Marta Kudelska, Dorota Kamińska–Jones,
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The Temple Road Towards a Great India

Birla Mandirs as a Strategy for Reconstructing Nation and Tradition

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH ◼

This book presents the preliminary results of research carried out within a project entitled "Birla Mandir—modern Hindu temple complexes as an example of modernization by going back to tradition" supported by the National Science Center, Poland within the "Opus 5" program [number UMO-2013/09/B/HS1/02005].[1] The research work included temples founded from the 1930s onwards by the Birla family, colloquially referred to as the "Birla Mandirs".[2] The main goal of the research was to collect as wide a selection of documentation about the temples as possible and to conduct a preliminary analysis in order to establish some of the most important issues. First of all, is it possible to treat the BMs as a specific medium—the carrier of a particular message (a kind of narrative) that is not only religious, but with a significance that permeates other layers of social and political discourse? Secondly does—and if so, to what extent—this message have a bearing on the socio-political thought of India and was this supported by the creation and propagation of ideas related to identity and a national art. It was also important to indicate the structure of the narrative,

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[1]   The research team comprised: the head of the project Prof. Marta Kudelska, Dr. Agnieszka Staszczyk, Dr. Agata Świerzowska and Prof. Dorota Kamińska-Jones who contributed as an independent expert.

[2]   Referred to from here on as: BM for Birla Mandir and BMs for Birla Mandirs.

identify the basic strategies and means of communication and reconstruct its fundamental meaning. It was also relevant to investigate whether and how the temples founded by the Birla family represent hierarchical Hindu inclusivism which, although it considers all religions as equal, treats Hinduism in a unique way—seeing within it the most perfect form of religion, giving man the opportunity to learn the highest truth. It was also interesting to examine whether the temples established by the Birla family and the religious activities undertaken in them apply Eric Hobsbawm's concept of "inventing" tradition,[3] and whether traditions created (or "modernized") in contemporary times are becoming a way to increasing the attractiveness of the message that flows from temple to society.

Three research trips were conducted as part of the project:

a) the first (February/March 2014)[4] included the following temples: Shri Lakshmi Narayan (Delhi), Shri Lakshmi Narayan (Patna, Bihar), Krishna/Gita Mandir (Kurukshetra, Haryana), Saraswati/Sharda Peeth (Pilani, Rajasthan), New Vishwanath (Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh), Shri Radha Krishna (Kolkata, West Bengal), Renukeshwar Mahadev Mandir (Renukoot, Uttar Pradesh);[5]

b) the second (January/February 2015) included these temples: Shri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir (Jaipur, Rajasthan), Vishnu-Vivasvan (Surya) Mandir (Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh), Shri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir (Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh), Vithoba Mandir (Shahad/Mumbai, Maharashtra), Venkateshwara Mandir (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh), Vinayak-Ganesha Mandir (Alibaug/Salav, Maharashtra), Vishnu Sheshashayi Mandir (Nagda, Madhya Pradesh), Rama Mandir (Akola, Maharashtra),[6] as well as a return to Shri Radha Krishna (Kolkata, West Bengal), Shri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir, Delhi;

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[3] Cf. E. Hobsbawm, T. Tanger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge Univeristy Press, Cambridge 2000.

[4] Moreover, in addition to this research trip, in July of the same year, A. Staszczyk visited a temple in Mathura during other fieldwork, where she made photographic documentation.

[5] The research report as well as preliminary hypotheses are presented in: M. Kudelska, A. Staszczyk, A. Świerzowska, "Birla mandir—współczesne hinduistyczne kompleksy świątynne jako przykład modernizacji przez powrót do tradycji", *Estetyka i Krytyka*, series *The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2014, Kraków, pp. 27–53.

[6] Research report, see: M. Kudelska, A. Staszczyk, A. Świerzowska, "Birla Mandirs—The Contemporary Hindu Temple Complexes as an Example of Modernization by Going Back to Tradition—2015 fieldwork report", *The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture.*

c) during the third (January/February 2016) the following BMs were visited: Shri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir and Shiva Mandir (Brajrajnagar, Odisha), as well as Bhavatarini Mandir (Amlai, Madhya Pradesh),[7] and temples in Varanasi and Delhi were revisited.

In total, 19 temple complexes founded by the Birla family were incorporated in the research, including the best known and the most recognizable, as well as smaller shrines, which are more local in character. One significant area of difficulty that we encountered during the research, even at the preparatory stage, was the impossibility to determine the exact number of temples created at the behest of the Birla family. In spite of many efforts, we were not able to access a reliable source that would allow us to identify the locations of all/other foundations. The only information on this subject is provided by M. Kudaisya, writing that by the 1980s, the family "endowed with more than 40 large temples in almost all the major cities of India, as well as dharamshalas and many religious institutions and sites."[8] However, it can be assumed that the number given here includes not only temples built by the family, but also facilities that were established with only the partial financial support of the Birlas or to which they gave financial support for maintenance or renovation. On the other hand, the subject of this research was limited to the buildings constructed from scratch.

As part of the research, we also visited some secular institutions founded by members of the Birla family: in Bhopal—the Birla Museum, in Hyderabad—the B.M. Birla Science Center Complex, in Jaipur—the B.M. Birla Planetarium, in Kolkata—the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, the M. P. Birla Planetarium and Modern High School for Girls, and in Pilani—the Birla Institute of Technology and Science campus. These projects stem from the same concept as the BMs and carry a similar message, yet functioning on a secular level. A detailed study of these facilities—their history, assumptions, missions, as well as functions

New Series, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016, pp. 149–170, http://www.ejournals.eu/PJACNS/2016/1(2016)/ (accessed 10.10.2017).

[7] Research report, see: M. Kudelska, A. Staszczyk, A. Świerzowska, "Birla mandir—współczesne hinduistyczne kompleksy świątynne jako przykład modernizacji przez powrót do tradycji. Sprawozdanie z badań terenowych (styczeń/luty 2016 rok)", *The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture. New Series*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2016, pp. 93–107, http://www.ejournals.eu/PJACNS/2016/2(2016)/ (accessed 10.10.2017).

[8] M. Kudaisya, *The Life and Times of G.D. Birla*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2013, p. 393.

and social impact would require separate studies. In further parts of the book, we only point out interesting directions for possible further research, and we treat these observations merely as material that allows us to outline the broader background of the Birla family's foundations.

While conducting research in individual temples, we focused on gathering the most detailed photographic material documenting the architectural compositions and the iconographic program. This formed the necessary basis for subsequent analyses and attempts to reconstruct the messages conveyed by the temples. The photos were taken both outside and (wherever possible, and where we obtained the appropriate permits) inside the temples, thus creating a rich and unique archive with full photographic documentation of all 19 shrines. This is the only collection of this kind known to us.

An important element of the field research were interviews with temple management and/or priests, complementing our information on the history of the temple and its founders. This aspect was significant because the BMs—in a global sense—had not yet been the subject of academic research, and no comprehensive body of work exists to elaborate them. Hence, it was often problematic to establish the basic facts about a given temple. The interviews elicited some of the missing information, but unfortunately not all. Other important issues raised during our conversations also concerned the way the temples were managed, the estimated number of visitors, relationships with others, including secular, institutions founded by the Birla family. We tried many times to contact the representatives of the youngest generation of the Birla family and/or representatives of organizations that supervise the temples. These people would be the most reliable and probably constitute the richest source of information about the temples under research. Unfortunately, despite many efforts and considerable help from many distinguished representatives of Indian and Polish institutions, including the Polish Embassy in Delhi, we were unable to establish contact. These efforts did not yield any results in terms of access to family archives and documentation created during the construction of the temples. For this reason, in full awareness of its deficiencies, we present the most comprehensive elaboration possible, which we managed to write based on the materials available to us.

In some temples, we also conversed with the visitors. The questions addressed to them focused primarily on the personal motives that prompt them to choose a particular place of worship. The information

collected was helpful in determining how the BMs are perceived by them and how they function both in the conscience of individuals and entire communities. The data thus obtained also led to the formulation of some interesting, yet rough hypotheses that may be treated as a preliminary indication of further, promising directions of research. An in-depth analysis of the social context in which the temples function and how they are present in the conscience of the Indians would require separate research based on a different methodology.

II. THE STATE OF RESEARCH ■

As previously mentioned, the BMs have not yet undergone a comprehensive academic study that looks at all aspects of the Birla foundations. Literature analysing these issues can be divided into several basic groups.

The first involves publications devoted to the Birla family—their history, enterprises and the biographies of individual members, as well as some memoirs. At the same time, most publications focus on the life and activity of the most seemingly recognizable member of the Birla family—Ghanshyamdas. Among them, it is worth mentioning *An Inspired Journey*[9] by A.K. Sen (ed.) that includes illustrations and basic information about selected temples, or *The Glorious 90 Years: G.D. Birla, Ramnaomi 1894–11th June 1983*[10]—of a similar nature. Next, one ought to include *G.D. Birla. A Biography*[11] by R.N. Jaju, and *G.D. Birla—Life and Legacy*[12] by M.M. Juneja, where some temples are mentioned and, above all, the context is shown. Also noteworthy is the work of M. Kudaisya entitled *The Life and Times of G.D. Birla*, which is the only objective academic study presenting the brief history of the Birla family and a detailed analysis of the activities of Ghanshyamdas. Although the author provides a lot of relevant information that helps reconstruct the ideological background of the foundation, she only mentions the

[9]   A.K. Sen (ed.), *An Inspired Journey*, Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta 1998.

[10]   D.P. Mandelia (ed.), *The Glorious 90 Years: G.D. Birla, Ramnaomi 1894–11th June 1983*, Kishor Parekh Associates, Bombay 1983.

[11]   R.N. Jaju, *G.D. Birla. A Biography* Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, New Delhi 1986.

[12]   M.M. Juneja, *G.D. Birla—Life and Legacy,* Modern Publishers, Hisar 2000.

temples themselves marginally. Also worth including here is the auto-biography of K.K. Birla, the son of Ghanshyamdas, entitled *Brushes with History*, in which the author mentions some temples established by his father, as well as the Kolkata temple, of which he himself was the initiator and the main founder.

