

Qualification for a Sthapati as per the Śilpaśāstras

K. P. Umapathy Acharya
Hereditary Architect and Sculptor

The term Sthapati is one of the traditional surnames of the Viśvakarma community, the others being Āchārya, Viśvakarma, Oja, etc. Today, however, the word is often used loosely to refer to anyone engaged in the civil-engineering aspects of Hindu temple construction.

In the Ṛg Veda and Atharva Veda, the term *Sthapati* denotes a "chief" or "viceroy." Within the classical hierarchy of architect-sculptors, four important ranks are recognised:

1. Sthapati – Chief architect-sculptor
2. Sūtragrahin – Disciple or son of the Sthapati, a Vedic scholar and expert surveyor
3. Vardhaki – Accurate measurer and sculptor under the Sūtragrahin
4. Taksaka – Builder, carpenter; subordinate to the Vardhaki

The Sthapati occupies the highest position in this hierarchy. To attain this status, one must pass successively through the stages of Taksaka → Vardhaki → Sūtragrahin → Sthapati. One may begin as a Taksaka only after becoming a direct disciple of a Sthapati.

Essential Qualifications for a Sthapati

A Sthapati must be thoroughly versed in:

- The Vedas
- The Śilpaśāstras
- The Purāṇas and Epics

He must also possess expert knowledge in a wide range of disciplines, including:

1. Animal behaviour and communication
2. Astrology
3. Astronomy

4. Calligraphy
5. Civil engineering
6. Culture of different countries
7. Economics
8. Epigraphy
9. Etymology
10. Geography of different countries
11. Geology
12. History of different countries
13. Knowledge management
14. Material management
15. Mathematics
16. Mechanical engineering
17. Military engineering
18. Music
19. Optics and light engineering
20. Painting
21. Philosophy of religions and sects
22. Phonetics
23. Process of fluency
24. Prosody
25. Quality management
26. Sculpture
27. Sound engineering
28. Surveying
29. Town planning

Personal Qualities Required of a Sthapati

He must:

1. Always speak the truth
2. Be charitable, especially in offering food
3. Be compassionate
4. Be faithful to friends
5. Be firm in decision-making

6. Possess a good reputation
7. Maintain a cheerful mind
8. Have self-control
9. Be free from greed
10. Be soft-spoken
11. Be sweet-tongued

He must be free from:

- Addiction to liquor
- Addiction to immoral conduct
- Blackmailing
- Day-dreaming, gambling, and hunting

He must also be:

- Curious and eager to learn all sciences
- Open to learning from others at all times

Vision (Dṛṣṭi) as the Core of Śilpa Education

The Ṛṣis codified these qualifications after profound psychological and spiritual experimentation. They held that without these qualifications, the mind becomes impure and the senses confused, leading to misunderstanding and misapplication of the Śāstra.

The texts distinguish between two levels of knowledge:

1. Lower knowledge – pure intellectual understanding
2. Higher knowledge – *vision (dṛṣṭi)*

Indian education placed great emphasis on *dṛṣṭi*, which has two dimensions:

- Internal vision – a light in the soul by which unseen truths become evident
- Internal experience – a deep psychological realization enabling the Sthapati to create symbols that reflect not only external life but the operations of the mind and the soul

The Ṛg Veda and Mayamata speak of the *dr̥ṣṭi* of the Muni and Ṛṣi, which forms the foundation of sacred architecture.

Historical Proof: Inscriptions on Sthapatis

Doubts may arise whether Sthapatis of the past possessed these qualifications. Clear evidence exists in the form of temple inscriptions praising individual Viśvakarma masters.

1. Channarayapatna Inscription: Architect Viśvanātha (11th century CE)

“Born in the family of Viśvakarma, the architect of the three worlds, Viśvanātha, son of Basavāchārya, son of Voḍeyappa considered the Jagat-Guru.”

Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V, Part I, No. 187, Translated p. 207

2. Inscription on Śrī Sarvasiddhi Āchārya, Chief Architect of the Virūpākṣa Temple, Paṭṭadakka

“Hail! Śrī Sarvasiddhi Āchārya, asylum of all virtuous qualities, the Pithāmaha—creator, maker of many cities and houses; he whose conversation is entirely perfect and refined; he whose crowning jewels are the palaces, vehicles, seats, and couches constructed by him, the most eminent Sūtragrahin of the Southern country.”

Old Canarese Inscription No. 100

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