

# Unveiling Shared Meanings

## A Symbolic Synthesis of Temple Pinnacle Ornaments Across Asia

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*Manuscript received:*  
March 27, 2025

*Manuscript revised:*  
July 8, 2025

*Manuscript accepted:*  
August 13, 2025

*Date of publication:*  
August 31, 2025.

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**Abstract** – Hindu and Buddhist temples across Asia are renowned for their distinctive pinnacle ornaments, which, despite varying names and forms across regions, share a profound equality of symbolic meaning. This qualitative study employs a comparative approach, analyzing diverse architectural examples to uncover and interpret the underlying symbolic meanings of these ornaments on various Hindu and Buddhist temple structures in Asia, such as vat shrines in Cambodia, wāt in Thailand, mandir in India and Nepal, pagoda in Japan, and temple and meru in Indonesia and Bali. The findings show that (a) in the human body, the ornament at the top of the temple can be interpreted as the crown of the head element; (b) the ornament at the top of the temple can be interpreted as the top of the mountain; (c) the existence of the ornament at the top of the temple building can be compared to the heaven at the top of Mount Meru; and (d) the ornament at the top of the temple is realized as small, abstract motifs, and has four similar faces. These shared symbolic interpretations underscore a profound underlying cosmological and philosophical unity within Hindu and Buddhist architectural traditions across the Asian continent.

**Keywords:** Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism, symbolic meaning, temple top ornaments.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Historical records indicate that Hinduism and Buddhism are two religions that originated in the Indian region (Yusuf, 2020). These two religions then developed not only in the Indian region but also spread to several other regions along with their teachings and culture. Hinduism developed in India, Nepal, and even in Southeast Asia, including Java and Bali in the archipelago. Meanwhile, Buddhism spread rapidly to other areas such as Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Archipelago.

In their spread, these two religions also left behind works of sacred buildings with various forms and characteristics that have been adapted to suit the conditions of the region where they are located. For example, in India and Nepal, Hindu sacred buildings are commonly referred to as mandirs (Suryada, 2020). These buildings tend to exist as single buildings with stone structures and single-peaked roofs.

In India, there are also various relics of Buddhist buildings known as *stūpa*. The *stūpa* building has a basic form that is like a dome building with a single-peaked roof.

In East Asia, Buddhist sacred buildings usually take the form of pagodas. Multi-tiered roofs and a single, tall peak characterize pagodas. Meanwhile, in Thailand and Cambodia, Buddhist shrines are commonly known as *wát* and *vat*. This building also has the form of a single sacred building with a roof that also has a towering peak (Nieamah, 2014; Ratni, 2020).

In the Archipelago, Hindu and Buddhist shrines are known as temples in Java. In Bali, Hindu shrines are commonly known as *pelinggih*. Temples in Java have various forms according to the style of the religion and the location of their existence. The temples tend to be divided into Hindu temples with *rātna* ornamented roofs, while Buddhist temples have roofs topped with *stūpika* ornaments. Hindu and Buddhist sacred buildings in Bali have various forms, and are named as *meru*, *padmasana*, *gedong*, or *stūpa* (Paramadhyaksa, 2009).

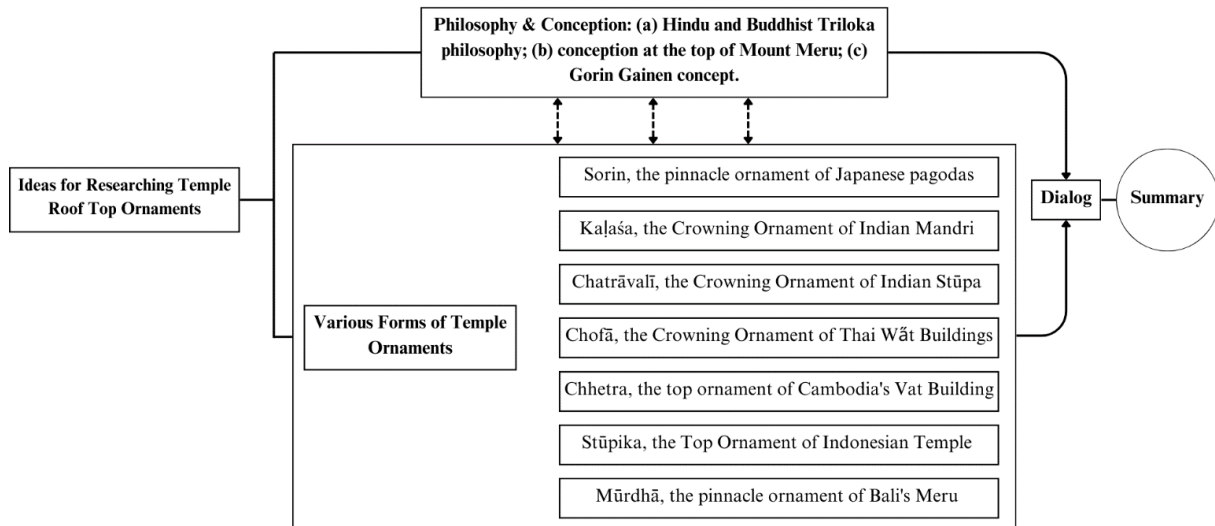
A review of existing literature reveals that studies on temple building ornaments predominantly focus on the elements found at the foot and body of the building (e.g., [Suryada, 2020]; [Gulla & Herwindo, 2024]). However, a significant research gap exists in the comprehensive scholarly examination of pinnacle ornaments on temple rooftops, which have rarely received dedicated attention in academic discourse. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the various forms and symbolic meanings of pinnacle ornaments found on Hindu and Buddhist temples across Asia, contextualizing them within their respective philosophical frameworks.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach that essentially compares the forms and positions of pinnacle ornaments on temple buildings across various regions and countries, dialoguing them with their underlying philosophical contexts. The selection of these diverse case studies—including *vat* buildings in Cambodia, *stūpa* buildings in India (for Buddhism), pagoda buildings in Japan, *mandir* buildings in India and Nepal (for Hinduism), *wát* buildings in Thailand, temple buildings in Java, and *meru* buildings in Bali—is justified by their representativeness of major Hindu and Buddhist architectural traditions and their distinctive pinnacle ornament styles across Asia. This broad selection enables a comprehensive comparative analysis of shared symbolic meanings, despite regional variations.