The second group includes books and articles on art history that deal with selected temples. They are often set in the wider context of Indian architecture in the 20th century. The most important tome in this respect is by J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai and entitled *Architecture and Independence. The Search for Identity—India 1880 to 1980*,[13] dealing with the BM in Delhi and the endeavours of its designer against the background of the foundations from the beginning of the 20th century. An article by S. Gupta—"Sris Chandra Chatterjee: The Quest for a National Architecture"[14]—is of a similar character and focuses on the main architect of the Delhi temple.

The recently published work by S. Bhatra—*Rejuvenation of the Nāgara Temples (With Special Reference to Yamunā Pāra Plain. 19th & 20th Century)*,[15] dedicated to the *nāgara* temples in North India includes, among others, the BM in Delhi and Mathura, although it treats them very generally by focusing on a description of the architecture and decoration, while making only scant reference to the artistic or socio-political context for the analysis of the BMs selected here for study.

It is also worth distinguishing publications in this category that discuss contemporary Hindu temples, because they facilitate a broader look at the BMs, especially those belonging to the so-called second group, whose design differs from the model of the Hindu Rashtra Mandir (Birla Mandir in Delhi). Some general studies mention selected BMs, such as: "Contemporary Architectural Languages of the Hindu Temple in India"[16] by A. Mukerji, S. Basu, "Sompura: Traditional

[13] J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, *Architecture and Independence. The Search for Identity—India 1880 to 1980*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997.

[14] S. Gupta, "Sris Chandra Chatterjee: The Quest for a National Architecture", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1991.

[15] S. Bhatra, *Rejuvenation of the Nāgara Temples (With Special Reference to Yamunā Pāra Plain. 19th & 20th Century)*, Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, Delhi 2014.

[16] A. Mukerji, S. Basu, "Contemporary Architectural Languages of the Hindu Temple in India", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2015.

Master Builders of Western India"[17] by R.J. Vasavada, or *Rediscovering the Hindu Temple: The Sacred Architecture and Urbanism of India*[18] by V. Bharne, K. Krusche, L. Krier. However, the most significant of all is the article by S.N. Prasad, entitled "The Saraswati Temple at Pilani,"[19] because it is the only one that comprehensively analyses a specific temple. The author gives information about the creators, details related to the foundation, construction and consecration, and also provides a description and analysis of the building and its special decoration on the external walls.

One should also mention materials intended for tourists, which focus almost exclusively on the architectural details of the buildings and basic information about the foundations. Among them, apart from traditional publications, one ought to distinguish websites that have been developed, among others, by private individuals who visited the temples that strive to present the BMs as regional attractions. Among institutional websites, it is worth noting the Banaras Hindu University website, which contains a subpage devoted to the New Vishwanath Mandir (a short description, history, employees, events and holidays, etc.) prepared exclusively in Hindi.[20]

The collected material and the preliminary analysis based on it, as previously mentioned, is therefore completely innovative. The data presented in this book—representing only a small fragment of what was gathered—and the subsequent discussion open up new, extremely promising directions of research.

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[17]   R.J. Vasavada, "Sompura: Traditional Master Builders of Western India" [in:] *Authenticity in Architectural Heritage Conservation: Discourses, Opinions, Experiences in Europe, South and East Asia*, K. Weiler, N. Gutschow (eds.), Springer, Heidelberg 2017.

[18]   V. Bharne, K. Krusche, *Rediscovering the Hindu Temple: The Sacred Architecture and Urbanism of India*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK 2012.

[19]   S.N. Prasad, "Sharda Peeth: The Saraswati Temple at Pilani" [in:] *Modern India. Heritage and Achievement. Shri Ghanshyam Das Birla Eightieth Birthday Commemoration Volume*, The Committee, Pilani 1977.

[20]   http://www.bhu.ac.in/VT/ (accessed 10.10.2017).

The project founded for decades by successive Birla generations constitutes a highly coherent enterprise. The guiding idea was defined as building foundations for the spiritual and political power of modern India through a new reading of Indian tradition, in line with the challenges of the 20th century. As previously indicated, this forms a kind of narrative,[21] where many threads underwent far-reaching idealization. It should be emphasized here that the Indians understood historical processes in a more traditional way (*itihāsa*) than the approach of, for example, Herodotus. They paid more attention to the message of *śruti*, *smṛti*, or the later hagiographies of eminent leaders, rulers, saints and spiritual teachers. Due to the fact that the aforementioned narrative and message are built on a traditional Indian story, this project adopted a similar strategy. As an example of such an approach, it is worth quoting the *Mahābhārata*—regardless of which topic is examined first since all others will be referred to in the end. This is also how the Birla project is presented in this book. Of course, with complete awareness of the need to objectify the narrative discussed, in many places we point to over-interpretations, idealizations and decontextualizations. However, because the purpose of the research is not to critically analyse the narrative expressed in and via the BMs, but to reconstruct its axial motifs, such remarks are given only where necessary in order to understand the message itself and to show the process of creating the narrative itself.

The Birla project is interdisciplinary in nature, raising and evoking so many issues and associations that it is not possible to refer to each and every one of them. The quantity of the material gathered imposes the need to focus on a selected few, which we consider to be the most representative in order to organize the message and create a coherent

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[21] We understand the narrative here according to J. Trzebiński as a "special form of cognitive representation of reality" and "a way of understanding reality" that surrounds man in a direct and historical way, which is not visible to the naked eye but noticeably determines the shape of the former (J. Trzebiński, "Wstęp", p. 14). Each narrative is a way of organizing historical data, its understanding and interpretation—giving meaning or seeking a hidden meaning within, it is also a way of remembering and transmitting such information. In narratives, a kind of transformation is carried out—a stream of events, a set of facts connected by time and space, turns into a story that takes on a given meaning resulting from a specific interpretation of these events.

Smṛti—"what you remember". Collections of texts included in Tradition. The *smṛti* consist of two great epics: the *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata*, as well as the *purāṇa*s (ancient tales), *itihāsa*s (stories), myths and various liturgical and legal texts. The basic framework of the *smṛti* was created around the 4ᵗʰ century BC–10ᵗʰ century AD. The *smṛti* also include the *vedāṅga*—written in the form of short aphorisms (*sūtra*)—that are closely related to the Vedic tradition, comprising issues related to language (grammar, phonetics, metrics, etymology), astronomy and Vedic ritual (*Śrautasūtra*s), domestic ritual (*Gṛhyasūtra*s), and the ritual that teaches the principles of *dharma* (*Dharmasūtra*s). Their continuations include: the *Dharmaśāstra*s, along with the *Manusmṛti*, political treatises (*Arthaśāstra*), or the famous treatise on love—*Kāmasūtra*. The smallest collection of *smṛti* is the *Mahābhārata*, composed of 18 books. The main thread of the story is focused on the feud between two related families: the Pāṇḍavas, under the leadership of Yudhiṣṭhira, and the Kauravas, commanded by Duryodhana. The conflict is finally settled in a fratricidal battle in the Kuru field. Before the battle in the Kuru Field begins the action of the most famous passage in the *Mahābhārata*, part of the sixth book—the *Bhagavadgītā*. The content of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the relationship of a conversation between the elevated form of the supreme deity, Kṛṣṇa, and his friend and zealous worshiper, Arjuna. Before the battle, Arjuna has doubts about whether he can defend himself against members of his family, teachers and friends. Kṛṣṇa's lecture serves to dispel his doubts, to explain to him the nature of reality and, above all, to indicate the proper course of action in accordance with *dharma*. It is a philosophically syncretic text, using the concepts of theistic *Vedānta*, *Sāṁkhya*, *Yoga*, as well as Vedic ritual, even using the concepts of the Vedic hymns. However, it is more of an ethical lecture, indicating proper courses of conduct, especially in extreme situations and propagating an attitude of worshiping God—*bhakta*. For certain groups of Hindus, some fragments of the *smṛti*, such as the *Bhagavadgītā*, have the same rank of sanctity as the texts belonging to the *śruti*. The *Rāmāyana* tells the story of King Rāma and his wife Sītā—the personification of all women's virtues—against the background of their exile. Rāma obediently decides to go into exile in order to allow her father to keep his oath and not breach *dharma*. In this way, he himself becomes the personification of the *dharma* of an ideal ruler. During his exile, he fights many opponents, including the demon Rāvaṇa, who tricked him and imprisoned Sītā. In this battle, his greatest ally is the monkey army commanded by the king of monkeys—Hanumān. Hanumān is an example of the perfect *bhakta*, faithful to Rāma, with the beloved Sītā and Rāma eternally in his heart. Different groups of Hindus hold the 18 main *purāṇa*s in different esteem. For followers of Viṣṇu in the form of the Kṛṣṇa *avatar*, the most important is the *Bhagavatapurāṇa*, which reveals the extremely colourful history of Kṛṣṇa's life, including his numerous battles with demons. In all these stories, the main characters above all play the role of guardians of the eternal *dharma*.

whole. This choice is subjective in nature—many lines of inquiry have been omitted, while others have been emphasized. To a large extent, this is related to a desire that this book—probably not the last one on this topic—should be relatively compact and focus on the main messages presented in accordance with the concept of their reading.

Focusing on the main message is also inherent in the narrative of the founders. After analysing the material, it can be concluded that in the preparation of all the inscriptions, panels, various representations, and thus meticulously composing the iconographic program, a whole spectrum of outstanding specialists and scholars sought to direct the overall message towards everyone, not only experts in the field. It seems that not only our analysis, but also the message of the founders was comprehensively simplified. Visitors to the BMs, which are increasingly treated as living museums or galleries rather than temples of worship,

Śruti—"what is heard", knowledge transmitted verbally. *Śruti* is the name of the canon of revealed literature, whose author was not a man (*apauraṣeya*), and therefore one that is flawless, infallible, which nobody has the slightest right to violate or change at all. It should be kept and conveyed with reverence due to the sacred nature of its texts. In India, the *Veda* is accredited to this category of texts—a very large collection of hymns and sequences of further comments and notes. The term *śruti* is sometimes identified with the term *veda*, in the sense of a set of texts written in Vedic Sanskrit, which consists of four successive layers of writings: *Sāṁhitā*s, *Brāhmana*s, *Āraṇyaka*s, *Upaniṣad*s. The oldest textual artefact is the *Veda*, a collection of hymns, songs, sacrificial and ritual magical formulas. *Veda*—i.e. knowledge—is the name of a collection, which was created more or less from 1200 to 900 BC. Vedic literature consists of a collection of hymns—*Saṃhitā*. The oldest collection is *Ṛgveda*—knowledge of hymns. The next ones are: *Sāmaveda*—knowledge of melodies, songs, chants and *Yajurveda*—knowledge of sacrificial formulas. The Vedic tradition grew in stages. After some time, the collections of individual hymns—four *Veda*s by this time—required comments. Thus the *Brāhmaṇas*—liturgical comments—were formed, continued by the *Āraṇyaka* forest books considerations, mainly regarding reflection on the meaning of sacrifice. The *Upaniṣad*s are esoteric ritualistic and philosophical texts, considering the relationship between reality perceived from the perspective of the principium of subjectivity (*Ātman*), and the principle of presented reality (*Brahman*). The so-called canonical *Upaniṣad*s usually include 12 or 13 texts; as one of the more recognized criteria, it is accepted that the canonical ones were those that were either commented on by Śaṅkara, or fragments of them quoted in his comments. Careful dating of the entire canon of *śruti* is: 1200–300 BC.

have the chance to become acquainted with the overall vision, without penetrating the individual ideas or ideologies that constitute it.

