

Circumambulation in Indian pilgrimage: Meaning and manifestation

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Abstract— Our ancient literature is full of examples where pilgrimage became an immensely popular way of achieving spiritual aims while walking. In India, many communities have attached spiritual importance to particular places or to the place where people feel a spiritual awakening. Circumambulation (pradakshina) around that sacred place becomes the key point of prayer and offering. All these circumambulation spaces are associated with the shrines or sacred places referring to auspicious symbolism. In Indian tradition, circumambulation has been practice in multiple scales ranging from a deity or tree to sacred hill, river, and city. The spatial character of the path, route, and street, shift from an inside dwelling to outside in nature or city, depending upon the central symbolism. The experience of the space while walking through sacred space remodel people's mental and physical character. As a result, not only the sacred space but their design and physical characteristics can be both meaningful and valuable to the public. This research has been done by exploring in two stage to finalize the conclusion, In which First stage will involve a literature exploration of Hindu and Buddhist scripture to understand the meaning and significance of circumambulation and in second, will investigate the architectural manifestation of various element in circumambulatory which help to attain its meaning and true purpose.

Index Terms— Pilgrimage, Circumambulation, Spatial, Sacred, Path, Hinduism, Temple architecture

1 Introduction

Circumambulation 'Pradakshinā', According to Rig Vedic verses¹, **'Pra' used as a prefix to the verb and takes on the meaning of onward, forward to Dakshinam (south) is pradakshina.** It is always practice in a manner by keeping the right side of the body towards the center of the sacred symbol. Circumambulation is the oldest act or custom to pay respect to a sacred element of a person in the Hindu religion. Scholars trace back the earliest reference to the practice of pilgrimage to Aitareya Brahmana of the Rg Veda, composed between c. 1500 and c. 1000 BC². The Mahabharata (ca. 300 B.C.) may be considered the first Hindu book to refer to the glorious notation of sacred places and journey to it. **It indicates that going on pilgrimages (tīrtha-yātrās) is superior to sacrifice³.** It still dominates throughout Hindu and Buddhist belief and practice of pilgrimage to a sacred site. **Referring to the Skanda Purana, tirtha-yatra not only means the physical act of visiting the holy places but also implies mental and moral discipline⁴.**

The sacred space in which circumambulation has been practiced has great meaning, value, and function attached to it, which change both the physical and mental state of the pilgrim. These values and functions attached to circumambulatory are highly influenced by religious facts and pilgrim's cultural background or lifestyle. In some example circumambulatory pass through a carved path inside the monolithic rock where the echo of mantras and

single light source falling upon central symbolism plays a vital role. In some, it passes through a trail full of natural wonder ranging from sacred forest to river giving a sole idea of peaceful nature. In many cases, it passes through or around an inhabited city where it interacts through an abundance of public life and space. One of the major factors affecting these routes is the arrangement of spatial elements along with it. The limitation of this study is only focused on the Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage in India.

2 Indian Pilgrimage: Circumambulation

**There is no happiness for him who does not travel!
Thus we have heard. Living in the society of men,
The best of men becomes a sinner.
Therefore, wander!**

Aitareya Brahmana (Rig Veda), VII.15-18.

From a Vedic literature narrative (ca. 2000 - 500 B.C.), The God Indra says to King Harischandra that **"There is no happiness for the person who does not travel; living amongst men, even the best man unknowingly becomes a sinner; Hence, travel!"** So, the Vedic text does not refer directly to pilgrimages, but travelling was considered as a fruitful act. In Vedic literature, the Sanskrit word *yatra* referred to "travel" rather than "pilgrimage", but the Puranic literature (ca. 500 B.C. - A.D. 700) did accept *yatra* as

¹Rig: 2.42.3 and 2.43.1

²Bhardwaj 1973, 3

³Bhardwaj 1973, 29

⁴Bhardwaj 1973, 1

meaning "pilgrimage". Hindus undertake a pilgrimage (called a tirtha-yatra) as in process of reaching the tirtha (pilgrimage site), an act is usually divided into four-part that is a holy bath (snana), Making an offering (Puja), circumambulation (pradakshina), and giving charity (dana). Although all days that are auspicious for travelling are considered good for pilgrimages, a particular day is preferred for the worship of a specific deity and a distinct goal. According to Puranic text, the nature of pilgrim's motives has been classified into four category⁵ but in the present time, as it is accessible to everyone who desires to go on pilgrimage, can be classified into five categories,

- The desire for peace and spiritual merit
- Perform specific religious rites
- The desire for clan succession
- Desire of materiality
- The desire for liberation and atonement from sin

3 Circumambulation: Meaning

Since Vedic time, Hindu believes that the circumambulation around sacred spots has the effect of blotting out the sins⁶. In the Buddhist text, it has been also described as an act of paying the highest respect to sacred objects. In the puranic text, it refers to the single pradakshina of Vishnu temple with a devoted mind gets the benefit of performing 1000 horse sacrifices (Ashwamedhayagnayas). Circumambulation in India represents the daily march of the Sun, and the meaning itself is also connected with the trinity in Indian religion and philosophy. The purpose of circumambulation of gods is purely simple, that is, to observe the truth in its totality. As explained by Mr. Colebrooke⁷, **The priest first adored the sun while directing his face to the east, then walked towards the west by the way of the south, saying, at the same time, "I follow the course of the sun,"**. Some writers also explain circumambulation as a drama of the development in an individual life, which begins in the young vigour of the Rising Sun, reaches its peak in the Southern hemisphere, and declines to the old age of the West. In the Shiva Purana, the story of the illumined pillar of Shiva⁸ started a new thought of circumambulation around the sacred pillar. By referring to this idea, many architectural pillars had been constructed to serve as a central symbol for circumambulation. They were symbolically erected with multiple motifs of inverted lotus, lion, Garuda, or Dharma-Chakra. These pillars and surroundings were used as sacred