Data were primarily collected through extensive literature review, encompassing academic journals, books, and historical records related to Hindu and Buddhist temple architecture, iconography, and philosophy. Visual documentation, including photographs and architectural drawings of the selected temple types, was also meticulously collected to support the analysis of ornament forms and positions. All sources were systematically documented to ensure reliability and traceability.

The method for interpreting symbolic meaning involved a multi-layered approach. The three guiding philosophies and conceptions—namely (a) the philosophy of the Hindu and Buddhist Triloka; (b) the conception at the top of Mount Meru; and (c) the conception of Gorin Gainen—were explicitly utilized as analytical lenses. Each pinnacle ornament's form, position, and associated local narratives were cross-referenced with these philosophical frameworks to uncover deeper, shared symbolic meanings. This involved a systematic visual analysis of the ornaments in conjunction with textual analysis of religious and architectural treatises. Study conclusions or final findings are summarized and organized by deductive reasoning, moving from general philosophical principles to specific architectural manifestations. An outline of the flow of thought applied in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Research Steps

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section, the study's results regarding the equality of symbolic meanings expressed through ornaments on the tops of Hindu and Buddhist sacred buildings in Asia are presented.

Unlike many previous studies that primarily focused on the base reliefs and body structures of temples (e.g., Suryada, 2020; Gulla & Herwindo, 2024; Dhar, 2018; Gurme & Patil, 2017), this research provides an explicit and detailed analysis of the often-overlooked pinnacle ornaments. This study significantly expands upon earlier research by offering new interpretations of these rooftop elements, connecting their forms, positions, and inherent symbolism to shared cosmological and philosophical principles across diverse Asian temple traditions. It highlights a critical, previously underexplored dimension of temple architecture.

#### A. Hindu-Buddhist Sacred Buildings in Asia

In the context of the history of Hinduism and Buddhism, these two religions had a significant impact on the development of Asia. The spread of these religions from their home territories in India to various Asian countries has shaped a diverse cultural heritage. The development of Hinduism in India, Nepal, and Southeast Asia, as well as the spread of Buddhism to Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Archipelago, demonstrates strong roots and extensive growth across Asia. Temples and places of worship are concrete evidence of the precious spiritual heritage of these two religions on the Asian continent.

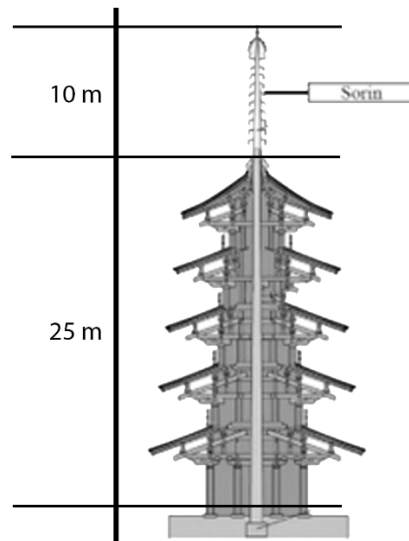
##### 1) Pagoda sacred buildings in Japan

Pagoda buildings in Japan, known as *tō* in Japanese, are sacred structures used for worship and the storage of sacred objects. In addition, pagodas in Japan also serve as places of pilgrimage and meditation for Buddhists. Pagodas in Japan are generally built using wooden materials and are often painted with distinctive colors such as striking red or black. Examples of pagoda shrines in Japan are Kiyomizu-dera, Senso-ji, Horyu-ji, Toji, Kofuku-ji, Narita-san Shinsho-ji, and other pagodas.

Pagoda shrines in Japan generally consist of three main parts that have symbolic meanings in Buddhism. The first part is the foot or bottom, which is the base or foundation of the pagoda structure. The foot is usually square or rectangular in shape and consists of several layers of stones stacked on top of each other. The second part is the body, which is the center part of the pagoda structure that supports the roof. The body of the pagoda is typically cylindrical or rectangular in shape, with terraced layers that lead upwards. The third part is the roof (*tōrō*), which is curved upwards and consists of terraced roofs.

Japanese pagoda sacred buildings not only have beautiful shapes, but are also equipped with a pinnacle ornament called *sorin* or *sorihafu*. *Sorin* is an ornament located at the peak of the pagoda roof (Hisatoku, et al., 2000), consisting of two main parts: *sorin*, which is a small ball or sphere symbolizing the sky, and *hōju*, which is a prominent ornament above the *sorin* symbolizing wisdom. *Sorin* is typically

made of metal materials, such as bronze or iron, and is decorated with beautiful carvings and artistic details. Sorin ornaments have symbolic meanings in Buddhism, *sorin* symbolizes the sky or the vast universe, while *hōju* symbolizes wisdom or spiritual perfection.