The richness of themes and topics makes it impossible to adopt a single methodology. At the same time, we made a conscious decision to present and summarize the results of our research in a simple way, limiting their interpretation as far as possible so as not to render it illegible. Thus, recalling many detailed threads, concepts, stories or figures, we do not delve deeply or critically into a related topic, leaving it on such a level of generality that a comprehensive message may still be constructed. We took the same approach with inscriptions that accompany individual facilities. Due to their huge number, we decided in some cases to provide exact translations of the fragments quoted, while in others we only included collective discussions. As mentioned above, the emphasis is on the clarity and consistency of the argument.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS ■

The book consists of two main parts. Part one—"Assumptions, Objectives and Scope of Research"—is of an introductory nature. The research material is presented and characterized therein—the BMs included in the research are presented, along with their classification and the main idea guiding their founders (Chapter 1). The whole is set in the broader context of the history and shaping of the idea of charity in India, with particular emphasis on the activities of the Birla family—the founders of the temples under study (Chapter 2). The ideological context also turned out to be highly significant for the researched temple complexes—an indication of their sources of inspiration, identification of the basic threads forming the message conveyed by the BMs, identification of the "founding fathers" of the venture, whose ideas were more or less realized in the temples established by subsequent generations of the family (Chapter 3).

This part of the book also contains an analysis of the concept of Indian national art—its genesis, development, character, meaning—thus determining the main line of interpretation of the examined temples (belonging to the older group, founded before the end of the 1960s). This concept is demonstrated by the example of the oldest and, so it seems, the key BM—Shri Lakshmi Narayan temple in Delhi, which

was intended by the founders to be a model of a new Hindu Rashtra Mandir. This shrine became the reference point for subsequent BMs in the so-called older group, which reproduced not only the architectural pattern adopted in the temple in Delhi, but also the iconographic program with a specific national message (Chapter 4). Due to the model character of the BM in Delhi, in subsequent chapters of the book, presenting a detailed analysis of selected threads appearing in the temples founded by the Birla family, Shri Lakshmi Narayan temple in Delhi will always be presented first.

The second part of the book—"Analysis of the Program—Selected Issues"—is devoted entirely to an in-depth analysis of selected themes appearing in the iconographic program of the BMs. In our opinion, the extremely complex, rich and diverse iconographic program of the temples has been subordinated to the main idea, which constitutes an attempt to express and, at the same time, construct a new tradition that could become the basis for formulating a new, modern Hindu identity. The presentation starts with the general set of characters and scenes in the BM décor, which can be considered to be the most important symbols of Hindu identity (Chapter 5). Next, the importance of the *Upaniṣad*s themes is demonstrated, which, while retaining the Hindu dimension of the message conveyed by the BMs, ensure a universalizing character at the same time (Chapter 6). An extremely important element of the BM program is the *Bhagavadgītā*. Passages from this book are not only written on panels to create an integral part of the decoration, but are also dedicated to separate temples and pavilions. In the BMs, the *Gītā* is treated as an interpretation of basic Hindu values (Chapter 7). The entire message of the BMs, although multifaceted, is extremely consistent. As we maintain, what lies at its foundation, what determines its coherence, is the Vedantic philosophy in the version popularized by Swami Vivekananda. From this perspective, some specific thinkers, philosophers, religious leaders or ascetics, who appear in the iconography of the BMs, have been selected. Thus the next chapter of the book (Chapter 8) is devoted to their analysis (along with the ideas they represent). Equally important representations related to the struggle for the defence and maintenance of Hindu/*Ārya dharma* is dealt with in the following part (Chapter 9). They are directly related to the nationalist character of the first temples of the Birla foundation. The characters and themes of Tradition selected by the authors of the program perfectly illustrate the process of creating a message based

on carefully selected elements, not always in accordance with historical truth. The same problem occurs in two subsequent chapters. The first of these (Chapter 10) is devoted to a woman's place in the *Ārya* tradition and examines female mystics and ascetics as well as philosophers and warriors. The role of many of them is presented as much more significant than was originally the case, which definitely corresponds to the needs of new Hinduism and modern nationalism. In the second one, we discuss the role and meaning of elements of the Buddhist tradition in the BMs, which, as we point out, was used to build a vision of universal Hinduism (Chapter 11). In the concluding chapter, we show the BMs as a kind of "cultural media" whose aim—apart from their obvious cult function—was to create a new, conscious Hindu identity of a citizen by inventing a tradition or building a collective memory that refers to the past but at the same time meets the requirements of contemporary times (Chapter 12).

The text, in specially designated places, also features some additional information that is relevant for understanding the reasoning presented throughout the book—these include definitions of the key terms used, as well as short profiles of characters who were important for the BM project. These profiles present only the most important moments in the lives and achievements of the persons referred to, as well as the basic ideas or concepts formulated by them, which are reflected in the BMs. In turn, the definitions of terminology are like dictionary entries and so their content, although widely accepted, is general and slightly simplified because they do not take into account the subtle differences arising from various contexts: historical, cultural, philosophical or theological. The definition of the terms used is significant because the authors of the BM project use them many times in accordance with their own understanding and interpretation, which are presented in the main text.

The overall analysis is supplemented by tables: a genealogical tree of the Birla family, a chronological list of all the temples researched along with some basic information about them and a list of all the deities and figures appearing in the BM decorations.

V. COMMENTS ON TRANSLITERATION ◼

Scientific transliteration was used 1. in foreign terms from Indian languages, 2. in names and surnames which were used in literature up until the period when they began to be commonly introduced in the Latin alphabet on the subcontinent, 3. in Sanskrit or Hindi quotes, which additionally appear in italics. In other names, the English versions were used, because they are more widespread. In the geographical names, the official English versions are used, according to the *Oxford Atlas of the World* (Oxford University Press).

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ◼

Fig. 1: The entrance gate to
the Birlas' *havelī* in Pilani
(now the family museum),
photo A. Świerzowska

Fig. 2: The Shri Lakshmi Narayan Birla Mandir in Delhi, 1933–1939, general view,
photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 3: The Shri Lakshmi Narayan Birla Mandir in Patna, 1942, entrance view, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 4: The Shrimadbhagavadgita Birla Mandir in Mathura, 1946, side view, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 5: The Shri Lakshmi Narayan Birla Mandir in Brajrajnagar, 1950, front view, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 6: The Gita Birla Mandir in Kurukshetra, 1952, general side view with *Gītā-ratha* in the foreground, photo A. Świerzowska

Fig. 7: The Rama Birla Mandir in Akola, 1960s, side view, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 8: The Shri Lakshmi Narayan Birla Mandir in Bhopal, 1960–1964, front view, photo A. Świerzowska

Fig. 9: The Shiva Birla Mandir in Brajrajnagar, 1960, side view, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 10: The New Vishwanath Mandir in Varanasi, 1931–1966, the superstructure, in the foreground the Malaviya statue facing the temple entrance, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 11: The Saraswati Birla Mandir in Pilani, 1956–1960, photo A. Staszczyk

Fig. 12: The Vithoba Birla Mandir in Shahad, 1960–1966, the temple entrance, photo A. Świerzowska

PART I
ASSUMPTIONS, OBJECTIVES
AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

BIRLA TEMPLES—THE LOCATION OF THE FOUNDATIONS, DIVISION INTO GROUPS, MAIN IDEA

The foundations organized by the Birla family should be considered as an extensive and long-term project. Several generations were involved in the renovation and foundation of sanctuaries, temples and other sacral buildings.[1] In fact, the first founder in the full sense of the word—that is, the instigator of the construction of the temples from scratch—was Raja Baldev Das (Baldeodas) Birla, whose name appears on the earliest foundations. His work was continued by his sons (mainly Jugalkishore and Ghanshyamdas) and grandchildren (especially Ganga Prasad). As a result, between 1933 and 1998, 19 temples were established, mainly in northern and central India.[2] The foundation sites were carefully selected—some of them are important for Indian tradition and/or religious life or are political centres such as Delhi, Mathura, Kurukshetra, Varanasi, Patna and Kolkata. However, several temples were built away from the main tourist or pilgrimage

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[1]   The Birla Foundation, run by Ganga Prasad Birla and his wife, among others, records about 100 temples, which were restored with the government's consent in such states as: Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The most important buildings are: the Kali Temple at Kalighat, Kolkata, the Gargaj Ka Hanuman Temple in Gwalior, the Vindhyavasini Temple at Mirzapur, the Galtaji Complex and Govind Deoji and Natwarji Temple Complex in Jaipur and Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. See A.K. Sen (ed.), *An Inspired Journey*, Birla Archaeological and Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta 1998, pp. 113–123. See also the family's genealogical tree, Appendix 1.