spaces before the invention of temples in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The worship of these pillars was to be accomplished with an act of walking around by touching the depression of the base with the hands. The magical power of circumambulation is already described in the MahaparinirvanaSutta of Buddhist literature (**where circumambulation around Buddha's dead body produces automatic fire**). The significance of circumambulation defines that the circle cannot be imagined without a centre and God defines the centre of the entire universe, so by performing circumambulation we acknowledge him as a focal point of every living and non-living material. Ancient Hindus firmly believed that they could use their action to follow God, and the sun was the visible embodiment of God, who walks in heaven from East to West by South; therefore it was most natural for them to evolve a ceremony in this manner. Accordingly in the northern hemisphere like Egypt, Greece, and Rome people also follow the same manner of circumambulation. In Hinduism, The manner of practicing circumambulation as described that⁹, **it should be done at a slow-pace, hand, tongue, and heart should be in control, and focusing the mind on the god**. The circumambulation for the Sun god is done by the devotee after rotating on his axis to express the manifestation of the Sun all over the directions¹⁰. It is important to note that circumambulation in the Saivism (shiva-lingam) is performed differently. In the Shiva temple of India, the circumambulation starts from the sacred bull and goes to the water outlet (somasutra) in a clockwise direction then returns to the bull and goes to the other side of the somasutra and from there finally returning to the bull to complete the circle. In India, the practice of circumambulation is performed in various scales which range in both physical character and meaning attached to them.

4 Circumambulation: Space

Coming face to face with the Lord, however, may not be always permitted due to some conclusive religious practices. So, instead of entering the sacred chamber (Garbhagriha), the devotee can move around it in the circumambulatory path, which runs immediately around the outside of the sanctum wall and the temple. The walls of this pathway are sculpted with the images of celestial beings and gods, which can be seen and identified by the passing devotee. So, even though he is not allowed entry into the sanctum, the devotee achieves indirect confrontation with god by the movement

⁵Referring Skandapurana (8TH century CE): Puranic text, motives for pilgrimage are described in four categorized that is Putreshana (the desire of a son), Vitteshana (the desire for wealth), Mukteshana (the desire of liberation) and lokeshana (the desire of fame).
⁶ Prasanna Raghava, I. 10

⁷ The religious ceremonies of the Hindus, H.T. Colebrooke, vol. vi.

⁸ Shiva-Purāna, Vidyeshvara-Samhitāch. VI J

⁹ Srividya Guruprasad, 2016

¹⁰ The Hindu Temples, Vol. II. 357

of circumambulation, with his eye and mind on the images in this path. The main purpose achieved here is the emphasis on transitional space which segregates sacredness to the outer world, yet it has done very gradually by increasing focus to the centre. The devotee has the consolation of feeling blessed by the mere physical proximity to the sanctum despite not being within and confronting it. By referring book *The Hindu Temples*,¹¹ **we shall find innumerable customs concerning temple architecture and its connection with the rite of circumambulation.** The elements and strategies used in circumambulation sequentially for the segregation from the outside world, and to increase the focus of thought towards the central object. In Hindu temples, raised platform (Jagati) where the temple sits and courtyard around the temple also, get used as circumambulatory. But as far it moves from the sanctum, the level of intimacy toward the central object decreases (figure 1). It also has been noticed that a downward movement of levels from the centre also decreases the sacredness of space. In Hindu temple, **the structure is conceptualized from the inside, yet visualized from the outside**¹², the term visualization here means "perceived visually from the exterior" as part of the confrontation (darsan) during the act of circumambulation. In Purana, it is said that one who performs 108 circumambulations of Sakti (Devi) while moving around toward right, fulfilled all his desire and gets enlightened at the end and never goes to the hell¹³. In India, sacred trees and plants are also circumambulator in the same manner, though space is used as more of private or semi-collective rituals. In Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says **"I am the Peepal tree (ashvattha) among the trees"**. It is said to be the abode of Gods and ancestors (figure 2). Tulsi is known as the physical incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi herself; planting tulsi in the house courtyard is still in the practice of Indian tradition. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Say that **performing 3-time circumambulation and offering water in morning and evening bring peace and prosperity in life.** Here courtyard act as a private space to perform worship and circumambulation without getting disturbed by outside activities (figure 3). In temple planning, the measurement of circumambulatory passage, the Samarangana-sutradhara¹⁴, **gives the width of the outer path for circumambulation of the temple as four Padas (approx. to 4 feet).** The passage constructed for the inner circumambulation known as Andhakarika or ambulatory enclosed by external wall of the temple known as Sandhara style, and the absence of this enclosed ambulatory called Nirandharastyle. Shiva temple, Bhumara, and Dasavatar temple, Deogarh is one of the earliest examples of Sandhara and Nirandhara style (figure 4).