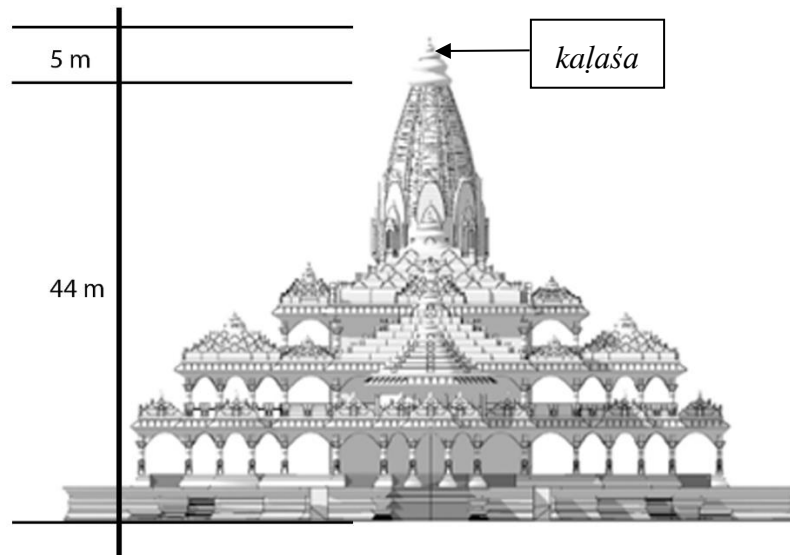
**Fig. 2.** Pagoda Sacred Building Structure  
Source: Author (2024)

## 2) Mandri shrines in India and Nepal

A mandir is a Hindi term that refers to a Hindu temple that is considered sacred and is a place of worship. mandirs play an important role in Hinduism where devotees worship, pray, and perform religious rituals. These Hindu temples are usually dedicated to one or more deities and have distinctive and beautiful architecture. Examples of mandirs include the Akshardham Mandir, Kashi Vishwanath Mandir, Meenakshi Amman Mandir, Pashupatinath Mandir, and other mandirs.

Judging from its shape, the mandir shrine has three parts representing the feet, body, and head, which is a representation of the Hindu architectural concept depicting the structure of humans or gods. The foot (*pada*) is the base of the building or the strong foundation, symbolizing a solid foundation and stability. The body (*śarīra*) is the primary component of the building, encompassing the worship space and altar dedicated to the worshipped deity, symbolizing existence and life. The head section (*śikhara*) is the topmost part of the building, often featuring a beautiful and impressive tower or dome, symbolizing consciousness and the pinnacle of spirituality.

The mandir shrine is also equipped with a pinnacle ornament in Hindu architecture known as *kalāśa*. *Kalāśa* is an ornament in the form of a curved piece of copper or bronze with a round cap at the top. The bottom of the *kalāśa* is usually round or oval, while the top is shaped like a beautifully decorated bowl. The *kalāśa* symbolizes the sanctity and presence of the deity in the mandir. In addition, the *kalāśa* also symbolizes the unity between heaven and earth and the balance in the universe (Gurme & Patil, 2017).

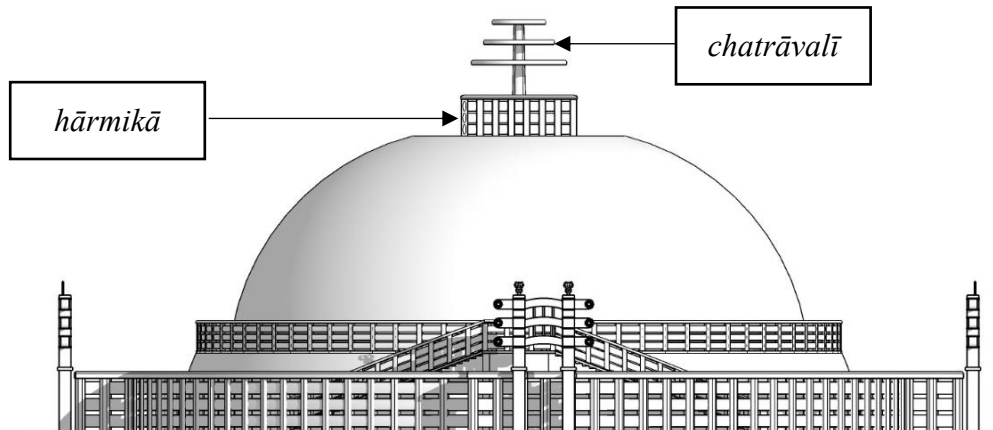


**Fig. 3.** Śrī Rāma Mandira Building, Ayodhyā  
Source: Author (2024)

### 3) *Stūpa sacred buildings in India*

*Stūpa* is a sacred Buddhist building. In India, there are many *stūpas* that have high religious historical value. One of them is The Greet Stūpa in Sāncī, *Madhya Pradeśa* which was built in the 3rd century BC by the Maurya Emperor Aśoka, this *stūpa* is believed to be one of the oldest Buddhist monuments in the country (Malik, 2020).