[2]   A complete list of temples where the field studies were conducted between 2014–2016, along with basic information on each of them, can be found in Appendix 2.

trails, in industrial towns established by the Birlas, in the immediate vicinity of the factories/facilities belonging to them. Here one might mention, for example, Brajrajnagar (cellulose production, coal mines), Renukoot (aluminium factory), Shahad (fabric production) or Alibaug/Salav (manufacture of steel, cellulose). In this study, only temples built from scratch will be analysed. The first one to be completed as well as the most important one is the temple erected in honour of Lakshmi Narayan in Delhi opened in 1939 with the participation of Mahatma Gandhi. It played a key role in shaping the architectural forms and building decorations in the first/older group of temples, which contained the most important ideas of national art. Apart from the temple in Delhi, one may also include six buildings located in places of great historical importance, as well as in small industrial centres, in: Patna, Mathura, Brajrajnagar (Lakshmi Narayan Mandir), Akola, Kurukshetra and Bhopal.[3] This group was the first to appear chronologically, and due to its architectural features, it can be described as following the model of a new-modern Hindu temple ascribed by Sris Chandra Chatterjee, starting from the foundation in Delhi. The project of a national temple for a new, independent state aimed to create a standard for a Hindu sanctuary, in accordance with the ideas of revivalism and the Modern Indian Architectural Movement, of which Chatterjee was one of the main initiators.[4] This architect spent the early years of his career in the Bikaner region, where he forged contacts with craftsmen working with traditional methods.[5] He traveled to the Dilwara temples in Mt. Abu, where restoration work was being carried out, as well as to Ujjain and Vijayanagar. As noted by S. Gupta:

[3] Due to the partially preserved formal features and the emerging decoration in the form of inscribed panels and representations, this group may also include the temples devoted to Śiva in Brajrajnagar and Varanasi, although it should be noted that they differ from other buildings.

[4] J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, *Architecture and Independence. The Search for Identity—India 1880 to 1980*, Oxford University Press, Delhi–New York 1997, pp. 17, 131, 133–134.

[5] In that period, the founders included local Hindu rulers. As Tagdell noticed, some of them reacted to the current discussion on the revival of arts: "The eclectic clash of historical styles variously pretending to relevance for modern building, was heard in India as in Britain. [...] In this field, as in that of princely building, the second wave of reform at home, primarily vernacular in inspiration, promoted renewed interest—officially and scholarly—in India's heritage." Cf. C. Tagdell, *The History of Architecture in India. From the Dawn of Civilization to the End of the Raj*, Phaidon Press, London 1990, p. 263.

These early influences were instrumental in shaping his ideas of bringing about a renaissance, and the formulation of a policy to create a "national" architecture for the future. At another level, his commitment to reviving an indigenous style, had its roots in the prevalent intellectual atmosphere of the art circles which were then under the influence of what is generally called the Neo-Bengal School.[6]

Chatterjee was also a member of the Indian National Congress and was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. He believed that gaining political independence was inextricably linked to the achievement of cultural freedom. To his mind, rebirth was not solely based on the approach to ancient tradition, but also on the use of modern technologies and materials. He was the author of many articles, books, and lectures, in which he presented his ideas for the revival of Indian art and ways of educating artists and craftsmen. In addition, as a member of the National Planning Commission and the Bengal Post-War Reconstruction Committee, he had access to influential people.[7] No wonder that it was he who was commissioned for the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir project, and the form and decoration developed in Delhi were repeated many times in the later foundations mentioned above. Thus, in this group there are temples built in the particular style of 20th century sacral architecture. In their structure, the temples vary in their complexity of design, sometimes with two levels, with pillared and windowed bright halls (often decorated with stained-glass windows), enclosing up to three sanctuaries in one line in the cella or *garbhagṛha* area. The main sanctum is positioned in the middle. The outside walls are painted in yellow, red and white.[8] The interior of those temples, even if they

[6] S. Gupta, "Sris Chandra Chatterjee: The Quest for a National Architecture", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1991, p. 191.
[7] Ibid., pp. 193–194, 196, 198. Other known works by Chatterjee include: the Congress Office (Congress National Hall) in Patna, the Hindu Mahasabha Bhavan in Delhi and the Birla Dharmasala in Sarnath.
[8] These colours were used for the first time in the BHU campus buildings (although not in the temple itself, whose construction was completed much later than originally planned). As Renold explains: "The colours of the campus where, however, considered distinctively Hindu. The buildings of the campus were all painted in the auspicious hues of yellowish-red and reddish brown, designated variously as *gairika, kashaya*, saffron or ochre. Some say that the colour in its various manifestations is derived from red ochre found in mountainous districts and rocky areas. The colour is regarded as a symbol of self-restraint and renunciation and is the colour prescribed for

are rather small, is planned in such a way that the main section could form a spacious *maṇḍapa* with sanctum(s) at one end. The sanctuaries are usually circumambulated and at the same time provide another space for various figural representations and inscriptions. The decoration of the outer walls is limited, but inside there are many images, mostly on the relief panels, numerous sculptural decorations, paintings and plenty of inscriptions and quotations from holy scriptures.

At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, a distinct change may be observed in the foundations and the appearance of temples that somewhat differently implement the postulates of artists by seeking appropriate forms in the ancient sacral architecture that might represent a national style. However, once again while seeking the origins and sources of inspiration for the founders, one must return to Sris Chandra Chatterjee and the discussion concerning the shape of new Indian art at the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, many architects who presented the so-called Indo-Saracenic style, at that time reached out to the forms and elements of regional and medieval architecture. As S. Gupta points out:

> Sris Chandra too, consciously and deliberately, chose elements from various traditional styles in an eclectic manner to create "modern" and "national" structures. Whereas the designs of the Indo-Saracenic architects were meant to serve imperial ideology as it developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Sris Chandra's designs were to represent the growing nationalism [...]. The source for his designs was ancient India (specially Magadha) rather than the medieval period. According to his own explanatory notes regarding his designs, we can see that he too, deliberately chose elements like sun windows from Ajanta, Vessara roofs drom Rajgrha, pre-Gupta pillars, and put them together at random in his designs.[9]

persons such as monks and nuns who renounce worldly pleasures. The colour was considered appropriate for the University, which was referred to as a temple of learning, and whose students, ideally, were to be engaged in the brahmachari lifestyle of celibacy and devotion to pious study. The entire campus, with its temple architecture, auspicious colours, and its symbolic design, all contributed to the Hindusness of BHU." (L. Renold, *A Hindu Education: Early Years of the Banaras Hindu University*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2005, p. 150).

9   S. Gupta, op. cit., p. 199.

However, it is not entirely clear what, in the architect's opinion, actually constituted the national style and guaranteed its originality, as he repeatedly criticized other artists' juxtaposition of styles, while also applying such techniques himself.[10]

In the case of the BMs, the oldest example presenting the traditional architectural language, reaching out to the forms of yesteryear (often eclectically), is the temple in Pilani, whose main constructor (*sthāpati*) was Vindhyeshwari Prasad. The following were also involved in the work: H.C. Laddha, at the time the Estate Supervisor of the Birla Education Trust and Ghulama Faridi from Makran, from where marble was acquired to build the temple. Rajasthani craftsmen were employed to carry out the work. This information about the creators may serve as a clear indication that in the case of the temples in the second group, the Birlas usually commissioned local artisans to design and complete the work[11] (which certainly would have pleased Chatterjee—a strong advocate of using traditional methods and patterns). Among those involved, mention may also be made of the people working in institutions founded by the Birlas, as well as the members of the family themselves. The activity and achievements of the Sompura[12] builders from Gujarat and, above all, the line to which Prabhashankar and Chandrakantbhai belonged, are important in this context. The Sompuras represent a group of India's most talented master builders[13]

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[10] J. Lang, M. Desai and M. Desai cite Robert Venturi, who described him as the one behind the architecture of the facades. In terms of method, Chatterjee was not too different from the Indo-Saracen designers. As the researchers write: "His work never proceeded beyond developing a series of descriptive models of historical periods. All its referents were in the past." After: J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 134. In another publication, Lang writes about his architecture as follows: "His work seems to be more a pastiche—a patching together of components—than a synthesis of the design principles that informed the historical work [...]." Ibid., p. 27.

[11] Unfortunately, in the case of many temples, the authors encountered difficulties in accessing archival materials; therefore, the names of all architects and other artists could not be determined.

[12] A group of traditional master builders of Western India. For more, see the dissertation of M.Ch. Inglis, *Reimaging Tradition, The Sompura Hereditary Temple Architects of Gujarat*, submitted to Cardiff University in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University 2016. A sincere thank-you to Dr. Inglis for pointing out this group of architects and their relationship with the Birla foundations.

[13] J. Lang, M. Desai and M. Desai also use the term *mistrī* (lit. a qualified worker, artisan, here in the meaning of master builder): "Many buildings in India continue to be designed in a traditional manner not only in rural areas but also in cities. *Mistris*

(starting with Narmadashankar Muljibhai Sompura, 1883–1956), mostly self-taught, passing on their knowledge as a family from generation to generation. Both thanks to his proficiency in his craft as well as in-depth knowledge of classical texts, the first and most famous Sompura—Narmadashankar—gained the recognition of the Maharaja of Baroda—Sayajirao Gaekward. The ruler invited him to his court in 1926 and asked him to make a commentary on *Shilpa Ratnakari*, which was published in 1939. In addition, Sompura was appointed professor of architecture at the Kalabhavan school in Baroda. He designed the Kirti Mandir—a building commemorating the place where the previous rulers of Baroda were cremated. As R.J. Vasavada notes: "This building is an example of Indian architecture employing a classical Indian idiom for a contemporary building."[14] Narmadashankar's son and grandchildren continue his work, there are also two more lines of Sompura master builders from the family (the families of the previously mentioned Prabhashankar and Chandrakantbhai and Amrutlal Mulshankar Trivedi). They were all famous for their work on the restoration of important monuments (e.g. the Dilwara Temples, Somnath Temple and Mahavir Swami temple at Osiyan), the design of new buildings and temples (e.g. Vallabh Smarak in Delhi; the Akshardham Svāmīnārāyaṇa Temple in Noida; the Akshardham Svāmīnārāyaṇa Temple in Neasden, London; the Hindu temple in Pittsburgh; the Śiva temple in Singapore). It is known that Prabhashankar O. Sompura and Chandrakantbhai Sompura (b. 1943)[15] are included among those responsible for the construction of BMs in Nagda, Shahad, Renukoot,

continue their traditional role in society either working with a tried vernacular architectural vocabulary, particularly in the design and construction process. Those *sthapati* working in the traditional manner rely on astrology, mathematics and the application of number systems, as well as design principles with a Vedic base [...]. The *sthapati* today would not be recognized as such by many traditionalists who rely on the appearance of buildings as a statement of traditional attitudes. Nevertheless the role of simultaneously designing and constructing buildings is a traditional one." After: J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 14.