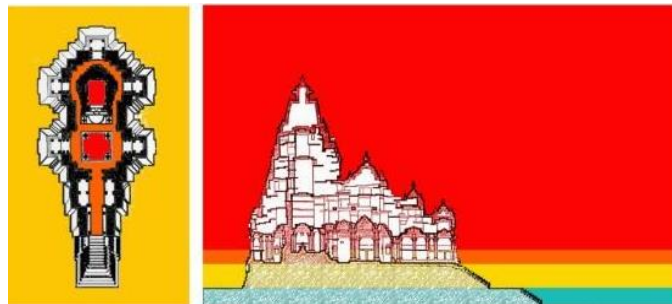


Figure 1. Plan and section of Kandarya Mahadeva temple, Khajuraho

Showing the intimacy towards the center in horizontal and vertical movement

(Source: Author interpretation on plan by Gen. Cunningham, and section by B.L.Dhama)



Figure 2. Circumambulation space of sacred Pipal tree

Showing a circumambulatory open towards the nature of the central object.

(Source: Author)

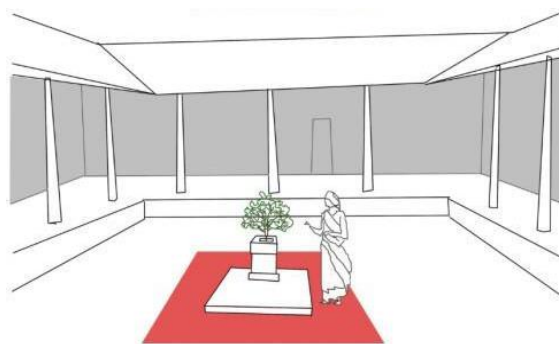


Figure 3. Circumambulation space of Tulsi plant

Showing an enclosed private sacred space inside a courtyard of a traditional Indian house.

(Source: Author)

¹¹*The Hindu temples Vol. II, 299,*

¹²*The Hindu temple, V ii. 359*

¹³*Kalika purana, 419*

¹⁴*Samarangana-sutradhara, 52-53*

Sanctum (Garbha-griha) by its symbolic nature is secret and sacred chamber. To maintain its sacredness, the temple itself covers with the second series of a wall. The integration of the enclosing walls of the ambulatory in the physical body of the temple is purely an Indian development. The Sandhara style has more characteristics in South Indian temple architecture. In the South Indian temple, the character of two enclosed ambulatories can be noticed, where the outer circumambulatory is generally surrounded by colonnade or compound wall (figure 5, 6). The enclosing wall here has a greater retentiveness than elsewhere in India. In the case of 64 yogini temples of India, which typically has a circular plan symbolizing the form of yoni wherein centre Shiva-lingam reside. This temple has multiple circumambulatory with different levels of circular open, semi-open, and closed passage. The 64 *Yogini Temple, Morena* has 4 concentric circumambulatory in different levels, inner and outer ambulatory is on a central platform where the *Shiva-lingam* manifest is divided by a series of columns with close and open roof respectively. The next passage is in an open courtyard on the lowest level and the last one is along with a circular enclosure with 64 chambers of *yogini* also separated by a series of columns (figure 7). The level of visual confrontation towards *Shiva* and *Sakti* gets high in the inner and outer passage as the sense of enclosure increases by the use of a covered roof and colonnade. Because of its peculiar shape and hypaethral structure, it is believed that the temple was an important venue for astrology and tantric practice. In many cases, the directions of the face of sub-temples also go with the directions of clockwise circumambulatory passage. As explain in *Samarangana-Sutra Dhara Sub-temple in the East always faces west and that in the West should face the East; and the others clockwise, those in the North facing south. But the one in the South should not face north*¹⁵ (figure 8). The cremation-ground location should be to the North of the city or village where evil spirits (chandalas) live. Thus the temple should not face north. The direction of sub-temples is highly influenced by the special character of circumambulation because it creates a direct visual connection between the pilgrim and the god. In some cases, it has been seen as elements of enclosing wall with either facing inward or outward to get access from inner or outer circumambulatory respectively. In the Kailasa temple of Ellora cave (figure 9), the direction of 5 sub-temple along the inner circumambulatory face inwards in a clockwise direction. Yet in another case of Kailasanathar Temple, Tamilnadu (figure 10) it faces towards outer circumambulatory in the temple courtyard. In Kailasa temple, the central axis (east-west) is diverted after the entrance (Gopuram) by the pavilion of sacred bull (Nandi).

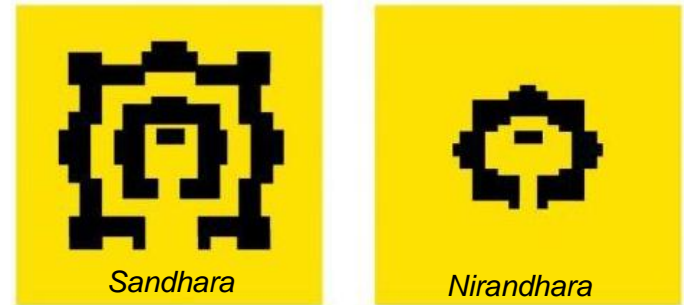


Figure 4. Typical layout plan of Sandhara and Nirandhara temple style

Showing enclosed (Sandhara) and open (Nirandhara) circumambulatory

(Source: Author)

