tAla in vAstu Shilpa shAstra



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Article By: Ar. Sashikala Ananth
Ganesha Sketch credit: Indian sculpture & Iconography by Ganapathi Sthapathi & translated by Sashikala
Ananth
(Sanskrit- PrathimamAnAlakshanam Tamil- Shilpa chenul)

In the field of *vAstu shilpa shAstra* the importance given to ratios and proportions is very high. Let us look at the place of *tAla* in all the traditions to understand it.

***tAla*:** it's a name given to rhythms in sound that is also known as tempo. In the visual field, it is called *mukham, tAla, pada*, or module. In Indian classical music, *tAla* plays a pivotal role. It is both an audible rhythm maintained by the skin drums such as *mridanga, tabla,* etc and the inherent rhythm maintained by the musician with the hands. In dance, the *tAla* is maintained

by the feet. Through sustained and intense practice the tAla becomes a part of the body, voice, and emotions of the artist. Therefore even if there is no drum playing, the musician or dancer will not miss a beat.

In the same way, Vedic chanting also holds a very powerful rhythmic structure that is internalised by the person who is chanting. Here the *tAla* and the *shabda* or sound merge to create a complete pattern. This *tAla* is part of what is called *Chandas* and also takes years of practice to get internalised and embodied by the person.

What is important to pay attention here is that in every one of these traditions, there is a methodology to learn and manifest this structure. It takes years of *sAdhanA.* For the total impact of this sound on the Rasika or listener/viewer the artist and the *vaidika* have to offer it with sincerity and precision. The body and the voice have to be carefully prepared to transfer this rhythm into the space. It is said that when the artist offers from a deep and quiet inner space, this manifestation is capable of transforming the listener/viewer.

shishurvEtti pashurvEtti vEtti gAnarasam phaNiH

“This chanting or singing that comes from a meditative space and has its root in the Vedas is capable of being understood by animals, babies and snakes”.

***tAla* in *vAstu shilpa*:**

vastu is the form and *vAstu* is the space in which the smaller form exists. Therefore, the relationship between form and space is the essence of *vAstu shAstra*. When a form or *vastu* that inhabits a space is out of alignment then there is a disturbance in the inner alignment of people who occupy the space. Every individual component in the space has to be in rhythmic balance with each other and with the overall space. This *lakshaNa* takes years of disciplined practice to manifest in the physical space. Such a *sAdhana* when it manifests, is what we call *tAla, pada* and *samyama*.

Proportions are a mathematical algorithm that is extended to every aspect of the built form. Once a module has been chosen, it’s multiples and fractions are used to create all the elements of the form.

For example: if the width of a module in a *paramasayika pada gruha* (a grid of 9×9) is 5′ after calculating for *shaDAyAdi poruttam (*auspicious measurement), then the total width can be 5 times 5′ ie. 25′;

The length can be 9 times 5′ ie 45′;

The size of rooms can be 2,3,4 times the size of the module;

The doors can be 3/4 module wide and 1 1/2 modules high;

The size of columns in the veranda can be 1/5 of the module;

The height of the rooms can be 2 times the module when they are small, and 2 1/2 times when they are larger rooms.

The entire building can be 3,4,5 times the module in height and so on.

The interplay of the ratios and proportions cannot be random, it must fall into the 3 principles of design: *bhogaDyam, sukhadarshanan* and *ramya*.

bhogaDyam refers to the usefulness of the element, *sukhadarshanam* refers to the aesthetics of the element and the integration of the elements in the larger form (not unlike the place of *swaras* in a *rAga*. when the balance is not correct the *rAga* loses its integrity). *ramya* stands for the choice of the rhythm, the *tAla*, the numerical value and the frequency of the energy that permeates the built form.

This process is very subtle/*sukshma* and has to be learnt under an able Guru.