[14] R.J. Vasavada, "Sompura: Traditional Master Builders of Western India" [in:] *Authenticity in Architectural Heritage Conservation: Discourses, Opinions, Experiences in Europe, South and East Asia*, K. Weiler, N. Gutschow (eds.), Springer, Heidelberg 2017, p. 117.

[15] He is currently considered one of the most important architects of temple architecture in India. He also serves as an ASI consultant for restoration and safety work in monuments in Puri and other places. Two sons cooperate with him, one of whom is a formally educated architect. Cf. R.J. Vasavada, "Sompura: Traditional Master Builders of Western India" [in:] *Authenticity in Architectural Heritage Conservation: Discourses,*

Gwalior, Kolkata and Salav/Alibaug.[16] Experts in architecture and sculpture, the Sompuras are the authors of numerous Vastu texts, templates and catalogues with ready-made designs that could be used to design any temple. Such catalogues are used by builders every day.[17] As R.J. Vasavada sums up:

> During the last century there were many Indian master builders originating from the traditional schools. They worked in their own contemporary contexts to reinterpret and adapt the classical canons and idiom to the demands of their prevailing times while still adhering to an understanding of their traditional profession of master builders as one based on Indian classical philosophy.[18]

All these elements, the methods used by the master builders, as well as other projects influenced the shape of the temples that the Sompuras were commissioned by the Birlas to create.[19]

The second group of BMs has almost no inscriptions, and besides the main deity, to whom the temple is dedicated, in the naves as well as on the exterior and interior walls there are illustrations of characters—usually historical, together with mythological scenes and minor gods and goddesses. Temple designs are more suited to contemplation and meditation than specific religious rituals. These are foundations established from the 1960s–1990s, both in large urban conglomerations (Kolkata, Jaipur) as well as smaller industrial locations (e.g. Renukoot, Amlai). This group consists of temples constructed in ancient historical styles; they imitate[20] famous temples and their sculptural decoration

Opinions, Experiences in Europe, South and East Asia, K. Weiler, N. Gutschow (eds.), Springer, Heidelberg 2017, pp. 116–117.

[16] M.Ch. Inglis, *Reimaging Tradition, The Sompura Hereditary Temple Architects of Gujarat*, p. 140; www.sompuracb.com (accessed 17.05.2018).

[17] R.J. Vasavada, op. cit., pp. 116–118.

[18] Ibid., p. 117.

[19] A. Hardy describes them as today's most prolific designers of monumental, (traditional) north Indian stone temples, and Śekharī specialists. A. Hardy, "Śekharī Temples", *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2002, p. 82. The term *śekharī* and types of temple building are explained later (fn. 34 in this chapter).

[20] J. Lang, M. Desai and M. Desai quoting L. Steil (original work: "On Imitation," *Architectural Design*, Vol. 58, No. 9/10, 1988) and J. Gibson (original work: *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1979) differentiate three modes: imitations, copies and pastiche. They describe them as follows: "Imitation is the process of creating something new—not simply novel—out of a thorough understanding

and/or the regional styles of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. A few of them tend towards being an almost exact copy of some excellent examples of Hindu sacral architecture, such as the temples in Konark (the Birla Vivasvan-Surya temple in Gwalior, dated to 1988) or Bhubaneswar (the Śiva temple in Renukoot constructed in 1972), although the style is not extremely accurate. In fact, in architectural form, many temples do not conform to the exact image of their prototypes. On the contrary, some examples of the BMs may be cited here where, in fact, the bodies of the shrines consist of juxtaposed elements of a different origin. This means that a temple may assemble elements that were inspired by more than one style. As a preliminary remark, it could be summarized that the group of temples under discussion here is mostly the result of a blending of regional styles, freely incorporating particular elements according to the requirements. The same rule applies to the sculpture decoration that is usually concentrated on the outside walls. Interestingly, the interior decoration is quite limited in some cases, and there are also panels with inscriptions in only a few temples.

This architectural return to ancient historical languages is, of course, connected with the involvement of traditional master builders. However, it also in a sense implies paying attention to heritage, referring to ancient forms, and even recalling specific monuments and placing them in a completely different architectural context often without reference to the regional style—therefore using, for example, the form of an 11th century Odishan temple in Uttar Pradesh (the aforementioned foundation in Renukoot) or Central-Indian forms from the 10th–11th century in Rajasthan (BM in Pilani). This can also be applied to the afterlives of monuments discussed by researchers, which is noticeable in many of the constructions.[21] They analyse the places where and

of the principles understanding of the principles underlying precedents. The design objectives and the architectonic and technological affordances of specific patterns or built form must be understood. A copy, in contrast, is a replication, or reproduction, of a precedent, while a pastiche is a reproduction of a number of elements—compositional or stylistic—of some precedent. A pastiche is thus a "partial and imperfect copy. It focuses on the appearance—or rather the impression of appearance—of an artifact [...]." (J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 6). In our context, this is a most relevant characteristic that proved extremely helpful in the analysing the BMs, which feature—depending on the temple—all three modes.

21   The 29th volume of South Asian Studies from 2013 was, for example, devoted to this issue.

the reasons for which the monuments are reused, transformed and relocated—in relation to time—in a political and social context. These edifices—constituting the material evidence of a great past—support, particularly in the case of the South Asian community, the process of seeking identity in terms of nation, religion and culture. As noted by D. Cherry:

> The afterlives of monuments in South Asia have been built on claims of longevity, on bids to secure continuity, as for example in campaigns for the restitution of relics, the restoration of a site to religious use, the rebuilding of a demolished structure, or the many new buildings based on and adapting ancient models.[22]

Therefore, the BMs could be an example of the final category mentioned by the researcher—the introduction of buildings based on ancient forms into a new architectural space (especially in the case of industrial towns).

Due to its year of foundation (the first one from this group to be opened), as well as the architectural form itself, the temple dedicated to Sarasvatī (otherwise known as Sharada Peeth) certainly comes to the fore. It is also worth noting that it is located in the Birlas' home town of Pilani (Fig. 1).[23] The remaining temples in this group were located in Shahad, Amlai, Renukoot, Hyderabad, Nagda, Jaipur, Gwalior and Kolkata.

With regard to the formal features and involvement of traditional Indian builders in the construction of the temples, A. Mukerji and S. Basu classify them within the trend of contemporary traditional Indian architecture.[24] The buildings were designed and constructed in historical styles (using historical languages). In the analysis, the

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[22] D. Cherry, "The Afterlives of Monuments", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1–14.

[23] In this town, the family mansion (*havelī*) still stands, which is now open to visitors as the family museum.

[24] A.G.K Menon also distinguishes among the three architectural strands something that he calls continuity of tradition by following the historic texts, see A.G.K. Menon, "Contemporary Patterns in Religious Architecture", *Architecture and Design*, Vol. 14, No. 6, 1997, p. 26. However, A. Hardy refers to this as "authentic classical trend following and copying the medieval canons and made by traditional architects like *Sthapatis* of Tamilnadu and *Somapuras* of Gujarat', see A. Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India*, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester 2007, p. 239.

researchers distinguish between languages: classical, mutated classical and other historical.[25] The contemporary languages feature three variants: Traditional, Modern and Post-Modern. This classification can be helpful in the case of description and analysis of the Birla foundations. The Traditional Contemporary Language contains "cultural continuity, a sense of 'authenticity' and heritage". It follows the canons and imitates the formal/visual aspects of the traditional. It may be "similar to traditional in the pure form" or "revivalist" and have "eclectic contextual references." As an example of traditional language with a modern usage, A. Mukerji and S. Basu cite the BM in Kolkata designed by Nomi Bose.[26]

The last of the temples, completed in 1998 on the initiative of Aditya Vikram Birla, whose statue is located in the adjacent garden, was founded in the small town of Salav (Alibaug) near Mumbai. It is also the most modern in terms of its architectural form and therefore cannot be classified into any of the groups listed in the research material (the temples belonging to the older/first and the younger/second group). However, like most of the temples in the second group, it was located in an industrial centre. Its form is proof of what A. Mukerji and S. Basu define as the need to move away from the historical architectural dictionary and the desire for change—functional, aesthetic and semantic—imposed by contemporary lifestyle and the socio-economic situation. This Modern Contemporary Language may be characterized with 1. "tectonic form, functionalism, rationalism"; 2. "reinterpretation of form and space as per structural and functional logic";

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[25] It is worth mentioning that the classical language, as they claim, contents "representation of esoteric and spiritual ideas', whereas the mutated classical is used with an intention of "continuity of canons, albeit diluted, while incorporating regional influences." In terms of strategies the first one thus "employs cosmic geometries, space syntax and iconography following canons." At the same time "structure or material are suppressed in favour of the visual/symbolic aspect." In the latter there is "adopting, adapting or naively borrowing from the canons and hybridizing with regional elements." Neither respond to contemporary demands or developments. In case of tropes that are used in the classical language, scholars enumerate: "1. Syntax of spaces and symbolic morphology; 2. Profuse decorative ornamentation; 3. Imagery and iconography." The mutated classical is then described as "Similar to classical, with an enriched vocabulary (but may be diluted symbolic significance)." For full classification, see: A. Mukerji, S. Basu, "Contemporary Architectural Languages of the Hindu Temple in India", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2015, p. 54.

[26] Ibid., pp. 38–42, 54.

3. "contextual references restrained, reified"; 4. "minimal, abstracted ornamentation"; 5. "articulation of structure, material." In the case of the Salav BM, it is possible to speak of a break with traditional language in favour of a modern form with a primary focus on usability and rationality in planning, accentuation of materials and constructional solutions used, abstract metaphors and minimalist aesthetics. Similar examples of modern Hindu temples are described by A. Mukerji and S. Basu in their article.[27] The temple in Salav, therefore, contrary to its predecessor, harmonizes with its industrial surroundings.