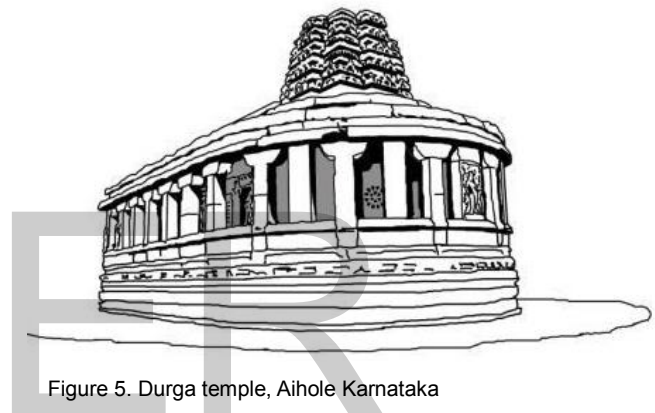


Figure 5. Durga temple, Aihole Karnataka

Showing the three layer of enclose where outer circumambulatory enclosed by colonnade.

(Source: Author)

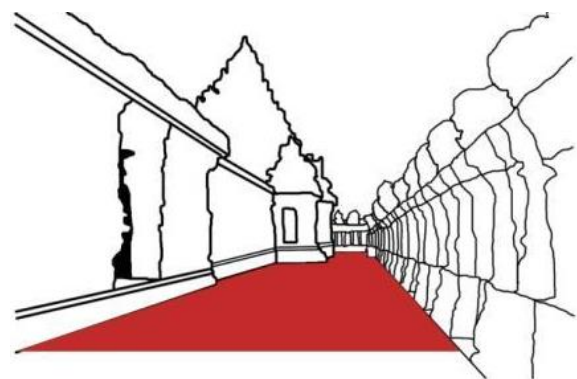


Figure 6. Kailasanthar Temple, Tamilnadu

Showing outer circumambulatory enclosed by a compound wall which contains a niche of 58 sub-shrines.

(Source: Author)

¹⁵ *Samarangana-Sutradhara*, X. 112

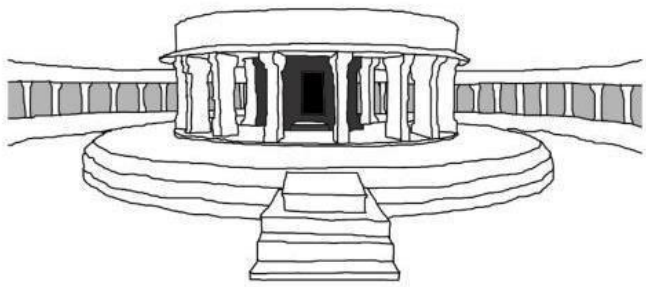


Figure 7. Chausath yogini temple, Morena, Madhya Pradesh

Showing the circular temple having multiple concentric circumambulatory at a different level.

(Source: Author)

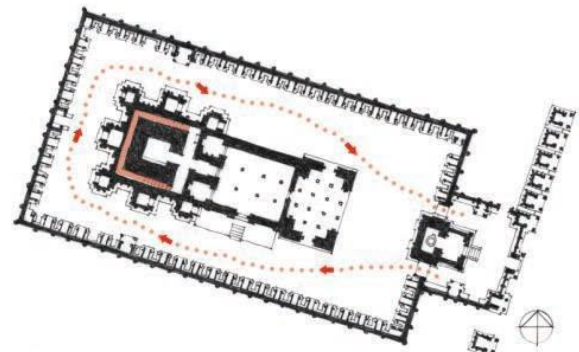


Figure 10. Plan of Kailasanathar Temple, Tamilnadu

Showing narrow inner circumambulatory passage and outer passage enclosed by compound wall containing 56 niches of sub-shrines.

(Source: frankching.com/WordPress)

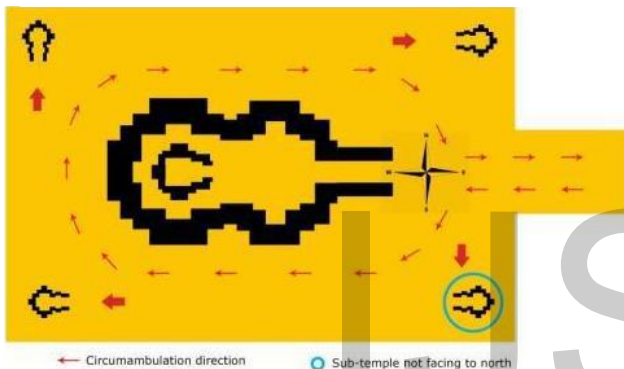


Figure 8. The basic layout of sub-temples facing the direction of circumambulation.

(Source: Author, referring the text from amaraangana-Sutradhara)

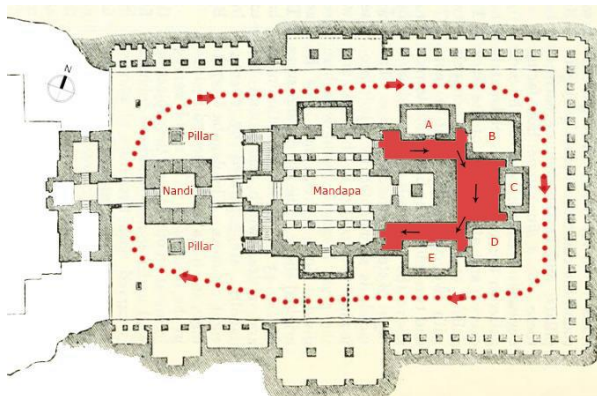


Figure 9. Plan of Kailasa temple, Ellora cave 16

Showing the sub-shrines A, B, C, and D facing the direction of inner circumambulatory and also pointing in the break of central axis after entrance.