A *stūpa* in India typically has a form resembling a mound, around which a road is bordered by a stone fence called a *vedikā*. This road is usually used for performing Buddhist rituals and devotional practices, such as *parikrāmā* or *pradakṣiṇā* (Kumar, 2024; Rawat, 2022). At the top of the *stūpa* mound is a square-shaped ornament called *hārmikā*, inside which is a three-tiered umbrella-shaped ornament called *chatrāvalī*. The *chatrāvalī* ornament symbolizes the Buddhist teachings of Buddha, *dharma* (Buddhist teachings), and *saṅgha* (Buddhist order) (Hardjoko, 2020).



**Fig. 4.** The Greet Stūpa in Sāncī  
Source: Author (2024)

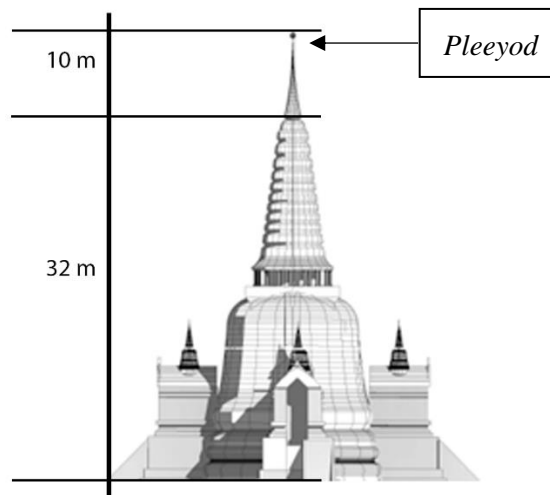
### 4) *A wāt shrine in Thailand*

Wāt sacred buildings in Thailand are an important part of the country's architecture and religious life. In general, wāt is a Thai term that refers to a Buddhist temple complex consisting of various buildings and structures used for religious practice and meditation. Examples of wāt buildings in Thailand are Wat Mahathat, Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Arun, and other wāt shrines.

A wāt sacred building has three main parts: a foot section that serves as the base of the building, often consisting of several levels resting on a larger platform. This part is called *yāna* or *yāntara*, symbolizing a solid and strong base, representing the foundation of trust and faith in Buddhism. In

addition to the foot section, there is also the body which is the central part of the building that houses the worship space or Buddha statues. The body of the building is often called *vihāra* or *phra ubosot*, symbolizing a place for worship and contemplation, a place where Buddhists can seek peace and enlightenment. Finally, the head section, which protects and covers the inside of the temple, is called the *chedi* or *prang* and symbolizes protection, sanctity, and high spiritual attainment.

The *wāt* shrine also features a pinnacle ornament known as the *Pleeyod*. This ornament is a hybrid between a bird and a dragon, resembling a bird's tail curving upwards with fish scales on the underside. *Pleeyod* is often decorated with bright colors and intricate carved details. The *Pleeyod* ornament symbolizes the balance between the elements of land, water, fire, air, as well as between heaven and earth (Syafroeny & Suwanpratest, 2016).



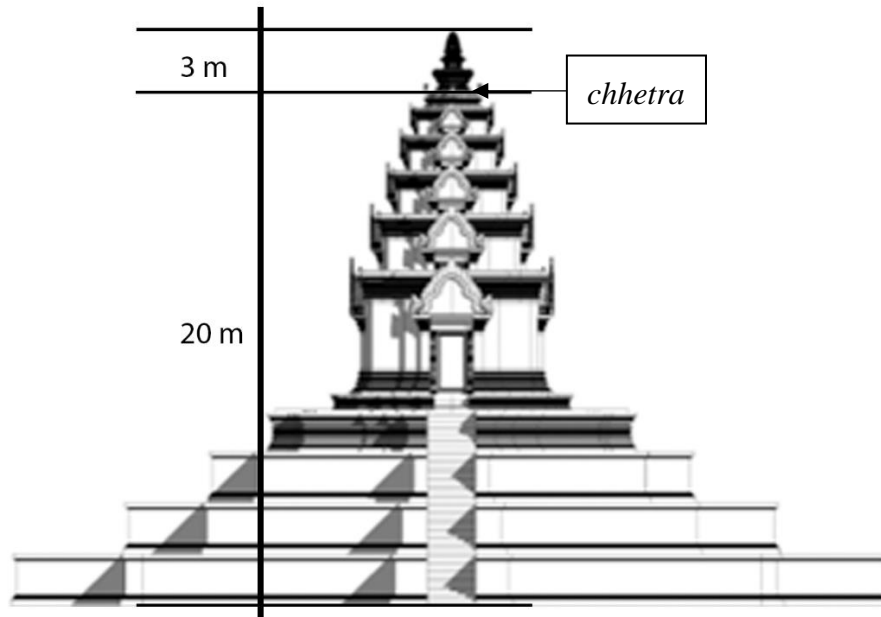
**Fig. 5.** Wat Phra Sri Sanphet Sacred Building  
Source: Author (2024)

##### 5) Sacred vat building in Cambodia

A vat shrine is a Khmer language term that refers to a Buddhist temple or temple complex in Cambodia. Vat shrines usually serve as places of worship, meditation, and Buddhist learning. Some of the most famous examples of vat shrines in Cambodia are Angkor, Baksei Chamkrong, Preah Vihear, Banteay Srei, and Bayon.

