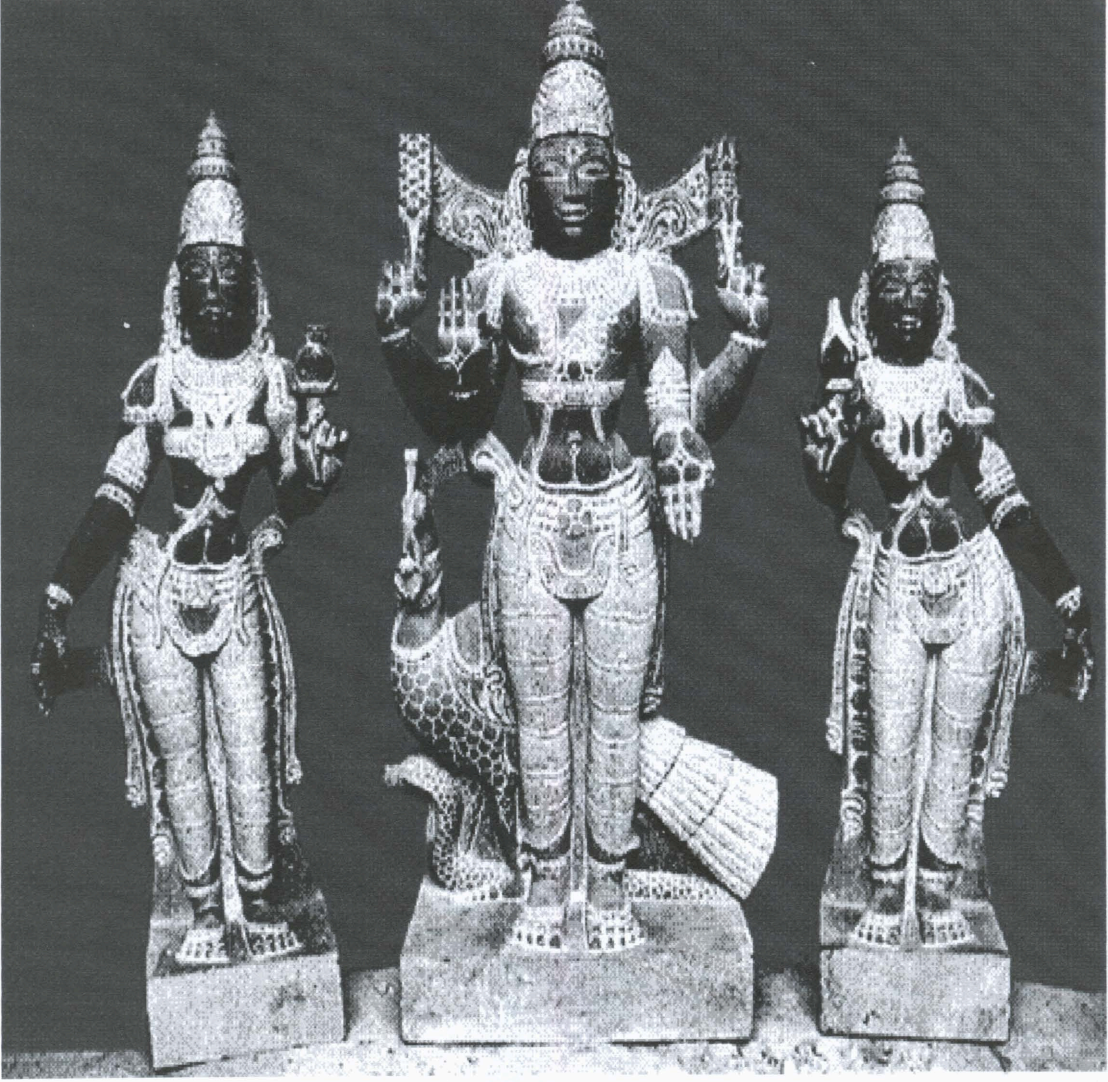


Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி (Dharma Neri)

56



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Editorial

‘ Path to Darma’ the monthly magazine, published by Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 56th issue this month. The main intention of this magazine is to converse the perceptions linked to Hinduism and its ceremonial rituals, customs and dharma, to the anxious readers.