As D.P. Mandelia[28] described in a jubilee volume devoted to G.D. Birla entitled *The Glorious 90 Years*, the Birlas, and in particular G.D., stood behind the foundation of "The Temples of Prosperity"[29] (e.g. the Renusagar Thermal Power Plant that supplies energy to, among others, the Hindalco plant; Gwalior Rayon factory at Nagda; the Saurashtra Chemicals factory at Porbundar), followed by the "Temples of Learning" (the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani), and the "Temples for Spiritual Uplift" (the aforementioned and illustrated temples in Pilani, Renukoot and Nagda). Certainly, this type of activity is strongly connected with the ancient concept of *dāna*, and the contemporary idea of Corporate Social Responsibility. It is worth emphasizing that in almost every town that grew around the factories belonging to the Birlas, they tried to provide the local community not only with work, but also a place of prayer. This, above all, was G.D.'s intention.[30] Thus, from the idea of a national temple, serving to unify the Hindus and strengthening their identity and national pride, the Birlas shifted their foundation campaign towards assumptions recalling the best examples from the splendour of Hindu architecture, while at the same time forming a kind of enclave in the industrial landscape—tasteful and aesthetically pleasing, secluded, full of green space. Reflecting on the motives of the founders of the second period

[27] Ibid., pp. 41–45, 54.
[28] It is worth mentioning here that D.P. Mandelia was a great admirer of G.D.'s activity, and for more on this subject see: J. Naresh, *D.P. Mandelia, His Life-Time Association with GD Birla*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, New Delhi 2005.
[29] These are the titles of individual chapters in the album referred to here, illustrating and describing the most important G.D.'s investments united under the slogan: "The temples that he built". See D.P. Mandelia (ed.), *The Glorious 90 Years: G.D. Birla, Ramnaomi 1894–11th June 1983*, p. 72, 73.
[30] www.sompuracb.com (accessed 20.10.2017).

of temple construction, it is worth recalling the words of Dr. Karan Singh, who was invited to open their penultimate temple in Kolkata:

> Some might ask: What is the point of making so many Temples? So much deprivation in our country—many don't get even two meals a day. Why then go in for grand temples? The answer is simple: Every human being needs food, but every human being needs spiritual nourishment as well. In fact, unless the spiritual nutrition is present, the physical food is not of much value. Temples are attempts to make spiritual nourishment available to people, crores of them, year after year.[31]

To sum up, the temples founded by the Birla family do not have a homogeneous architectural form, all the more since they refer consistently to the style that is common in a given region. On the contrary, in this respect they are very diverse. The wealth of the temples does not end with the variety of architectural styles, but their religious affiliations are equally diverse. Among them are the most important figures of the Hindu pantheon, such as Viṣṇu or Śiva or their incarnations and emanations, but other definitely less popular deities or aspects of deities are also included (Sarasvatī, Viṣṇu Śeṣaśayin), sometimes ones that are only popular locally (Viṭhobā). The BMs also have the capacity to surprise with various decorative motifs, not seen in other places, which—apart from their aesthetic function—above all bear important symbolic content. What is of particular interest is that these motifs (located, after all, in Hindu temples) refer to the religious tradition of not only Hinduism, but also Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, and, perhaps most surprisingly, to Christianity, Islam or Confucianism. Even more so, they refer to the broadly understood culture of other (than Hindu) cultural circles, referring to the philosophy, science or art of these areas. The BMs are not only popular places of pilgrimage and well-known centres of social and religious life—all the more so since *dharmaśālā* (pilgrim homes) operate near some of them—but also a tourist destination. These temples are eagerly visited by both Western and Indian tourists, guided by various motivations—purely cognitive, educational, religious or spiritual.

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[31]   Excerpts from the speech of Dr. Karan Singh on 21 February 1996: *Sri Radha-Krishna Temple*, temple information brochure, p. 6.

1.1. TEMPLES OF THE OLD GROUP—USING THE HINDU RASHTRA MANDIR (DELHI) MODEL

1.1.1. THE TEMPLE IN DELHI

This is the first Birla foundation, which was planned from the beginning as a national temple—the realization of the message of monotheism, national and universalist unification. It is considered to be one of the most popular Hindu temples in Delhi (Fig. 2), and its founder was Raja Baldeodas Birla. In fact, the construction, which lasted 6 years (1933–1939), was supervised by his son Jugalkishore. Responsible for the design of the temple, as mentioned above, was one of the most eminent architects of that time—Sris Chandra Chatterjee—while the decoration was made by artists brought in from Varanasi, under the supervision of Acharya Vishvanath Shastri.[32] Its opening ceremony took place in 1939, and G.D. Birla personally strove to involve Mahatma Gandhi in the event, to which he agreed under one condition—the door of the temple was to be open to all, regardless of caste or religious affiliation.[33] The architecture of the temple refers to sacral buildings

[32] V. Bharne, K. Krusche, *Rediscovering the Hindu Temple: The Sacred Architecture and Urbanism of India*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK 2012, p. 241.

[33] Of course, it can also be linked to the guidelines on the concept of the Sarvajanik Mandir, which was to be planned as a place of prayer and gathering for all Indians, regardless of class or caste, as well as for representatives of other religions. This reformism was reflected in the BM in Delhi, as well as in other temples, primarily because their designers were not guided by Vastu principles, and so the plans and individual parts were created experimentally. For more, see J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 136. The importance of Hindu reformism in many areas was, therefore, quite significant. In addition, T. O'Toole, analysing the case of the cow defence movement, points to the links between religious reformism and Hindu nationalism. As she points out, organizations "such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission facilitated the development of Hindu nationalism", but also "made possible the imagination of a Hindu nation (...) (that is, through the creation of **conceptually unified Hindu community with common doctrinal beliefs**), the reform of "corrupting" social practices, and the positing of a past Hindu Golden Age with a vision of Hindu resurgence." More: T. O'Toole, "Secularizing the Sacred Cow. The Relationship between Religious Reform and Hindu Nationalism" [in:] *Hinduism in Public and Private. Reform, Hindutva, Gender, and Sampraday*, A. Copley (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2003, p. 84. Bold added.

in northern India.[34] Its characteristic element visible from a distance are three high superstructures (*śikhara*)[35] located above the sanctuaries. This temple viewed from the outside gives the impression of a compact body, but in reality it is considerably fragmented, and its construction uses contemporary architectural solutions—high and spacious *maṇḍapa*s with an additional level. The main temple is adjoined by a separate sanctuary called Gita Mandir, where the main hall has a gallery on the first floor, and the extended sanctuary is in three parts. These elements, as well as the extension of the whole complex upwards and down, creates the impression of a sizeable, fragmented temple, adjoined by a garden complex.[36]

1.1.2. THE TEMPLE IN PATNA

The construction of this small temple (Fig. 3) dedicated to Shri Lakshmi Narayan and funded by Baldeodas Birla, was completed in 1942. Like the foundation in Delhi, it is assumed to be open to: "all Hindus

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[34] Although in the most recent literature on the subject, regional classification predominates in the descriptions of architectural styles, it is worth noting that the former general division into northern (*nāgara*) and southern (*drāviḍa*) temple architecture can now be useful not in terms of styles, but in two separate architectural languages, along with their inscrutable vocabulary—as postulated by A. Hardy. It is worth adding that M.A. Dhaky introduced the term *śekharī* (a derivative of *śikhara*) to describe the northern sanctuaries, in which the basic structure consists of: a sanctum and superstructure. A. Hardy also uses the terms *anekāṇḍaka*—"multi-limbed" and *mūlaprāsāda*—"shrine proper" for this type of temples, characteristic of the Middle Ages, in Central India, North-West (currently Gujarat), North-East (now Odisha) and Dekan, starting with the "proto-Śekharī" foundation of the Candela dynasty in Khajuraho. The form turned out to be so perfect and suited to needs that in the 17th and 18th centuries it was continued in the foundations of the Rajput and Maratha families. For more on this subject, see A. Hardy, "Śekharī Temples..." , pp. 81–82, 85. This type is referred to most often in the Birla foundations.

[35] A. Hardy also points out that "the form, or least an echo of it, has remained strongly bound up with the whole idea of a north Indian temple" and cites examples of the use of this form in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among them is the BM in Delhi with, as the researcher described, "the Bollywoodesque towers" (ibid., p. 82).

[36] Because of the importance of this temple, and the fact that it was the first to be founded by the Birlas, a separate chapter has been devoted to it, where there is a detailed analysis of the architectural form and decoration. Among them the most recent and detailed work is by S. Bhatra, where the architectural description is given. Cf. S. Bhatra, *Rejuvenation of the Nāgara Temples (With Special Reference to Yamunā Pāra Plain. 19th & 20th Century)*, India Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, Delhi 2014, pp. 35–40.

(including Harijans) without distinction of high and low."[37] Architecturally, it corresponds to buildings in northern India. Its compact small shape comprises individual elements—a short vestibule (*ardhamaṇḍapa*), the main hall (*mahāmaṇḍapa*) and some sanctuaries (one main and two side ones) above which the superstructures rise. It is the only temple with a separate cella dedicated to Buddha. The main hall leads into an extended vestibule, which can be accessed directly from the street, and side entrances—right and left respectively. The temple is located between neighbouring buildings and due to the limited space is the only one in this group that was not surrounded by a garden complex. On the walls of the vestibule and the main hall are bas-reliefs, imprinted panels, while in the upper part of the *mahāmaṇḍapa* there are additionally paintings illustrating the life of Buddha. In total, there are few decorative panels. In the main sanctuary there are standing statues of Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa, with Buddha and Śiva in the side shrines. The side door on the right leads outside into a separate small sanctuary that houses *liṅgam* and representations of the Śiva family. The temple's decoration is a reproduction of the BM program in Delhi. The style of the representations is rather provincial, and no modifications occur in the iconography.

The temple was established in a village that grew on the ruins of the ancient capital of Magadha—Pataliputra. The region is also strongly associated with the figure of Buddha, so he was stressed more distinctly than in the other foundations. Starting with Delhi, the BMs consistently strove to convey the message that Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are branches of *Ārya dharma*.

1.1.3. THE TEMPLE IN MATHURA ◼

This temple (Fig. 4) was opened in 1946 on the initiative of Baldeodas Birla in a very important place for the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Its construction was supervised by the Aryadharma Sevasangha Trust. It is called the Shrimadbhagavadgita Mandir and topics connected with the *Gītā* are indeed brought to the fore here. It stands out from the other temples in this group in terms of its opulent decoration. Many panels from

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[37] Information placed on the panel at the entrance to the temple, BM, Patna. Quote, as in the original inscription.