(Source: A handbook for travellers in India, Burma, and Ceylon)

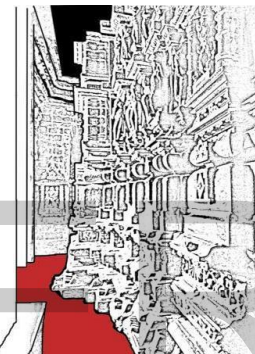


Figure 11. Inner circumambulatory of Kandarya Mahadeva temple, Khajuraho.

Showing an intimate space with a sculpture on the sanctum wall.

(Source: Author)



Figure 12. Outer circumambulatory of Kandarya Mahadeva temple, Khajuraho

Showing base (Jagati) platform as outer circumambulatory around temple exterior wall.

(Source: Author)

From there the pilgrims are visually directed towards the north-south open court, where the point of focus has been created by a life-size sculpture of an elephant (Gajalaxmi) that further leads through outer circumambulatory around the main temple (figure 9). In the case of the Kailasanathar temple, the central axis is diverted towards the open court from the entry point (figure 10). The act of circumambulation is also related to the spiritual symbol of life-circle; hence the darkness is displayed along the passage in a course of purification, leading towards the light that is perfection which can only be achieved in the life hereafter. As an example In Kailasanathar Temple, Kanchipuram has the same symbolic meaning attached to inner circumambulatory which is a narrow dark space with a plane wall is known as passage of life. **It starts with a narrow entry point with seven-step known as the gate of death and exit through a narrow pit known as the gate of rebirth**¹⁶ (figure 10). Here the central axis of this temple is diverted towards the open court from the entrance pavilion which further directs to the outer circumambulatory. In the north India Sandhara temple, the closeness of the carved celestial figure with the cardinal light source through small openings and the devotee is brought to its maximum in one space (figure 11). The outer circumambulation has been done on a base platform (Jagati); here rite of circumambulation is more a communion by movement with the sculpture on the walls than a visual recognition of their identity and perfection (figure 12). The rite of circumambulation is performed outside the temple also, whether there will be an enclosed inner ambulatory. Comparing the great temples of India by Stella Kramrisch, as she described that **these wonderful passages lead beyond everything under the guise of the temple. The diverse shape with carve texture exposing high and low in light and shades as one moves around it and admonished to see the order of this world in the likeness of the temple and be guided by it.** (Figure 12). In the Buddhist tradition, they also construct round sacred stupas containing relics and circular galleries to serve as circumambulatory. The idea of enlightenment in Buddhism was reflected by creating more open space towards nature, as the main purpose of pilgrimage in Buddhism focused on meditation and circumambulation around sacred space. The sacredness of space is divided by multiple levels of the gallery (figure 13) same as seen in the north Indian temple style. In the stupa circumambulatory, stair becomes an element of a threshold as it is the only medium to connect multiple sacred levels (figure 14). The ambulatory of stupas is enclosed by Sunga style railing with Buddhist relics on the junctions of the strip. These small carving visually help the pilgrim to connect their mind towards the sacred thought

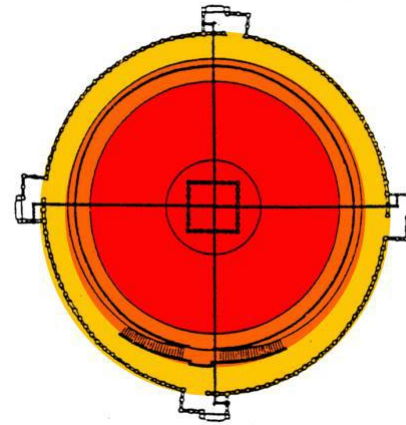


Figure 13. Plan of Great stupa, Sanchi

Showing the sacredness of space concentrating towards centre.

(Source: Interpretation by author on map
<http://www.greatbuildings.com>)

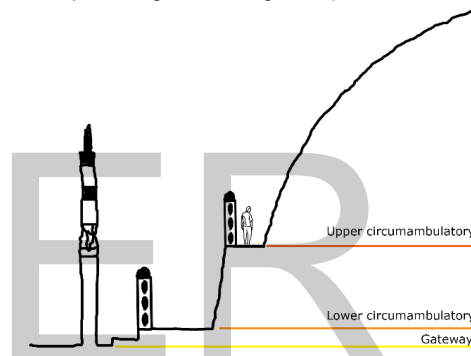


Figure 14. Levels at The great stupa, Sanchi

Showing as level go higher it become more concentrated toward the centre.

(Source: Author)

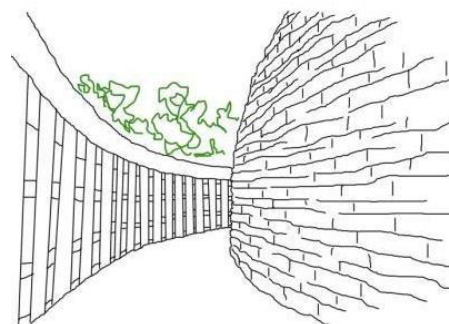


Figure 15. Circumambulatory of great stupa, Sanchi

Showing the intimate space around main stupa enclosed by Sunga style railing.