Vat shrines in Cambodia consist of three main parts. First, the foot section consisting of a platform or terrace rising high above the ground, often decorated with stone reliefs depicting stories from Buddhist scriptures or Khmer mythology. This section is called *baksā* in Khmer. Secondly, the body of the vat building consists of the main chamber of the temple where Buddhists worship and meditate, often decorated with beautiful Buddha statues, murals and reliefs. This part of the body is called *prang* in Khmer. Third, the head section of the vat building features a towering and complex roof, often shaped like a pagoda with multiple tiers. This head section is called *mukh* in Khmer (Widyargo & Herwindo, 2018).

The pinnacle ornament on vat shrines in Cambodia is called *chhetra* in Khmer. It is a symbol of the *liṅga* and *yoni*, symbolizing fertility and life. They are often made of stone, wood, or metal, with very intricate and beautiful details.



**Fig. 6.** Baksei Chamkrong Sacred Building  
Source: Author (2024)

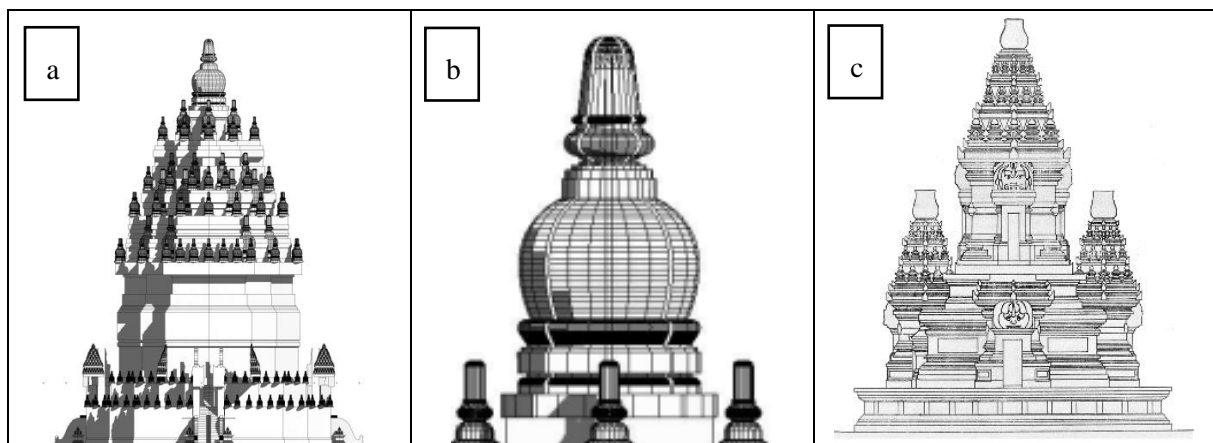
#### 6) Sacred temple buildings in Indonesia

Temples are sacred buildings or shrines that are usually built by Hindu or Buddhist communities in Indonesia (Lim, 2019). Some examples of famous temples in Indonesia include Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, Mendut Temple, Singasari Temple, Jawi Temple, and other temples. The general structure of these temples consists of three main parts, namely the base or foot, the main building or body, and the head or roof along with the roof peak.

From the bottom of the temple, it can be seen that the shape is in the form of a platform or foundation that serves as a support for the main building. This platform can consist of several levels that aim to support the temple.

The body of the temple features a vertical structure, comprising rooms within the temple that are used for worship and meditation activities. This part of the building is often decorated with reliefs or carvings on the walls.

The roofs and rooftops of temples generally have a pyramid shape or terraced stacks that symbolize purity and spiritual pursuits. The roof tops are often adorned with beautiful decorations. Meanwhile, the temple's pinnacle ornament is called *stūpika*, which is in the form of a small stūpa. *Stūpika* represents the symbolization of the existence of heaven, which in Hinduism is believed to be located at the highest peak of the universe's sacred mountain (Paramadhyaksa, 2009).



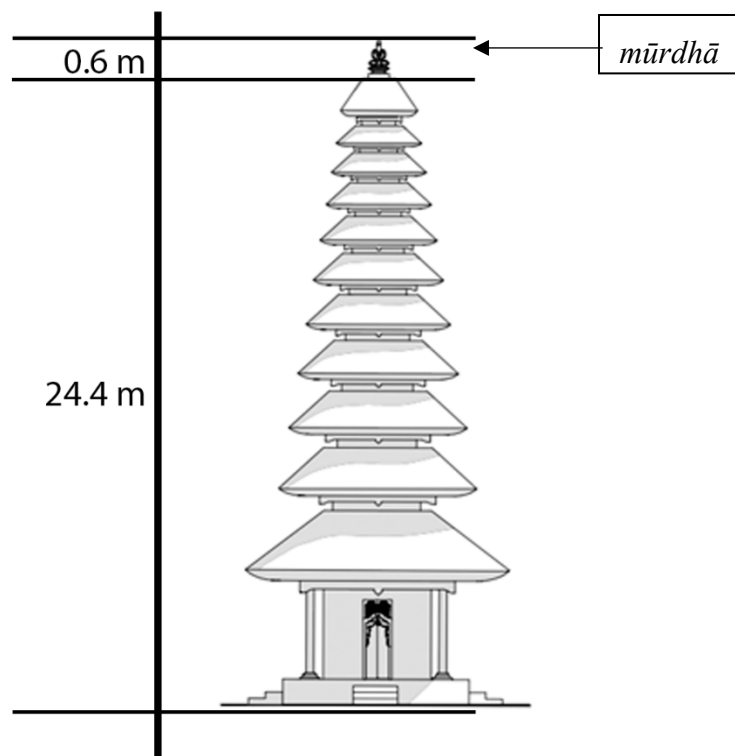
**Fig. 7.** (a) Prambanan Temple; (b) *Stūpika*; (c) Singasari Temple  
Source: Author (2024)

### 7) Meru sacred buildings in Bali-Indonesia

The meru sacred building is one of the main sacred buildings in the temple complex. In general, meru faces west and adjoins padma, gedong, and other sacred buildings on the east side, from north to south. This allows Hindus to worship facing east, towards the rising sun. However, there are exceptions in some temples in Bali, such as Kehen Temple in Bangli Regency which faces south, and Uluwatu Temple in Badung Regency which faces northeast. Thus, the direction of worship also varies according to the location of the temple.