The elucidation and investigation from the readers are appreciated.

B.Sivaramakrishna Sarma,
Kshethra Vinayaka Temple,
Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka.,August, 2012

1. Give a detailed account of God Brahmā?

Brahmā is the Hindu god (deva) of creation and one of the Trimūrti, (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva). Brahmā is not to be confused or puzzled with the Supreme Cosmic Spirit in Hindu Vedānta philosophy known as Brahman. Brahmā is believed to be the son of the Supreme Being, *Brahmān*, and the female energy known as Prakṛti. Brahmā is often identified with Prajāpati, a Vedic deity.

Brahmā Purāṇa, describe Brahmā as the father of Manu, (from whom all human beings are descended. In the epics Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, Brahmā is frequently referred to as the progenitor or great grandsire of all human beings.

Temples of brahma

According to the Purāṇas, Brahmā is self-born in the lotus flower. With reference to another myth Brahmā was born in water. A seed that shortly became the golden egg. Brahmā the creator was born from this golden egg, as *Hiranyagarbha*. The remaining materials of this golden egg expanded into the Brahmāṇḍa (Universe). Brahmā's consort is Saraswati.



Brahmā created ten sons or Prajāpatis (used in another sense), from his mind who are supposed to be the forerunners of the human race. The Manu smṛti and the Bhāgavat Purāṇa specify them as,

1. Marīci,
2. Atri,
3. Angīrā,
4. Pulastya,
5. Pulaha,
6. Kratu,
7. Vasiṣṭha,
8. Dakṣa,
9. Bhṛgu,
10. Nārada.

Brahmā created many other off springs from different parts of his body. As all these sons were created out of his mind, they are identified as *Mānas Putras* (mind-sons or spirits).



Brahmā is normally dressed in red coloured garments. Brahmā is traditionally represented with a human body, four heads, four faces, four arms and two legs. Brahmā persistently recites one of the four Vedas with mouth of each head. He is depicted with a white beard indicative of the eternal nature of his existence. Unlike other forms of gods, Brahmā has no weapons in his hands.

The Rudraksha maala (rosary) in the upper right hand symbolizes the cycle of time (creation to sustenance, from sustenance to dissolution, and from dissolution to new creation). The rosary also symbolizes the materials used for the creation. A book in the upper left hand (symbolizing the intellect) illustrates knowledge. The lower left hand symbolizes the cosmic energy. The front right hand is in the pose of bestowing grace. The four faces represent the sacred knowledge of the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharvana). The four arms represent the four directions and thus represent the omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.

Explanation of Symbols

The Four Faces – The four Vedas (Rig Veda, Sāma Veda, Yajuh Veda and Atharva Veda).

The Four Hands – Brahmā's four arms represent the four cardinal directions: East, South, West, and North.

- The back right hand symbolizes mind,
- The back left hand symbolizes intellect,
- The front right hand symbolizes ego,
- The front left hand symbolizes self-confidence.

The Prayer beads (the 'akṣamālā') – Symbolize the substances used in the process of creation.

The book in the upper left hand – The book symbolizes knowledge.

The Golden colour the golden face of Brahmā indicates that He is actively involved in the process of creating the Universe.

The Swan is the symbol of grace and discernment. Brahmā uses the swan as his vāhana,(haṁsa) or his carrier or vehicle.

The Crown of Lord Brahmā indicates His supreme authority.

The Lotus symbolizes nature and the living essence of all things and beings in the Universe.

The Beard which is white in colour of Lord Brahmā denotes wisdom and the eternal process of creation.

The Vedas Symbolises his four faces.