(Source: Author)

(figure 15). In the cave architecture of Ajanta and Ellora, many monumental chaityas have been built to serve as a sacred place for Buddhists. In chaitya of cave 26, Ajanta the grand double storey entrance with horseshoe window on the upper level and separate entry and exit for circumambulatory (figure 16). Inside the cave, a central double-height space with a stupa at the end and circumambulatory is separated by a carved colonnade (figure 17). The interior wall of the ambulatory is adorned with sculpture and relics depicting the lifestyle of Buddha. The possibility of these sculptures, created as a consequence of a meditative approach to visualization while walking through it. The interior colonnade here creates a transparent barrier between central space and ambulatory, which helps to perform an occasional ritual in the centre while uninterrupted circumambulation in the outer gallery (figure 18). In the Mahabodhi temple complex at Bodhgaya, where the main temple is built with a sanctum chamber (Nirandhara style), which is a rare example to see in Buddhist architecture. The whole temple complex is being considered sacred accommodating many small stupas are being circumambulated (figure 19). The here exterior wall of the main temple along circumambulatory depict various disciple of Buddha in meditation posture (figure 20), which help pilgrim to attain the same meditative mood. In Buddhism circumambulation is refer to walking meditation which is practice with body, speech, and Mind keeping sacred thoughts while walking and chanting prayers. In large scale circumambulatory which is majorly practiced around the sacred city, hill forest, and river in India. One of the highly active circumambulatory is Panchakroshi circumambulation in Varanasi which length around 80.5 km and practice throughout the year, though it gets most crowed in (Nov-Dec, Feb-March). The trace of this circumambulation can be found in the ancient book of Ramayana and Mahabharata. There are 108 Shiva-lingam with 5 major sacred points are situated along the right side of the path which corresponds to the product of 12 months and 9 planets (figure 21). Though the night halts and restrooms are situated along the left side of the route. While doing circumambulation which approximately takes 5 days to complete, pilgrims get involve in various activities with locals like drama and play depicting sacred stories. The journey starts with a holy dip at Manikarnika kund of the river Ganga and finished at the same point. All five node act as a point of threshold where the journey breaks and start again with spiritual bath, the presence of sacred water body and open veranda with the temple helps to attain function and purpose of circumambulation (figure 22). In the same way, Ajodhya also defines their three territorial limits

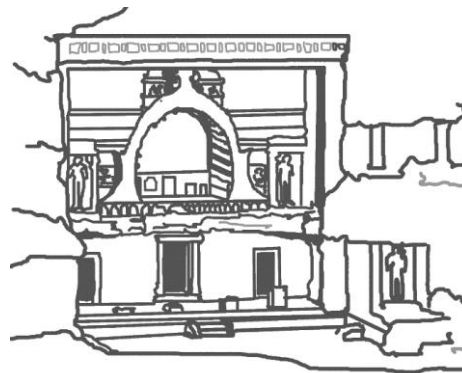


Figure 16. Ajanta cave 26, Maharashtra

Showing the grand double height entrance with broken porch, with separate entry and exit for circumambulatory passage.

(Source: Author)

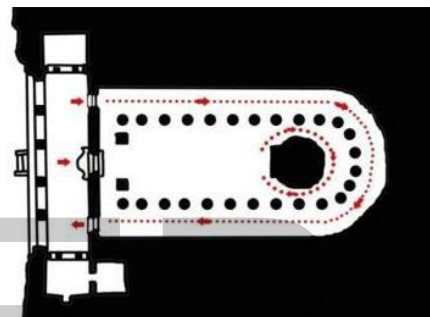


Figure 17. Plan of Chaitya cave 26, Ajanta

Showing the circumambulatory passage with separate entry and exit.

(Source: Burgess, James, the Cave Temples of India)

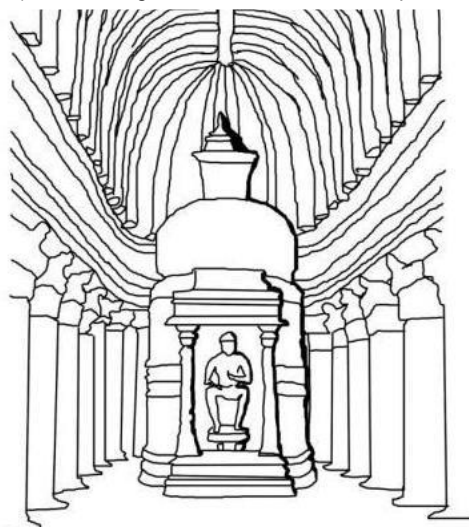


Figure 18. Interior of Chaitya, cave 26, Ajanta

Showing the central interior space with stupa, and colonnade separating the circumambulatory passage from the center.

(Source: Author)

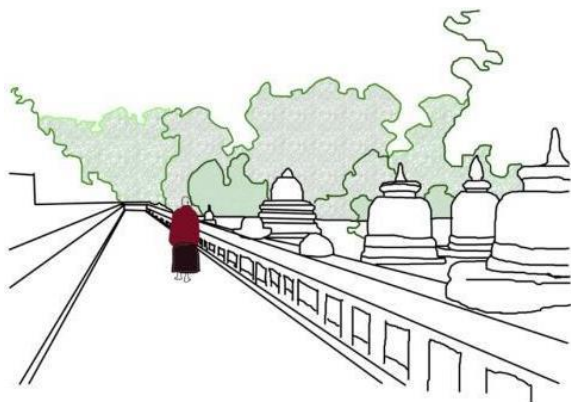


Figure 19. Mahabodhi temple complex, Bodhgaya

Showing the open circumambulatory of temple complex.

