of slopes for roofs, column sizes, wall thicknesses, etc., all conform completely to the principles and guidelines as prescribed in the Vastu Shastras of India. Residential layouts are identical to those found in Mohenjodaro. The temple layouts are identical to those that he is building today and that can be found all over India."

These startling discoveries came during a March, 1995, visit of the master builder to the ancient Incan and Mayan sites of South and Central America. Ganapati Sthapati is India's foremost traditional temple architect and perhaps the first true expert in sculpture and stone construction to personally examine these ancient buildings. To do so has been his dream since the 1960's.

Sthapati is the architect of the San Marga Iraivan Temple [see page 28] being built at Kauai Aadheenam, Hawaii, home of Hinduism Today. To fulfill this life-long ambition to visit the Mayan and Incan sites, our publisher, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, arranged for California builders and architects Deva Rajan and Thamby Kumaran to accompany Sthapati on a three-week trip through South and Central America. "Like boys on holiday," they described their exciting trek of discovery which began 11,000 feet high in central Peru at the famed Incan site of Machu Picchu which remained hidden until 1911.

It is Sthapati's theory that Mayan, the creator of Indian architecture, originated from the Mayan people of Central America. In Indian history, Mayan appears several times, most significantly as the author of Mayamatam, "Concept of Mayan" which is a Vastu Shastra, a text on art, architecture and town planning. The traditional date for this work is 8,000bce. Mayan appears in the Ramayana (2000bce) and again in the Mahabharata (1400bce)-in the latter he designs a magnificent palace for the Pandava brothers. Mayan is also mentioned in Silappathikaram, an ancient Tamil scripture, and is author of Surya Siddhanta, one of the most ancient Hindu treatises on astronomy.

The fundamental principle of Mayan's architecture and town planning is the "module." Buildings and towns are to be laid out according to certain multiples of a standard unit. Floor plans, door locations and sizes, wall heights and roofs, all are determined by the modular plan. More specifically, Mayan advocated the use of an eight-by-eight square, for a total of 64 units, which is known as the Vastu Purusha Mandala. The on-site inspection by Sthapati was to determine if the Incan and Mayan structures did follow a modular plan and reflect the Vastu Purusha Mandala. He also intended to examine the stone working technology-his particular field of expertise.

Sthapati was born in 1927 into a family whose ancestors, members of the aboriginal tribe of Viswakarmas, built the great temple at Tanjore in the 10th century ce at the request of Raja Raja Chola. He learned the craft from his father, Sri M. Vaiydyanatha Sthapati and his uncle, Sri M. Sellakkannu Sthapati. He spent 27 years as head of the Government College of Architecture and Sculpture in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, and is responsible for India's significant resurgence in the ancient art of stone carving. After his retirement in 1988, he continued building temples and founded the Vastu Vedic Research Foundation to explore the ancient origins of the temple craftsmen. He is responsible for the construction of dozens of temples in India, plus others in Chicago, Washington D.C., Kentucky, Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, and Hawaii in the USA as well as in the UK, Singapore, Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

## Machu Picchu

The moment Sthapati approached an ancient Incan residential building at Machu Picchu on March 15th, he pointed at the wall and said, "That is a thickness of one kishku hasta"-33 inches, a standard measure in South India first promulgated

by Mayan. He proceeded to measure the buildings in detail and discovered each was indeed built on a module-based plan [see photos and drawings to right], following the system of Mayan's eight-by-eight squares. The module method was followed within small fractions of an inch, according to Thamby Kumaran, who was taking the measurements. The buildings were oriented toward certain points of the compass, also a principle of Mayan, rather than randomly placed. Also the lengths of buildings were never more than twice their width, as Mayan stipulated.

From Machu Picchu the three adventurers traveled to Saqsayhuman, an Incan site dated from 400 bce to 1400 ce. Here are the famous stone walls made of rocks weighing up to 160 tons and fitted together so expertly that a knife blade cannot be put in any joint. "Nobody knows how these stones were put in place," offered their guide when they first arrived on the site. Sthapati politely differed, and pointed out the insets chiseled into the base of many stones, as well as small knobs left on their faces. "These are for the use of levers, the exact same system we continue to use in India to move large stones. Thirty to forty men can move these very large rocks with this method," he explained to the guide's astonishment.