Satyaloka – abode of Brahmā

According to mythological narrations, Satyaloka is situated by 120,000,000 yojanas higher than Tapoloka. The distance from the Sun to Satya loka is 233,800,000 yojanas, (1,870,400,000 miles). The Vaikuṇṭha region begin 26,200,000 yojanas (209,600,000 miles) above Satyaloka.

Padma Purāṇa, shows that “on the four sides of the spiritual sky there are four different transcendental abodes occupied by Vāsudeva, Sankarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha ” respectively.

The Vaikuṇṭha area is covered with sanctified water is inhabited by Vāsudeva and this Vaikuṇṭha is known as Devavatipur. Above the Satya loka there is Viṣṇu loka where Sankarṣaṇa resides. In the middle of the Ocean of Milk, this is an island in the Śvetadvipa which is resided in by Aniruddha lying on the bed of Anantha (Ananthasayanam)."

Duration of day of Brahmā

According to Śrīmad Bhāgavata 12.8.2–5 "Lord Brahmā's day and night, each consists of his 12 hours (4 billion 320 million human years)."

Brahmā sampradāya

According to Brahmā sampradāya, Brahmā appeared on lotus flower that springs from the navel of Garbhodakṣāyī Viṣṇu. Brahmā created fourteen planetary systems and all the other living beings and non –living beings came. Brahmā received Vedas from Aum.

Brahmā samhita

Brahmā-samhita shows all the prayers of Brahmā. This amhita reveals that Brahmā is a devotee of ‘Aum’ the empty space everlasting peace and abode, and what is home for both living materials, non-living materials and spiritual universes. According to Brahmā-samhita, “Aum is the Supreme God. He has an eternal blissful spiritual body. He is the origin of all. He has no other origin and He is the prime cause of all causes”.

Temples devoted to Brahmā

More or less every Hindu religious ritual has a prominent place for the praying to Brahmā. Exceptionally a small number of temples are devoted for the worship of Brahmā.

1. There is a well-known temple of Brahmā at Pushkar in Rajasthan. In this temple, an annual Kartik Poornima, (the full moon night of the Hindu lunar month of Kartik ,October – November),a famous religious festival is observed in favour of Brahmā.
2. There is a temple to Brahmā at Asotra in Rajasthan.

3. There is a temple to Brahmā at Thirunavaya in Kerala.
4. There is a temple to Brahmā in Asotra village at Kumbakonam in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu.
5. There is a temple to Brahmā at Kodumudi, Tamil Nadu.
6. There is a temple to Brahmā at Balotra taluka of Rajasthan's Barmer district, known as *Kheteshwar Brahmadham Tirtha*.
7. There is a temple to Brahmā at the coastal state of Goa, a shrine belonging to 5th century AD, in the remote village of Carambolim.
8. There is a temple to Brahmā at the Sattari Taluka in the north-east region of the state is found.
9. There is a temple to Brahmā at Thirunavaya, and during Navrathri festival is observed in a grand scale.
10. There is a temple to Brahmā at Brahmā within the Brahmapureeswarar Temple in Thirupatur, near Trichy.
11. There is a temple to Brahmā at Mangalwedha, 52 km from the Solapur district of Maharashtra.
12. Statues of Brahmā is found in Khedbrahma, Gujarat.
13. There is a temple to Brahmā at Sopara near Mumbai.
14. There is a temple dedicated to Lord Brahmā at Sri Kalahasti near Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.
15. The largest shrine to Lord Brahmā is found at Angkor Wat temple Cambodia.
16. In Java (Indonesia), the 9th century Prambanan Trimurti temple is mainly dedicated to Śiva, however Brahmā and Viṣṇu also venerated in separate large shrines inside the temple compound, a single large shrine dedicated to Brahmā on Southern side of Śiva temple.
17. There is a statue of Brahmā at the Erawan shrine at Bangkok.
18. The golden dome of the Government House of Thailand possess a statue of Phra Phrom (Thai representation of Brahmā).