Delhi are repeated here, some of them supplemented with additional inscriptions, and numerous new representations were introduced. Due to the painting decoration and bas-relief panels, this temple can be considered the richest, although the Delhi BM is the oldest in the group and its form should be taken as a kind of pattern reproduced[38] in the 1940s–60s in the family's foundations. The exterior is also rather decorative, due to the use of a wide variety of elements, such as niches, openwork windows, pilasters (*kuḍya-stambha*), window frames, superstructures in many different forms and *āmalaka*s. The small temple at Mathura is set in a vast garden, which also houses a separate chapel for Hanumān, additional buildings such as *Gītā-Bhavan*, a Rest House topped with a superstructure inspired by South Indian *vimāna*, *Gītā-stambha* and *Gītā-ratha.* In front of the main entrance there is a small marble pavilion for Garuḍa, whose kneeling image is directed towards the sanctuary. The temple body consists of: an elongated vestibule/entrance portico, main hall, vestibule and a sanctuary with an ambulatory. Inside, the pillars of the main hall and ambulatory divide the space into three naves. In addition to the main entrance, the temple is also accessible from two side entrances. Thanks to three open/pillar entry points, as well as numerous windows, which are set in the walls along the entire length of the temple, this is one of the best-illuminated temples in the group. Only the central sanctuary, in which Kṛṣṇa's representation is located, is topped with a superstructure duplicating the form used in the temple in Delhi. The side chapels contain images: Lakṣmī and Nārāyāṇa (left) and Rāma and Sitā (right).[39] The interior is almost entirely covered with decorations—some of them are paintings (mainly arranged on the frieze under the ceiling), while others are bas-relief panels with inscriptions. There are also numerous panels on where the text plays the main role, while the figures decorating

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[38] As J. Lang, M. Desai and M. Desai point out, Chatterjee's designs found favour with both the public and the founders: "It is an architecture which, nevertheless, has a broad popular appeal because its symbolism requires little erudition to understand what those referents are. It is much appreciated by lay people who recognize its Indianness and take pride in it. Chatterjee's idea remain in vogue even if he is a largely forgotten architect. The movement's spirit and aspirations, if not its manifesto, did have an impact on politicians—the patrons of much public architecture after Independence." (J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 134).

[39] The detailed architectural description of the temple, as well as the garden pavilions, is given in the work of S. Bhatra, op. cit., pp. 111–115.

them are depicted rather schematically (very often in white and black engraving). In addition to the temple, an imposing structure and the only one of its kind among all the Birla foundations—and therefore deserving special attention—is the *Gītā-stambha*,[40] whose decoration is described in detail in Chapter 7 (*The* Bhagavadgītā *in the Iconographic Programme of the Birla Mandirs. Selected Threads*). The whole temple is fenced off by a high wall, and a decorative gate leads inside. Undoubtedly, the building of a temple in such an important place for Hindus was associated with great ambitions and a special responsibility for the message conveyed—this can be explained by the meticulous attention to detail and wealth of decorations located here.

1.1.4. THE LAKSHMI NARAYAN TEMPLE IN BRAJRAJNAGAR

Located on a hill, facing the river Id, this temple—modest in form and decoration—was opened in 1950 (Fig. 5), probably on the initiative of Braj Mohan Birla. Belonging to the older group, together with a temple dedicated to Śiva (in the same village) and one devoted to Rāma in Akola, these foundations were planned and established for the Hindu community inhabiting Birla industrial settlements. It is also the oldest temple of this type. The form here is very simple—a single-storey, oblong temple with one room, accessible from three sides, ending with a sanctuary with an ambulatory, crowned with three superstructures is completed (the middle one being the highest). The sanctuary precedes an open vestibule, which also has entrances on both sides, and clearly separates the area of the main hall from the sanctuary. The main entrance to the temple is in the form of a pillar portico (similarly, the side entrances also feature porticos) flanked by two low turrets, which gives the facade a rather stretched appearance. Thanks to the numerous entrance openings, as well as the windows in the ambulatory walls, the interior is well-lit. The main hall is spacious with many pillars, with only one sanctuary at the end there containing images of Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa. The decor is quite ascetic; there are few panels embedded in the walls with images of deities or *guru*s accompanied by

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[40] A special pillar with the *Bhagavadgītā* engraved in its entirety and bas-relief scenes recalling the main events described in the text.

inscriptions. In the middle section of the *maṇḍapa* cover, the ceiling was slightly raised/deepened, creating an additional recess for some panels with *Bhagavadgītā* text, arranged on four sides. The temple is surrounded by a small garden, and the whole area is fenced off.[41]

1.1.5. THE TEMPLE IN KURUKSHETRA ◾

The name of this temple (Fig. 6), established by Baldeodas in 1952, reflects both the patronage of Gita Mandir and Deva/Dev Mandir, while the main sanctuary contains an image of Kṛṣṇa. This foundation was located in a very significant place for the Hindu tradition—here, according to beliefs, in the field of the great battle described by the epic *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa delivered the teachings of the *Gītā*.[42] The temple refers to the sacral architecture of northern India, with a significantly elongated east-west axis. Therefore, the following elements lead from the entrance to the sanctuary: 1. an extended vestibule with a superstructure located centrally above the entrance; 2. a long main hall, at the beginning and end of which a transept was built on the north-south axis; 3. one sanctuary with a spacious ambulatory, crowned with a high superstructure outside, looming over the whole construction. This temple belongs to the group with panels on the walls with engraved verses from all eighteen books of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Such a procedure highlights the meaning of the text, especially since the panels are embedded in the upper part of the sanctuary's ambulatory.[43] Indeed, this is a temple for Kṛṣṇa and the *Gītā* at the same time. In addition, embedded panels with representations of deities, saints, literary characters, etc., followed by paintings were included in the decoration, while the vast garden features an impressive *Gītā-ratha* (the largest of all), on which Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are presented, along with fragments of text.

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[41]   A picture of the temple viewed from the outside, as well as a presentation of the images of the sanctuary can be found in A.K. Sen (ed.), op. cit., p. 134.

[42]   For more on the significance of this place, see Chapter 7 ("The *Bhagavadgītā* in the Iconographic Programme of the Birla Mandirs. Selected Threads").

[43]   The same applies to the temples in Brajrajnagar (Shri Lakshmi Narayan) and in Varanasi.

A small temple dedicated to Rāma (Fig. 7) in a huge but currently neglected garden was probably erected in the 1960s on the initiative of Basant Kumar Birla. The Birlas ran some business enterprises in this town, so this is another temple designed for the local Hindu community working for the industrialists. It is extremely simple in form and modest in decoration (a total of 16 panels, of which only 6 contain any representations). It follows the style described in detail above, but in an extremely simplified version. The structure consists only of a very short pillared *ardhamaṇḍapa* elongated to the right side (forming a kind of veranda), a long *maṇḍapa* with two windows at either side and a low *śikhara*. The interior of the main hall is rather simple and bright due to its large windows and additional doors on each side of the cella back wall. In the sanctum there are idols of the Sītā-Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa group. The decoration of this temple is extremely restrained and minimalistic. As characteristic for this group of BMs, there are panels with holy scriptures, as well as painted religious representations. Outside, at the right end of the veranda there is a separate *śivaliṅga* shrine. The temple is located in the area of former cement manufacturing plants (now moved elsewhere), run by the family. Rāma Mandir, the only one of the temples so far visited, though still functioning, is profoundly neglected. The huge garden, once fenced and with a fountain in the central part, today serves only as grazing land. It is also the only foundation dedicated to Rāma; of course, the character of this *avatāra* is extremely important and frequently features in the decoration of temples in the older group,[44] but it was only in Akola that this incarnation was displayed and a separate temple opened.

This is the last temple in the older group, founded by Ganga Prasad Birla and dedicated to Shri Lakshmi Narayan (Fig. 8). The laying of the foundation stone took place in 1960,[45] while the consecration ceremony

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[44] A detailed analysis of this figure is given in Chapter 9 ("Defenders and Guards of the Hindu *Dharma*").

[45] At that time, the first temple of the so-called new group was consecrated in Pilani.

took place in 1964. It is one of the larger constructions, and the magnificent building of the temple itself was set within a large garden. From the north-east side, the building adjacent to the temple is the G.P. Birla Museum, which was opened in 1971[46] and houses, *inter alia*, a collection of religious sculptures found on the construction site. From the main gate, the long path with steps and a cascade fountain leads to the temple surmounted by a *śikhara* above the main shrine. There are also square aedicules on four corners of the elongated *maṇḍapa*. One may enter the main hall of the temple from a small portico. There are two side entrances as well. The pillars of the main hall divide its space into three aisles – the middle is wider with the main circum-ambulated cella at the end. There are idols of Nārāyaṇa and Śrī Lakṣmī in the centre shrine, whereas the side shrines house the images of Durgā (left) and Śiva (right). On the inside walls there are numerous bas-relief panels with inscriptions. They duplicate motifs and fragments of texts that had already been used in earlier temples. This is how it was characterized in a publication[47] about the activities of its founders:

> Though the temple design follows the Nagara style, it is based on more modern patterns. The only elevation is above the main sanctum-sanctorum, the "mandapa" and the "ardhamandapa" have flat roofs. There are four replicas of the main "shikhara" which adorn the "mandapa." There are no sculptural decorations here, but the sayings of spiritual masters and "slokas" from the Vedas and the Puranas are beautifully carved on the walls which have illustrations of scenes from the epics and the Puranas. Placed on a high pedestal outside the temple is a very large "shankha", an attribute of Lord Vishnu.[48]

There are also two photographs showing the temple from the outside and a picture of the images from the main sanctuary.

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[46]   A.K. Sen (ed.), op. cit., p. 20.
[47]   This is one of the few publications that in any way present the temples of the Birlas, especially when it comes to later foundations. In the case of such an important and well-known temple as the BM in Delhi, the situation is obviously different since it is mentioned or analysed in many publications.
[48]   A.K. Sen (ed.), op. cit., pp. 124–125.