The meru sacred building in Bali has a unique and distinctive structure that depicts the sacred mountain in Hindu cosmology. In terms of shape, meru consists of three main parts: the foot (bebaturan), the body (worship space or place to place pratimā), and the head (roof). The foot of the meru is generally square or rectangular in shape and serves as the foundation or base of the sacred building, symbolizing firmness and stability. The body of the Meru has a multilevel structure, representing the sacred mountain, with each level reflecting a spiritual level or universe in Hindu cosmology. It is often decorated with traditional carvings and ornaments. The roof of the meru resembles a mountain peak that rises upward, typically stepped and terraced, with ends that curve upward, symbolizing spiritual heights and the connection between the universe and the spirit world.

In addition to the three main parts of the meru shrine, there is also a rooftop part called the *mūrdhā* ornament. The *mūrdhā* ornament has a small shape with a circular or square base, with a similar appearance in all four directions, and a head that tapers upwards. The shapes of *mūrdhā* ornaments vary, such as flower buds, vases, inverted jars, jewels, cones, *linga yoni*, and *gāntā* (priestly handbells). *Mūrdhā* ornaments placed at the top of traditional Balinese buildings symbolize the existence of heaven at the top of the sacred mountain meru, the sanctity of the upper realm (God's realm), the connection between the human realm in the world and the divine realm in heaven, and as a container for positive energy from God that is channeled to humanity in the world (Paramadhyaksa, 2009).



**Fig. 8.** Meru Sacred Building

Source: Author (2024)

### B. Symbolic Meanings of Hindu-Buddhist Temple Pinnacle Ornaments

#### 1) Interpretation of ornament position

The pinnacle ornaments of Hindu and Buddhist temples are placed in the highest place of the building and at the same time become the decorative elements of the rooftop of Hinduistic, Buddhist, or syncretized sacred buildings. This suggests that these ornaments have a special symbolic meaning,

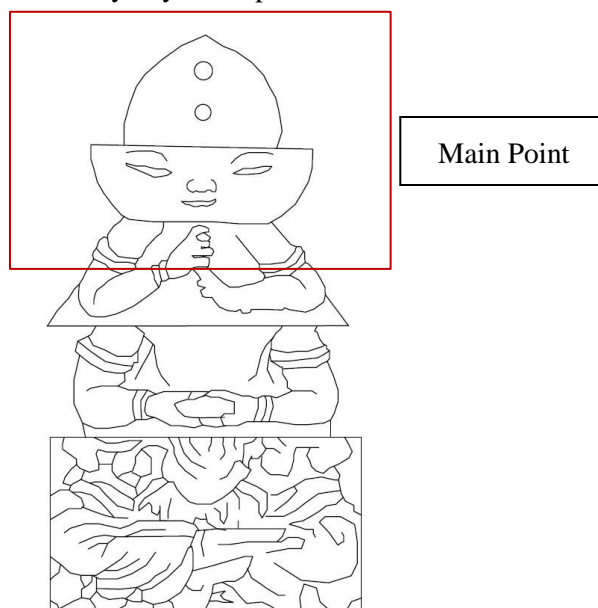


namely as the most important and most sanctified element in the structure of Hindu and Buddhist temples as a whole. Philosophically, the form of Hinduistic, Buddhist or syncretized temple buildings is usually inspired by the existence of cosmic sacred mountains, such as Mount Meru, Mount Kailasa, and Mount Mandara (Dhar, 2018). These three cosmic mountains are also believed to have mahasuci peaks where the gods and holy spirits of the universe reside. Thus, the ornaments placed at the top of the temple building can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the existence of the main elements of the dwelling place of the Gods at the top of the cosmic mahasuci mountains themselves.

In Hindu and Buddhist cosmology and mythology, it is mentioned that there is a Mahasuci mountain in the universe that serves as the pillar supporting the universe, known as Meru (Sheehy, 2020). This mountain is also known as *Sumisen* in Japanese. The main Meru of the universe is illustrated as having three main levels: the foot of the mountain, the body of the mountain, and the top of the mountain. Each level of the mountain represents the different stages of life in the universe, inhabited by various earthly and heavenly beings. Mount Meru is also said to have four faces, each facing four different directions, and representing the four cardinal directions of north, east, south, and west. The highest peak of Mount Meru is interpreted as the holiest level of the mountain that can be equated with the level of *svarloka* nature known in the Hindu *Triloka* Conception and the level of *arūpaloka* nature in the Buddhist Triloka Conception (Sunjana, 2019).

