

## **Mandi (Vedic temple)**

The Vedic culture and civilization were founded upon the vision and effort of the rishis and sages and the sanction of God in all His incarnations. The sages and rishis established institutions that have become the pillars of our great culture. One of the institution or pillar is the concept of Mandir, Temple.

The temple should be the center piece of social harmony and unity in the community. In a temple people from all walks of life and all the classes come together to worship God, their creator. The temple is the bridge between man and God. Every person needs someone they can confide in, tell their sorrows and pains. Someone they can share their joys with and someone that stands with them. God is the unseen partner of everyone and Mandir is a symbolic place where a person feels closest to God.

### ***The Purpose of a Temple***

The purpose of a temple is to create a common divine worship environment for everyone. In this environment there must be pure love and devotion for God, nothing else. At a mother's home all the children sit down for a meal. To the mother, education, wealth, status, rank and age do not mean anything since they are all her children. Similarly, in a temple people of all walks of life and all classes should forget their social inequalities and come together as children of one God. In the temple brotherhood and sisterhood of people under the fatherhood of God must be practiced. In most temples the footwear, shoes and slippers, are left outside of the temple. What do you think is the purpose of this practice? With your footwear, all your possession, like wealth, status, education, etc, which gives you a differentiation from your fellow human being must be left out. Just as in a home all children sit together in front of the mother during meal time, so must we all sit in front of our heavenly father, God. The temple symbolizes the faith of man in himself and in God. A group of people worshipping together in the temple is evidence of man's gratefulness to God. Temple is a place for man to account for his actions and to acknowledge God's active participation in his life by offering a portion of his daily earnings in the temple as God's share.

### ***Ideal Temple***

The ideal Temple should have all the aspects of the temple mentioned above. The ideal temple should be such that the person coming to the temple can be inspired to make his life like a temple. The Vedic scriptures are inspired by God. There should be daily recitation and study of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Geeta in the temple. The temple itself should be simple, spiritually uplifting and pleasing to the senses. The surroundings should inspire purity and peace of mind. That is why so many temples in the old days were situated far away from habitation, in the midst of nature. It is easy to forget matters of ego and worldly care in the presence of nature.

### ***Today's Temples***

Most of today's temples are architecturally magnificent – monuments of ostentation, there is nothing wrong with that. Some of today's temples have been in existence for hundreds of years, while some have recent origins. How did the recent temples come into existence in India? Usually, a few rich people of a community conceive the idea of building a temple for that

community. Generally, the understanding of a temple is what is being observed in other existing temples. To fulfill this goal of building a huge temple, fund raising activities are performed within the community. Most community members will give because they support a good idea, but some are not willing to give and feel coerced into doing so. Sometimes it does not matter that there may already be a few temples in the community. Somehow the temple gets built and priests are engaged to serve the community. But what happens then? Some of the benefactors rarely attend the daily worship; they may come once in a while. The people of the community come and go whenever they want, never staying long enough to meet with their fellow men. And the temples themselves seem to compete with each other as to which God is more popular based on the attendance.

As for prayer, can it be possible to have any spiritual peace amongst all the din of ringing bells and loud noise prevalent in these temples? In most temples, there are bells that are rung by the people when they visit the temple. Most temples are open throughout the day and as a consequence the ringing happens any time. If the only purpose of the temple was prayer, it would be more possible to pray quietly at home. Even though one purpose of the Temple is to bring together the people of society in common worship, the temples of today do not seem to accomplish that, either.

The temple should be able to foster emotional love for God. However, today they abound with beggars – not the ones outside the entrance to the temple, but those within, the men and women who come only to ask for something that they feel is lacking in their lives. They have forgotten that unasked, God has filled their lives with so many thousands of things to bring them pleasure and happiness. And one sees instead the people who come inside put some money for the Creator and Provider of the universe with the hope of earning some favor in the eyes of God!

### ***Vedic Temple***

The temple is the product of the Vedic sages' vision of bringing to an end the inequality amongst people through the use of devotion alone. Vedic teachings fostered the notion of gratitude to God in man. Life is a partnership between God and man. A little thought convinces man of his daily dependence on God. Reciting Trikal Sandhya everyday (at least three times) reminds a person of God who provides Smruti Daan at dawn of day, Shakti Daan at every meal time and Shanti Daan when he goes to sleep. An active God within man does these actions due to His love for man.

The temple is more than a community place for worship and offering. It is a “socio-economic center” for the people of the society. It shows them the way to remove the social inequality and economic disparity that exists among people using only devotion (Bhakti).

The temple is also the focus of community bonds and social cohesion. The temple's serene environment and devotion of the priests helps in achieving social equality. This is brought about with fostering love and understanding through devotion, and not imposing laws. Villagers gather at the temple every day, without distinction of caste and status, education or wealth, as children of one God. In the same way that in a family the children are equal in the eyes of their mother, even though one may be a doctor, one a farmer, one a businessman and another unemployed, so also everyone in a village can come together as equals at the temple for prayer and worship of their divine mother. The understanding of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God is developed.