He could see other details of the stone working were identical to what is practiced in India, such as the method of quarrying stones by splitting off slabs [photo page 14]. So too was the jointing and fitting of stones, the use of lime mortar, leveling with a plumb line and triangle, and the corbeling for the roofs. Corbeling is the method by which stones are drawn in layer by layer until they meet or nearly meet to allow a roof slab to be placed on top. Sthapati considers the similarity of this technology to that used in India to be very significant. The use of the horizontal lintel and the absence of the arch are additional noteworthy points of correspondence between the two traditions.

## Land of the Mayans

From the high Andes the threesome flew to Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. They and forty-five thousand other Mayan aficionados arrived at Chich n Itz i in time for the summer equinox on March 21st. At the moment of sunset on the equinox, a shadow is cast by the steps of the Pyramid of the Castle [photo right and on page one, where the shadow can be seen] upon the side of the staircase to the top. The shadow creates the image of a serpent's body which joins a stone carving of a serpent's head at the bottom of the stair case. It is a stunning demonstration of Mayan astronomical and architectural precision.

Archeologists, tourists and New Agers all gathered for the event, each with their own agenda. Since the publication of *The Mayan Factor-A Path Beyond Technology* by Josu Arguñalles, the Mayans and their advanced calendar, astronomy, philosophy and architecture have enjoyed a wide following in the West. Sthapati too has found much of interest in Arguñalles' book.

Standard academia archeologists consider the New Age interest as bordering on superstition and refuse to even talk to anyone partial to Mayan mysticism. A recent book, *Copan and Tikal, the Secrets of Two Cities*, by Honduran author Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle and archaeologist Juan Antonio Valdes of Guatemala, claim that the Mayan pyramids were actually castles for the wealthy and that what were once thought to be monuments to the Gods were in fact tributes to the dynasties of various kings. Not likely.

Native Mayan teachers such as Hunbatz Men, whom Sthapati met while in the Yucatan, are taking advantage of the interest to spark a revival of the original Mayan religion among the Mayans themselves. Since their brutal conquest and forced conversion to Catholicism by the Spaniards in the 16th century, Mayans have lived an oppressed and impoverished existence.

Amidst the crowds, Sthapati, Deva and Thamby again unsheathed their tape measures and closely examined the Pyramid of the Castle [see diagram right]. It too conformed to the Vastu Vedic principles of Mayan. The temple structure at the top was exactly 1/4th of the base. And the stepped pyramid design derived from a three-dimensional extension of the basic eight-by-eight grid system. The temple room at the top was also modular in design, with the wall thickness determining the size of doorways, location of columns, thickness of columns and the width and length of the structure.

Most interesting was the name of this structure-chilambalam, meaning a sacred space. It is Sthapati's theory that the Mayans worshiped the very concept of space, specifically a space made according to the modular system. This same idea is found in Hinduism in the sacred room in the center of the Chidambaram Siva Temple in South India, where space or akasha is worshiped-there is no idol. Chidambaram, Sthapati finds suspiciously like chilambalam, means "hall of consciousness." The concept of sacred space is at the center of the mystical shilpi tradition of India [see sidebar page 14].

The richly decorated Mayan buildings provided a feast for a sculptor's eye. There is a very common feature called a "mask" by the archeologists, but known to the Mayans as "Big Nose." A nearly identical face is a common feature of Hindu iconography, seen, for example, at the top of the arch placed behind a deity. "It is the very same thing in India," chuckled Sthapati, "we call it `Maha Nyasa'-Big Nose!" Several other details of the sculptures were similar or identical to India, such as the earrings, ear plugs, teeth, head dresses, even buckles around the waist. There are bas reliefs of priests sitting in lotus posture meditating.

From Chichén Itzá, they traveled on to Uxmal where they observed the snake and "bindu" designs on the wall faces [picture right]. They were astounded by the thousands of pyramids at Tikal and Uxactun in Guatemala, all laid out to conform to a grid pattern and oriented in astronomically significant directions.

As in Mayan buildings, Indians have been using lime mortar for all of their stone and brick buildings. This can be seen in the monumental creations in Mahabalipuram and also in the stone temples of Tanjor and Gangai Konda Choleasuram in Tamil Nadu. The outer surfaces were plastered, embellishments worked out in lime mortar, then painted. This method was strongest among the Mayas at Tikal and Uxactun, where all of the structures once had a plaster coating painted with many colors.

What is the Connection?

Sri Ganapati Sthapati postulates, after deep thought from his journey to the land of the Mayans and a lifetime study of South Indian architecture, that Mayan, the divine architect of Indian tradition, came from Central America. Ancient Tamil literature speaks of lands to the south of India 30,000 years ago, at the time of the first Tamil Sangam. According to scientists 160 million years ago India did lie physically close to Africa, South and Central America, but has since moved away as a result of continental drift. At that date, it would have been dinosaurs and not Mayans who wandered from the Americas to India, but perhaps the time frame for the continental drift is not correct. Architecture aside, there are significant similarities between Hinduism and the native religions of both Africa and the Americas.

