



## **Indian-style Buddhist Temple in Luoyang, China**

**Speaker:** Mr. Kshitij Jain

**Chair:** M.V. Rappai

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**Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi**

The focus of Mr Kshitij Jain's presentation was to apprise the audience of the unique project he was working on. With a view to celebrate the traditional cultural ties between India and China, the Governments of India and China agreed to jointly construct an Indian-style Buddhist temple in the International Garden adjacent to the White Horse Temple in Luoyang, China. Significantly, the White Horse Temple was the first Buddhist temple and is considered as the fountainhead of Buddhism in China.

Mr. Jain pointed out that the design for the Indian-style Buddhist Temple was selected by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in an architectural design competition which also saw six reputed architectural firms competing from different parts of the country. Mr. Jain and his team were the architects for this project, which was commissioned by the government of India. The MEA had prescribed some parameters which the firms had to adhere to – that the design should draw inspiration from the Sanchi Stupa, India and an idol shall be installed in the temple hall similar to the Buddha idol at Sarnath, India. The location of the temple in a historical city and the political significance of the project inspired the architects to create a structure whose identity was distinct in the vast landscape of Chinese architecture.

Talking about architectural speciality in China, Mr. Jain opined that China was home to myriad styles of architectures. In the speaker's view, grand structures occupy most of the architectural glimpses of Chinese architectural landscape. On the one hand, there are traditional temples resplendent in the pagoda style and on the other hand, there are modern buildings that represent economic might and sophistication of China.

In 2003, during the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's state visit to China, the Chinese authorities had suggested that there should be an Indian-style temple in China which was agreed to by the Indian counterparts. Later, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the former Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and then Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, in 2005. The design was accepted in 2005 and subsequently the ground-breaking design was finalised in April 2006. The project, upon successful completion, was inaugurated in 2010

by the then President of India. All elements of Buddhist architecture was duly incorporated such as stupas and 'chaitya' in the temple.

The speaker provided a historical account of the construction of the temple in Luoyang which was dedicated to the Indian Buddhist monks. Luoyang was the ancient capital of China located in Henan province in central China. With the support of photographs of the construction process and sites, Mr. Jain discussed the technical details at length. He apprised the audience of the proposal to build temples of all those countries where Buddhism is practiced opposite the White Horse Temple. That is how this Indian Style of temple was conceptualised in the first place.

Mr. Jain also shared details about the temple structure such as its corridor, special designed gates known as 'toran' and ventilation techniques, etc. The process of how different designs were derived from Buddhist temples in India and the logistical details pertaining to the transport of carved stones from India to China were also explained. Through his photographs, he afforded the audience a glimpse of how the stupa-shaped temple was designed as emerging from a pool of water with Pradakshina path all around. The project, he concluded, was immensely successful and is followed by similar projects being initiated by the Ministry in other countries as well.

## **Discussion**

The presentation was followed by a lively discussion. The discussion began with insightful remarks by the Chair on the significance of the project from the cultural exchange point of view between the two Asian giants, India and China. The discussion ranged from queries regarding the structural-technical part of the temple to the entire process of construction. For instance, one question pertained to the materials used to build the temple – whether all of them were transported from India or if any local product from China were utilised as well. Did the labour force come from India or were they entirely from China? In his response, the speaker responded that the construction was handled by Chinese contractors. All the materials, plumbing and fittings were of Chinese origin. But the finishing materials including entire consignment of stones used for construction, such as for flooring, the plain stones and the carved stones, were all sent from India.

A question was asked about the maintenance of the temple, to which the speaker answered promptly that it will be taken care of by the White Horse Temple. Another question was on the speaker's experience while working on this project and the local people's response to this unique initiative to build an Indian-style Buddhist temple. He responded that the local people were very enthusiastic, so much so that ticketing system was already in place for the visitors. According to him, the experience of working with the Chinese people, who were part of this project, was quite interesting. However, he did not mention about any particular challenge that he might have faced during the project. Mr. Jain underlined the efficiency of his counterparts in China – their swiftness and disciplined way of working, coupled with the solid techniques were highly appreciated by him.

Another fascinating question was raised about how much the speaker's design had evolved from the first proposal he had presented till its final shape. He was also asked to clarify the stage at

which Chinese inputs were encouraged besides being questioned about the involvement of religious or archaeological experts in the project. Mr. Jain shared that in terms of design evolution, the initial concept was in the form of sketches. A detailed plan was developed gradually and implemented accordingly. He highlighted that Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan (a leading Indian scholar of Indian architecture) was significantly involved at almost every stage of the project design and all the drawings were approved by her. There were other experts to inspect all the stones, idols and art work and provide approval before it was to be despatched.

*Report prepared by Kush Kumar Gayasen, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

### **About the Speaker**

Mr. Kshitij Jain, is an architect, who graduated from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. With professional experience of 16 years, he has handled various projects for the public & private sectors, which include embassy, institutional, office & commercial, residential, religious, public and community buildings. Some of the prestigious projects for which he is Architectural Consultant are Indian Embassy Complex in Kathmandu, Torana Gate at Kuala Lumpur, Embassy of Brazil in New Delhi, research & residential buildings at IIT Kanpur, etc. He is Fellow of the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) and International Associate of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and an Indian Green Building Council Accredited Professional (IGBC-AP).

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