(Source: Author)



Figure 22. Kardameshwar temple, Varanasi

Showing the second node of circumambulation with an open veranda and sacred water body.

(Source: Author)



Figure 20. Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya

Showing the exterior panel of temple depicting meditative relics.

(Source: Author)



Figure 23. Saryu river ghat, Ayodhya

Showing the flux of a crowd on a normal day and during the holy bath of 14 kroskiparikarma.

(Source: Author)

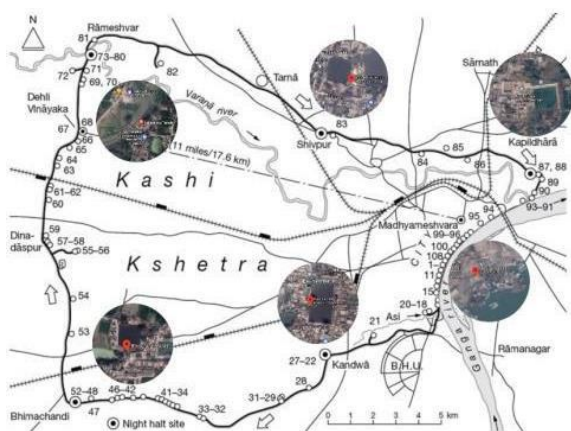


Figure 21. Map of Panchakroshti circumambulatory

Showing five major nodes with water bodies and 108 temples along the route.

(Source: <https://varanasivideos.com/>)



Figure 24. Devotees passing through a forest in Vraja mandala parikrama

(Source: www.iskconphotos.com)

sacredness by 84kroshi, 14kroshi, and 5kroshi circumambulatory, this also signifies the three tire cosmos in Hindu philosophy. 14 karoshi is widely active and has been practice by millions of devotees in November every year. The circumambulatory follow Hindu and Buddhist temples, monasteries, riverfronts, sacred water pools, Jain temples, Muslim shrines, and tombs along the route. The flux of crowd along the Saryu riverfront gets hugely crowded as the act of holy bath becomes a key point of the circumambulation (figure 23).

The circumambulatory in Ajodhya passes along riverfront buildings (monasteries and build heritage) mostly build by kings and lords of a different part of India. These monastery buildings also function as a public rest-house for the religious traveller who is engaged in parikrama. Most active monasteries and ghat along the circumambulatory route is Rinamochana Ghat, RāmasiyaPiya Kila at Jhunki Ghat, LakshmanKila at Lakshman Ghat, Divyakalkunj temple at Svaragadvara Ghat, and also Nageshvarnath temple. Many other sites and gardens associated with the Muslim and Buddhist religion also become a part of this circumambulatory. Mani Parvat is one of the oldest Buddhist ruined sites that was seen by Faxian ¹⁷, which is presently known as the Rāma-Sita temple. Circumambulation of Vraja Mandala has become the most popular religious act amongst ISKON devotees which is practices during October–November months. It is around 270 km long, which generally takes 1–2 months depending on the route and speed of pilgrims (figure 24). The circumambulatory passes through twelve forests (vans), twenty-four groves (*upvans*), many temples, and water bodies (*kund*). Similarly, *Goverdhan* circumambulation is done around the sacred hill where parikrama routes pass through 108 temples and *kunds*. The *Govardhan* hill circumambulation start from *Manasi-Ganga kund* after taking a holy bath and encircle the hill which is around 23 km by finishing at the same point. *Arunachala* hill in *Tamilnadu* is a single integral mountain with well defines peak visible from many locations described as self-inquiry with emphasis on the idea of “**I-am-the-body**”. The practice of walking around the hill (*Girivalyam*) in a clockwise direction is considering to achieve spiritual consciousness as the pilgrims pass through a peaceful natural landscape of 14 km around the hill (figure 25). 14 km routes start from the east gate (*Gopuram*) after worshiping *Brahma lingam* in *Arunachaleshwara* temple and pass along eight major *lingams*. The Practice is done with pure mind with the visual confrontation of *Arunachala peak*. Here the distance between pilgrim and central symbol is large though the visual permeability of the central object becomes more intimate as one looks towards it. *Narmada* is considered one of the holiest



Figure 25. Arunachala hill, Tamilnadu

Showing the integral sacred mountain peak

(Source: Author)

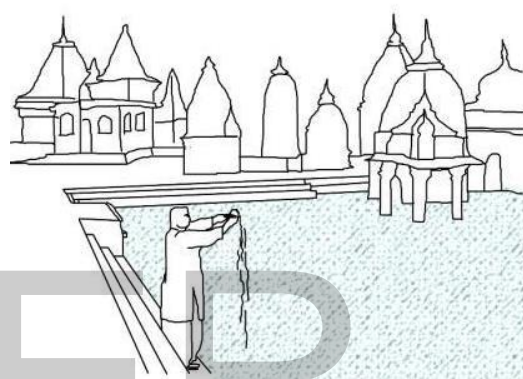


Figure 26. Narmada Kund, Amarkantak

Showing the sacred water body from where the river originate with cluster of temple around it.

(Source: Author)



Figure 27. Omkareshwar riverfronts, M.P.

Showing the riverfront with temples and open space.