There are other explanations. The simplest is boats. In 1970 the Norwegian Thor Hyerdal sailed a reed boat from Africa to the Americas in 57 days using no modern equipment. The boat, Ra II, was built for him by the Aymaro Indians of Lake Titicaca, Peru, neighbors of the ancient Incans. The double-hulled catamarans of India are also capable of long sea voyages. Historians discount contact between ancient people, but many cultures, such as the ancient Hawaiians, had remarkable sea-faring skills.

Perhaps the coincidences of stone working are just that, coincidence -a favorite "explanation" of archeologists. Stone workers will discover the same techniques naturally, without need for outside help, they say, and can point to historical incidents of simultaneous discovery. But this explanation hardly accounts for the similarities in motifs and modular design.

Another explanation is mystical-that Mayan, who is a divine being in Indian histories, appeared to both peoples. He could have conveyed the knowledge through visions and dreams.

Sri Ganapati Sthapati is vigorously continuing his research and is open to suggestions from Hinduism Today readers. Any information you may have on the similarities of the two cultures may be shared with him by writing to:

Vastu Vedic Research Foundation, Plot A-1, H.I.G. Colony, 1st Main Road (New Beach Road), Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Thiruvannamipur, Madras 600 041, India.

Sidebar: The Vastu Vedic Tradition

Text:

V. Ganapati Sthapati spoke eloquently during our interviews of the deep mysticism of his tradition. Here is an excerpt from his paper, "Synthesis of Science and Spirituality in the Vastu Vedic Tradition of Art and Architecture."

The Vastu Shilpa tradition of Indian origin has made a scientific approach to the problems of spirit and spiritual realization. This scientific tradition of Va-stu perceives Shakti [energy] as all-pervasive and as the casual substance for all the manifestations of visual and aural phenomena in the universe. They have named their Shakti as Paravastu in Sanskrit and the universal objects as Vastu. The word Paravastu means the quintessence or the ultimate substance. This phenomenon of Vastu and Va-stu can be equated to gold turned into gold ornaments, the shilpi acting as the agent for the transformation. Further, this Vastu is recognized by the Vastu tradition as one dwelling in the inner space of individual beings as well as in the outside space, the universal being. The science says that it is space, because of its self-propelled vibration, that turns into forms-the vibration force acting as the working agency. To do this is its unquestionable nature. This agency is designated as Absolute Time, emerging out of space. This is analogous to the vibration of the instrument of the vina developing into sound space. Here, sound space turns into sound form, and this when set to rhythmic vibration turns into musical form.

There is also another space responsible for the sound space. It is called luminous space. This pervades the entire universe (cosmos). This is the ultimate space wherein lie the Absolute Time and Absolute Energy. This is filled with luminous substance (Vastu) consisting of Paramanus, the minute particles of space. This luminous space is supersensitive, capable of becoming conscious of itself and vibrating into objects that it becomes conscious of. This action is its intrinsic nature and responsible for the forms that occur in the inner space of individuals as well as in the outer space of the universe. The experience of this form, in terms of space, is Spiritual Vision. This phenomenon is nothing but abstract science held by the Vastu tradition.

The Vastu tradition designates the inner being as Shilpi and the inner manifest subtle form as Shilpa, and as such the whole inner and outer universes are filled with shilpas. The gross visual forms are projected outside from the inside, by the inner being. This is the transformation of the subtle inner form into the gross visual, through the fingers exactly in tune with the subtle in terms of time and space. That "the sculptor becomes the sculpture and the poet becomes the poem" is therefore a powerful Vaignanic statement of the Vastu Vedins, and it is of pure advaitic tone. The projected visual form has the touch of a lyric, depending upon the individual inner culture.

Sidebar: The Linguistic Similarities

Text:

Chacla in Mayan refers to force centers of the body similar to the chakras of Hinduism. K'ultaniilni in Mayan refers to the power of God within man which is controlled by the breath, similar in meaning to kundalini. Mayan chilambalam refers to a sacred space, as does Tamil Chidambaram. Yok'hah in Mayan means "on top of truth," similar to yoga in Sanskrit.

(Two pages of photos in the printed edition show the design, technical and symbolic similarities. You'll have to subscribe to see it all.)