This construction was completed in 1960, probably on the initiative of Braj Mohan Birla, thus creating another temple for the residents of an industrial settlement centred around the factory of the Orient Paper Mills. The building presents a transitional form (Fig. 9) lying somewhere between the older type and buildings that can be classified within the younger group using historical languages. It is unusual and clearly refers to the *caitya* form, which in single-standing temple architecture can be found in the temple of Durga in Aihole (7th/8th century AD). The exterior and interior decoration includes panels with inscriptions and illustrations, although no too numerous (16). The temple is elongated in form with a sanctuary crowned by three superstructures (the central one is higher and retracted in relation to the others), as well as a *caitya* ambulatory, which is open on all sides, although in actual fact the outside walls are not rounded but slanting. There are three entrances inside, each in the form of an open, pillar-lined vestibule. The main hall is very spacious, with pillars, modestly decorated with symmetrically arranged panels behind glass frames. Their composition is also quite homogeneous—the majority is occupied by text (SH)[49] and only at the top is there any room for some small representations of deities. The main sanctuary features a statue of Śiva in a meditative pose. To the side, there are images of Pārvatī and Gaṇeśa (right) and Hanumān (left). From the outside, the building is painted yellow and red (similar to the temples of the older group).[50] The temple is surrounded by a vast garden containing a separate pavilion with a four-winged *śivaliṅga*. Similarly to other industrial centres, it is one of the few recreational places available to the local people.

1.1.9. THE TEMPLE IN VARANASI ◼

This is a Śiva temple, the eternal patron of the city, also known as the New Vishwanath Mandir and located on the Banaras Hindu University campus. Conceptually, it is the oldest temple of all, its origins

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[49]   S stands for Sanskrit, H for Hindi and, in other cases, E for English.

[50]   A picture of the temple viewed from the outside, as well as an image of the sanctuary can be found in ibid., p. 135. However, no information or description is provided.

even predating the temple in Delhi. The originator and author of the whole concept (both in terms of architecture and decoration) was Madan Mohan Malaviya, whose statue was positioned on the line of the main entrance (Fig. 10).[51] The temple was conceived as part of the university campus, located precisely in the middle of it, where each element has its own symbolic meaning.[52] The foundation stone was laid in 1931, and on this occasion religious ceremonies were held, to which prominent guests were invited (including the master of ceremonies Swami Krishnashram from Kanda in the Himalayas), as Malaviya personally insisted. However, the temple was only completed in 1966, and with significant financial support from the Birla family (primarily Baldeodas and Jugalkishore), although there were many more donors. It is maintained that it is a faithful copy of the old Śiva temple, called Shri Kashi Vishwanath, destroyed by Aurangzeb and rebuilt in 1780. It should be noted, however, that New Vishwanath Mandir with its extensive structure, and above all, two-level architecture both in the area of the *maṇḍapa*s and sanctuaries, refers to the Shri Lakshmi Narayan temple in Delhi, thereby creating a vast building, with numerous ambulatories, galleries and side sanctuaries. The surroundings of the temple, which create an additional recreational space, contain separate pavilions. The most characteristic element of the structure is the tall *śikhara* (76 m), made from white marble, erected above the main sanctuary, where the *liṅgam* was placed on the first level, and with an image of Śiva in the meditative pose on the second level. Thus, it can be concluded that in the general outline of the structure, the building referred (at least ideologically) to

[51]   For more on the role of Malaviya in the independence movements, the significance to and relationship with the Birla family and activities in Varanasi, see the Chapter 3 ("The Founding Fathers of Birla Mandirs"). In the decoration of the BM, in many places you can find fragments of texts (*Veda*s, *Gītā*, *purāṇa*s) invoked and interpreted by Malaviya, as well as his way of understanding God and the divinity contained within, cf. among others, his work entitled *The Immanence of God*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur 1937. L. Renold notes that Malaviya put a special emphasis on knowledge of the *Gītā* among students, although he considered other texts to be important as well (L. Renold, op. cit., pp. 136–141). It is worth adding here that on the BHU campus, the Vishwanath temple is not the only building with panels containing inscriptions and representations. They are also located in the Faculty of Sanskritvidya Dharmavijnan founded by Baldeodas Birla.

[52]   For detailed information on this project see: S. Somaskandan, *Mahāmanā Mālavīyjī aur uskī amar kṛti*, Payasvati Prakashan, Varanasi 2006, pp. 37, 40. Cf. also L. Renold, op. cit., p. 135.

Kashi Vishwanath Mandir. According to Malaviya's concept, there would be entrances leading to the temple on all four sides; the interior was to be a 15-meter-wide channel, with water flowing in on all four sides from the Ganges or other place above Ramnagar. The water would flow in continuously so the problem concerning where the water would flow out to was to be solved in such a way that the water would be directed to the university's farmland. There should also be three *ghat*s for ablution in the channel. Malaviya planned that the first level of the temple should be only one room, without any pillars. In this room there should be a place for students to study—to learn in peace, concentrating the mind on God. Recitations of stories (*kathā*), chants (*bhajan*), prayers (*kīrtan*) and other such rituals could also take place there. Next, the sanctuary of Viśvanātha should be located on the first floor. There were plans to install other statues on both levels. The temple would also have three superstructures.[53]

As one can observe, almost all of Malaviya's recommendations from the temple outline above were included in the actual realisation. In the BHU archives, there is also a sketch of the facade of the temple, drafted on behalf of Malaviya, depicting a temple located on a high platform, with high stairs rising from three sides and leading towards the entrances. The wide, two-storey building has three high superstructures in the central part, with the middle one built slightly higher. Additionally, pairs of lower superstructures crowning the corner rooftop kiosks (*chatris*) were planned on the sides. The sketch also shows numerous window openings on the first and second level, with three additional entrance openings on the ground floor, with the middle being the widest.[54] Here, however, some modifications may be observed in relation to the original plan. In the end, the structure did not include a high platform, and the central superstructure is in fact much taller and wider than the two side ones.

It is important, however, that the very concept of a modern Hindu temple, as Malaviya imagined it, was preserved, and probably even included in the planning of the temple in Delhi, which is also a spacious two-storey building with three superstructures and a spacious main hall on the ground floor. Thanks to the efforts of Sris Chandra Chatterjee, the dream and concept of Malaviya took their final shape

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[53] S. Somaskandan, op. cit., p. 37.
[54] Ibid., p. 39.

there for the first time. Chatterjee, along with Frank Lishman and Rai Ganga Ram Bahadur, was invited to design the BHU campus buildings.[55] Malaviya, on the other hand, is depicted in the cornerstone setting scene, which was immortalized in the Delhi temple. Along with Malaviya, the representation depicts Maharana Udayman Singh of Dholpur, and the accompanying scene text explains that Maharana was invited to this ceremony on Malaviya's initiative.

Malaviya is not the only activist and politician who spoke about the role of the temple or even art itself in communicating the most important values of Indian culture. One of the most important voices may also be Munshi's[56] educational and literary activities:

> Nowhere have I found the genius of India reflected with greater beauty than in its **literature** and **sculpture**. And nowhere has it been expressed with such unbroken continuity as in the latter [...]. Our outlook on life was based on an all-pervasive Dharma, in the narrow sense of religious merit; Artha the attainment of desires; Kama, desire; and Moksha, the absolute integration of personality which released a man from the bondage of desires. Both the **literary and plastic arts of India** have, for their aim, the fulfilment [sic] of one or the other of the Purusharthas, which must be brought into a homogeneous pattern with the integration of the human personality as its end [...]. **Indian Art** has to be viewed as associated with the spiritual needs of the hundreds of generations the [Hindu] temple was intended to serve.[57]

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[55] J. Lang, M. Desai, M. Desai, op. cit., p. 131; S. Gupta, op. cit., p. 199; J. Lang describes the campus buildings as an example of searching for Indianness in the architecture of revival under Modern Indian Architectural Movement (J. Lang, *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2002, p. 26. For more on the campus and its character cf. also L. Renold, op. cit., pp. 148–180 – chapter: "In the Temple of Learning: The Cultural and Academic Atmosphere of BHU").

[56] Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi (1887–1971) politician, writer, educator, member of the Indian National Congress, who was asked by Gandhi to leave Congress because of his views (lack of faith in the policy of non-violence; the idea of creating *Akhand Hindustan*), then also encouraged by Ghandi to return in 1946.

[57] Munshi, *Swan Love and Other Kulapati's Letters (Fourth Series)*, Bombay 1958, letter from 15.01.1956, cited from: M. Bhagavan, *The Hindutva Underground: Hindu Nationalism and the Indian National Congress in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial India*, p. 335. Bold added.

In the BMs, especially in the first group, the decoration was subordinated to such ideas, among others. Both the choice of characters and relevant quotes from the texts of tradition are related to the overarching goal of educating, raising awareness and spreading Hindu content through art.[58]

1.2. THE TEMPLE OF THE YOUNGER ECLECTIC GROUP

1.2.1. THE TEMPLE IN PILANI

The Saraswati temple in Pilani (Fig. 11) was located on the Birla Institute of Technology and Science campus, founded by Ghanshyamdas Birla.

The foundation stone was laid on 27 February 1956[59] by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the then vice-president of India. The main constructor (*sthāpati*) of the temple was Vindhyeshwari Prasad. The construction works were supervised by H.C. Laddha, the then Estate Supervisor of the Birla Education Trust and by Ghulama Faridi from Makrana. There were 410 artisans from Rajasthan working at the site. The inauguration took place on 6 February 1960[60]—Morarji Desai, the Finance Minister, opened the temple. Its architecture is inspired by the style of the most famous Khajuraho Candela foundations of the Western temple group. However, it does not imitate all the architectural elements of the

[58] In 2011 the temple published a small book collecting inscriptions from all panels. It is thus emphasized that the collection of excerpts from the text of Tradition may, and even should be studied, according to Malaviya's intention, as they convey important messages. This was among others indicated in the Foreword by Chandramauli Upadhyaya. See: *Mantrapuṣpāñjali*, Śrī Viśvanāth Mandir, Kaśī Hindu Viśvavidyalay, Varanasi 2011, pp. xvii–xviii.

[59] S.N. Prasad gives somewhat different information: "On 20th January 1956, Sri S.D. Pande, the then Kulapati, performed the preliminary rites in connection with the foundation laying ceremony of the temple. Dr. Radhakrishan, the then Vice-President of the Republic of India, laid the foundation stone on 29th February, 1956." See S.N. Prasad, "Sharda Peeth: The Saraswati Temple at Pilani" [in:] *Modern India. Heritage and Achievement. Shri Ghanshyam Das Birla Eightieth Birthday Commemoration Volume*, The Committee, Pilani 1977, p. 881.

[60] At the entrance to the temple there is a plaque informing that it was established in 1960. Also S.N. Prasad gives that date in the already cited article. However in M.M. Juneja's book (*GD Birla Life and Legacy*, Modern Publishers, Hisar 2000) year 1961 is given.