## ***Concept of impersonal wealth***

We know that monetary inequality exists in every country. And every country has tried to deal with this. Various methods have been tried to address this problem. Government passes laws and policies that have encompassed methods such as distribution of funds, taxes, etc. However, people rebel against enforced methods of distribution of wealth. They therefore respond by evading taxes, hiding income, etc. Social workers and religious leaders have tried to reach the solution via a humanitarian approach. They advocate charity and donations to the needy. But these methods are erratic and inconsistent, and based entirely of the individual's sense of goodwill. Thus economic disparity has remained a social evil even today. Laws and rules cannot enforce desirable conduct. The desire to change has to come from within man. Transformation can only occur by understanding.

The Vedic temple teaches the concept of an in-dwelling God. It preaches that God is the unseen partner of our every action who provides us with all our energy. In any business, where there are partners, the income is distributed amongst the partners. Here, God is not merely a sleeping partner, but an active partner in life. Thus it behooves man to honestly offer God a share of his income. Those who ignore this participation of God in their life are sinners and thieves, according to Bhagavan Shree Krishna as stated in the Bhagvad Geeta.

A temple is the place where each man can offer a part of his income to God. This offered money is not man's charity to God, but God's share of the income earned by man, for without God's help, he would not be able to work. This wealth is truly impersonal – it belongs to God. Just as in a business partnership, a partner's share is not yours, this money is not yours but Gods. It is impersonal because you do not have any claim on it. This money can then to be distributed amongst the needy of that society as God's blessing (Prasad) in times of need, for the people who are needy at any given moment would also have offered a part of their earnings at the temple earlier. In charity work there is always superiority complex, inferiority complex and fear complex. The giver usually feels superior since he is capable to give. The receiver feels inferior because he is not capable to support himself. Fear complex is present because the donor maybe insulted and withdraws the giving of charity. In the temple environment, the giver is giving God's share, there is no reason to feel superior, a partner's share is given. The receiver is getting God's Prasad thus no need to feel inferior. The receiver may have also given God's share in the past and will do so again when he is capable. In this process, God is in center, and devotion to God is the understanding of the giver and taker, thus fear complex is also removed.

## ***Vedic temple solve social problems***

As mentioned before, the Vedic temple preaches the concept of in-dwelling God. So, the same God that resides in me also resides in other person. So, under this concept, all human being are brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of God. All people, irrespective of caste or status, can gather in the Temple. In the temple, Hindus of all sects can be reading from their books and still not feel different. The serenity of the atmosphere and the harmony among the people has to be seen to be believed. The understanding of the people transcends the bonds of religion to the wider concept of devotion to God, which unifies men and binds different religious sects with the common purpose of worship.

Social bonding takes place because everyone comes to the temple at a designated hour every morning and evening. After the formal worship, they sit together for consultation, counsel and decision – a form of informal village assembly. This creates a sense of equality and “we-feeling” in the community. It strengthens the sense of relatedness.

## ***Significance of idols in temple***

The human mind, intellect and soul cannot develop and energy cannot sprout without concentration of the mind. So, it's of utmost importance to concentrate the mind. But, the human mind cannot concentrate without a specific form. It relies upon specific objects for its concentration, which will take the form of that object. If the human mind tries to concentrate on the divine form, then the mind and ultimately the entire life can become divine. So, rather than depending on any other object, the human mind should concentrate on the divine form embedded in the idols of the Temple. In the beginning, the human mind takes the form of this idol of their faith, and then, slowly, this idol form goes away and the human can experience the fullness. So, for real human development and to reach up to the experience of this fullness, the concept of idol worship is provided by Vedic Temple.

## ***How temple helps in making life a temple***

As we discussed, the temple is the place where God resides. One can try to live life in such a way that God desires to reside in one's life. Then that life can become the temple. Just as the temple should be clean, pure, filled with joyous, pious, devotional and Vedic thoughts, the life should also be made clean, pious, filled with joy & love, and filled with knowledge, action and devotion, so that it can uplift the lives of others. Once the understanding of God within me is reached, my thinking, my actions and my attitude towards life changes. If God is within me, I cannot be inferior? How can I live just the materialistic life, an animal life? How can I not understand that the God is an active partner in my every action? And since that is true, it's my duty to give God's share back in the form of my time, efficiency or earnings. When one starts living this kind of life, it becomes a temple.

Points:

- Concept from Rishis
- Brings unity and harmony within society
- Concept of brotherhood & sisterhood under fatherhood of God
- Ideal temple provides study of scriptures
- Peaceful surrounding away from day to day noise
- Vedic temple provided a means to remove inequality in society
- Socio-Economic center
- Concept of impersonal wealth
- Superiority, inferiority and fear complex do not exist
- In dwelling God in all, thus the equal
- Murti pooja is for purification of mind.