(Source: <https://www.esamskriti.com/a/MadhyaPradesh>)

¹⁷ Bakker 1986, 31

rivers in India. The significance of *Narmada* can be traced back to the epic age of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as the river itself consider the daughter of Lord *Shiva*. Circumambulatory of Narmada is largest in India (2600km) which is performed from the point of origin to the point of confluence and then return to the source again. There is no defined path consider for circumambulation, so the pilgrim can start from anywhere on the river bank and conclude there. The oldest manner of doing is to walk on foot which approximately takes 4 to 5 months to complete. The river originates from a small reservoir known as *Narmada Kund* in *Amarkantak* (figure 26) which is a major point to start the circumambulation. There are numerous riverfront has been marked by pilgrimage site along the right side of circumambulatory which serve as a node to stop and restart the journey. Seven important religious sites along the river are *Amarkantak*, *Omkareshwar temple*, *Chaubis Avatar Temple*, *Maheshwar temple*, *Siddheshwar temple*, *Chausath Yogini Temple*, and *Bhrigu Rishi temple* in which pilgrims pay a visit during the circumambulation (figure 27). These riverfronts have temple complexes with shaded verandas and open spaces which help to maintain the function and activities during the act of circumambulation.

5 Inference

By the study of various case examples of Hindus and Buddhist circumambulatory of different characters and scale, inferences have been derived by analysing the relation between spatial elements present in circumambulatory with their physical form and meaning attached to them (Refer Inference Table 1).

6 Conclusion

So, the circumambulatory is a consecrate projection, where it defines or marks the totality of sacredness in and around a space. In Hindu and Buddhist religious contexts these activities represent a unique spatial character and culture which result in creating various spatial elements in an urban religious context. The presence of these spatial elements in and along a circumambulatory helps pilgrims to attain their purpose directly or indirectly. The experiential quality of a circumambulatory relies on the visual and physical permeability of devotees towards the central sacred object. In this study, a spatial investigation has been done into the sacred space of Buddhist and Hindu religious sites, which yielded findings of various spatial elements. These key elements and their physical forms are directly linked to the meaning and function of the sacred circumambulation.

One of the stubborn assumptions of much recent urban research is that religion is external, incidental, or peripheral to the discussion of urban modernity¹⁸. This thinking, which is prevalent in India, has particularly disturbed the work on urban religious protection of a city like Ajodhya and Varanasi which is majorly known for their circumambulatory. The current planning and development of this historic circumambulatory route that is mainly conducted from the perspective of the urban landscape are not appropriate for the religious space. I, therefore, suggest value-oriented spatial planning for the future development of different urban circumambulatory in India to be done while giving importance to their respective sacred spatial elements. **However, religious space is more than its spatiality, and the research on religious spaces cannot be separated from the social, economic, and political background¹⁹.** Therefore, further research should be conducted on the religious spatial elements in the development of circumambulatory.

¹⁸Mary and Smriti, 2008, 617-630

¹⁹ song, 2001, 211-233

Inference Table 1

Spatial elements	Form of manifestation	Meaning and functions
Sculpture	Wall panel, Single entity, Pillar with relics	In some cases, it identifies as the central object of circumambulatory. Close encounters while walking along with the sculpture panel intimidate and help the mind to concentrate on it.
Walls	Compound wall, External wall of a building,	It provides a sense of direction through a defined space, In many cases, it has been also used as a space for sub-shrines.
Stairs	Cascading and semi-circular steps	Sacredness increases with Upward movement, It also helps to access a space that is closer to central space.
Green space	Garden, forest, and groves	It provides a naturally peaceful environment that helps to attain a meditative mood while waking. It also functions as a temporary resting point in circumambulatory. In large-scale circumambulatory, these spaces can be used to organize recreational activities.
Courtyard	Semi-enclosed space, open to the sky	Provide more private space for semi-collective rituals. It helps to create more closeness towards central auspicious objects.
Colonnade	Pillared hall, Open court, Boundary	Demarcate the central sacred space from outside with keeping visual access towards the central object.
Veranda	Plinth, Raised Platform with the temple at the centre	This space becomes an edge between sacred space and the outer world. This also functions as a collective ritual space.
Corridor	Dark narrow space inside temples, Path enclosed by one side by a wall and outer colonnade	Corridors of circumambulatory create an introvert space that helps to understand the self-consciousness of a person. Experience after death and before rebirth is being evoked there.
Sculpture	Sculpture wall, Pillar, and religious relics	Sometimes it creates a sense of central symbolic element and in many, it becomes a visible embodiment to provide direction. The proximity of the celestial sculpture panel brought max closeness with a devotee in one space.
Entrance	Gopuram, Torana, stair	It became a medium to reach the sacred space and also provide a transitional space to access more intimate sacred space. The entrance element also defines an invisible boundary between the inner and outer world.
Sacred water	Pools, Riverfronts, Well and spouts	It works as a threshold point in every circumambulatory. Sacred water sources act as a point to hold and restart the pilgrim's journey, and the major function like a holy bath, worship, and starting of circumambulation.
Sarai	Pergola, Chattri, Pavilion, and night halts	It provides a relaxing space with a pause in circumambulation. It may or may not include any religious activities to fulfill the purpose and meaning of the act.
Sacred Buildings	Monasteries, sub-temples, and shrines	These spaces facilitate to perform sacred ritual after a break and before restarting the circumambulation. On small scale, it provides a continuous visual confrontation to the god while walking around the central element.

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