The existence of ornaments at the top of Hindu and Buddhist temple buildings is essentially closely related to the conception of the existence of heaven, which is believed to be at the top of Mount Meru as the main cosmic mountain of the universe. Heaven is also interpreted as the final destination of mankind's journey after death. In Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, it is stated that the more good deeds a person has done during their lifetime, the better rewards they will receive, which will provide a smooth path for their soul to the highest level of heaven in the realm after their death. And vice versa. The existence of the ornament at the top of the temple building should be a symbol to guide humanity to always do good and avoid evil actions, so that later in eternity, their souls will have a clear path to reach the best level of heaven on that part of Mount Meru.

In the illustration of the *Gorin Gainen* conception, known in Japanese classical culture, the ornaments at the top of Hindu and Buddhist temples seem to be equated with the main point on the human head, which is often associated with the fontanel (Paramadhyaksa, 2016). This description also states that there is a kind of equality of meaning between the existence of ornaments at the top of Hindu and Buddhist temples and the area of the fontanel as the highest and most important point in the human body network. These two elements can be interpreted as elements that should be sanctified both in the temple building and in the human body. In classical Eastern culture, the head is indeed the most valued area of the human body. A person will always try to keep his or her head out of the hands of others.



**Fig. 9.** Gorin Gainen Illustration  
Source: Author (2024)

## 2) *Symbolic meaning of ornamental dimensions*

When compared to every other element portion found throughout the temple building as a whole, dimensionally, the portion of the temple's pinnacle ornament tends to be realized as very small. This small dimension is not only related to the idea that the ornaments at the top of the shrine are relatively light and do not overload the building structure as a whole. However, it also reflects the conceptual image of heaven, which is believed to be at the highest level of nature, the holiest, difficult to reach, and very selective to be entered by various souls in the universe. The dimensions of the shrine's tiny pinnacle ornament are also very much in line with the idea that heaven can only be reached by certain people who have been selected due to their ability to pass various tests in previous lifetimes.

There is a quite striking difference dimensionally between the top ornament of the temple building and the basic elements of the temple building found at the foot of the building. The base of the temple building, which symbolizes the lowest level of nature or the level of the virtual world as a place of life for mankind, is usually depicted as having the most extensive, large, massive, and relatively heavy area. This illustrative picture is, of course, very much in line with the symbolization of the world of life, which is filled with various passions, desires, attractions, and strong worldly ties.

## 3) *Four Similar Faces of the Peak Ornament*

The illustration of the four similar faces of the temple's pinnacle ornament is quite in line with the description of the process of creation of the universe in Hinduism and Buddhism. In these two teachings, it is stated that the process of creating the universe begins from a point that then develops in a balanced manner towards the north, east, south, and west. This illustration further inspired the birth of various forms of Hindu and Buddhist temple buildings in various countries that took the form of a rectangular base plan. In its development, the rectangular plan further evolved into an octagonal plan, a multi-sided design, and eventually, a temple building with a circular basic plan.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, heaven is regarded as the source of all souls in the universe, which brings down all the life-filling spirits of various living beings at various levels of life, and spreads them out in all directions, as a reflection of the comprehensive and continuous process of creation in the universe. Heaven is positioned as the highest point that spreads spirits to the various levels of life vertically, and spreads life-filling souls in a balanced manner in all directions horizontally.

Hindu and Buddhist temple pinnacles with their rectangular, octagonal or circular base planes with their four similar faces facing the four directions can be interpreted as symbolic images of heaven itself. The top ornament of the temple represents heaven as the source of existence for all the souls of the universe's inhabitants, who become life-giving seeds that spread evenly in various directions throughout the universe. This illustration is in line with the existence of heaven ornaments at the top of Hindu and Buddhist temples that have four faces that are similar to the four directions of facing. Some temples in various countries even have peak ornaments with exactly the same faces facing in all directions, such as Japanese pagoda buildings with Sorin ornaments on their peaks, stūpa buildings with *Chatrāvalī* ornaments, Indian mandir buildings with *Kaṣāsa* ornaments on their peaks, wāt buildings in Thailand with *Pleeyod* ornaments, vat buildings in Cambodia with *Chhetra* ornaments, and temples in the Indonesian archipelago with Stūpika and meru ornaments with *Mūrdhā* ornaments on their roof tops.

## 4) *Temple crest ornament motif*

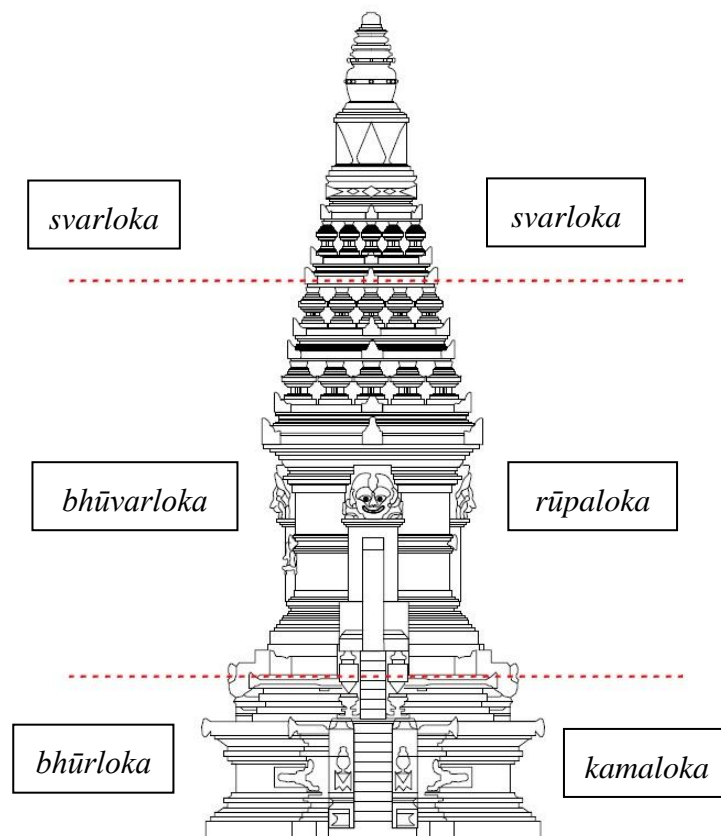
As sacred buildings that are full of symbolic and philosophical meanings, all Hindu and Buddhist temple buildings are also equipped with a variety of ornamental decorations and figures of mythological creatures that are rich in symbolic meanings. Starting from the foot or base of the building, which is often the area where various ornamental carvings and figures are placed both in two dimensions and three dimensions. On the stairs, for example, it is common to find figures of a pair of makaras, dragons or elephants decorating the edges of the steps leading to the sacred space of the building. In the body of the temple building, there is generally a sacred space, often complemented by the presence of elements, such as a pair of door leaves with sculptures or paintings of mythological creatures, epics, and local folklore, which serve as figures guarding the sanctity of the worship space within the temple building.

Inside the sacred space of the temple are highly sanctified cult statues as representations of gods and holy figures revered in Hinduism and Buddhism. On the roof of the multi-leveled sacred building are ornaments and decorations with a variety of simpler motifs that are often associated with illustrations of the strata of life that connote the upper levels of nature, such as the sky, clouds, and various other celestial objects. The concept of the three tiers of buildings, as embodied in Hindu and Buddhist temple

buildings, is closely aligned with the illustrations of the three tiers of nature in Hindu and Buddhist Triloka teachings, which contain various symbolic meanings within each tier.

The foot of the building symbolizes *bhūrloka* in Hinduism and *kamaloka* in Buddhism or the lower realms. The body of the building is equalized as the level of *bhūvarloka* in Hinduism and *rūpaloka* in Buddhism or the place where humans live. The roof of the temple symbolizes the *svarloka* level in Hinduism and Buddhism or the place of the gods (Setiawan, 2023; Gulla, & Herwindo, 2024). The ornamentation on each part of the building reflects the level of natural symbolism, with obvious and rough motifs on the lower levels and softer motifs on the higher levels.

Ornaments on temple pinnacles, which take abstract motifs and are small in size, are symbolic images of nature or the kingdom of heaven that are difficult to identify concretely in common reasoning. The abstract motifs of temple pinnacle ornaments are clearly visible in the form of pinnacle ornaments such as *Kaḷaśa* mandir in India, Sorin pagoda in Japan, *Chatrāvalī* stūpa in India, *Pleeyod wāt* in Thailand, *Chhetra* vat in Cambodia, *Ratna* in Hindu temples, and *Stūpika* in Buddhist temples in Indonesia. The ornaments on the top of Balinese temple buildings, known as *Mūrdhā*, also have many abstract decorative motifs that are difficult to identify. These abstract ornamental motifs reinforce the understanding that temple pinnacle ornaments represent heaven itself, which is sacred, abstract, and difficult to conceive of based on conventional reasoning.



**Fig. 10.** Hindu and Buddhist Triloka Philosophy  
Source: Author (2024)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study has successfully conducted a comparative analysis of pinnacle ornaments on Hindu and Buddhist temples across Asia, effectively contextualizing their various forms and symbolic meanings within respective philosophical frameworks. The findings reveal a profound and consistent symbolic congruence of these ornaments, extending beyond their diverse architectural manifestations. Specifically, the research concludes that the pinnacle ornament, regardless of its regional variations, consistently symbolizes the highest realm in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, paralleling the crown of the human head, the summit of a sacred mountain (such as Mount Meru), and ultimately, the concept of

heaven itself. This celestial representation is further emphasized by their typically small, abstract forms, and, in many cases, their four similar faces, which reflect the cosmic creation and universal dissemination of spiritual essence.

These findings offer significant theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research presents a novel interpretative model for understanding temple symbolism, diverging from the previous scholarly focus, which has predominantly centered on the base and body ornaments of sacred buildings. It explicitly fills a critical gap in the literature by elevating the analytical attention given to rooftop ornaments, demonstrating their integral role in conveying core philosophical tenets. Practically, these insights are invaluable for cultural heritage conservators and architectural designers, offering a deeper understanding of the original intent and sacred meaning embedded in these often-overlooked architectural elements. This enhanced comprehension can inform more sensitive preservation practices and inspire contemporary designs rooted in profound traditional symbolism.

Looking forward, this study opens several opportunities for further research. Future endeavors could explore the evolution of these pinnacle ornaments across different historical periods within specific regions, investigate the socio-cultural factors influencing their stylistic variations, or conduct a more in-depth iconographic analysis of the abstract motifs found on them. Additionally, comparative studies incorporating other religious architectural traditions or focusing on the materials and construction techniques of these ornaments would further enrich the understanding of their significance and resilience.

## V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support received from the Merdeka Learning Campus 2024 program, a collaborative initiative between the Department of Architecture, Udayana University and the Department of Architecture, Brawijaya University, for facilitating this research.

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