2. Give a brief account of the Somaskanda murthy of the Pallava, the Cōla period?

A detailed account of the ichonography of Somaskand was given in the issue of Path to Dharma,, No 51, March 2012 please refer.

The earlier forms of Somaskanda murthy available today in various types of stone and in granite are assigned to the Pallava period. Earliest depiction in bronze Somaskanda forms of Evolution, is assigned to Pallava Period. The finest bronzes of Somaskanda forms further developed mostly with the reign of the Cholas.

Somaskanda is one of the famous forms of Siva since the Pallava period. Earliest form of Somaskanda is seen in the shore temple erected by King Rajasimha Pallava. Occasionally Brahma and Vishnu are also revealed standing behind Somaskanda.

But in the representation of Somaskanda, in metal (bronze, brass or pancha loka) Brahma and Vishnu are not exhibited. In general, Somaskanda is to be depicted as Siva and Parvati seated in Sukhasana. Skanda is displayed either seated or standing in between Siva and Uma. The idol of Somaskanda, is constructed according to the Sakalathikara, where Siva is in the straight and erect structure, seated in

Sukhasana posture. Siva's upper hands should hold deer and battle axe and lower hands must show abhaya and Simha-karana-mudras. Uma (Parvathi) holds a lily flower in her right arm and shows ahuya varada in the left arm.

The name Somaskanda derives from the term 'Sa' (Siva) with 'Uma' (Parvati) and 'Skanda' (child Murugan). It is the form of Shiva where he is accompanied by Skanda the child and Uma his consort in sitting posture. Forms of Somaskanda murthas are not found in North Indian temples.

Somaskanda form was outstanding during the Pallava period which was much earlier to Cholas. References to the evolution of the Somaskanda perception are found from late Pallava period from the 7th century A.D. in carved rear granite (stone) walls in the sanctums (garbhagriha) of Pallava temple.

There are 40 such statues of Somaskanda are found in different temples including the Kailasanthar temple at Kanchipuram. Most of the images are attributed to Rajasimha Pallava (700-728 A.D.), Mahendra Pallava (580-630 A.D.), Narasimha Pallava (630-668 A.D.) and Parameswara Pallava (670-700 A.D.). Somaskanda was the primary deity during Pallava period replacing lingam, including at the temples at Mahabalipuram.

Anyhow Sangam literature does not mention about Somaskanda. The Tamil literature Tevarams of the 7th century, refer about Somaskanda. Somaskanda's significance is highlighted by the reality that the deity takes prominence in all the prime annual festivals.

In the Tiruvarur Thyagarajar Temple, the principal deity is Somaskanda under the name of Thyagaraja. In all the temples of the Thyagaraja cult, the images of Somaskandar is considered as Thyagarajar, though iconographically both are similar, they are iconologically different. Architecturally when there are separate shrines dedicated to the *utsava* (festival deity) of Somaskanda, they are called Thyagaraja shrines. Unlike Nataraja, which is a Chola development, Somaskanda was prominent even during the Pallava period much earlier to Cholas.

Early bronze alloy metal images of Somaskanda murti of the Pallava period were of small size, about half the size of a 10th Century Chola bronzes of Somaskanda murti. Siva of the Somaskanda murti is seen seated in the Sukhasana pose, with a minor inclination to the back.

The face of Siva is more or less round with an average range of 'Jata makuta' (crown of braided hair locks). Two 'kaanthis' (necklets) and a 'Haara' (necklace) are noticeable around the neck of Siva. The Yagnopavitam seems to be made of plaited gold wires, with a knot on his left chest. The nipple of Siva seems almost as pressed on the chest.

Most idols of Somāskandamūrti, belonging to Pallava period were carved out of granite. Depictions of Skanda is characterized in a customary standard posture. The hands of Skanda hold flowers. In all the Somāskanda postures of Rajasimha period, Skanda has a peculiar type of head ornamental outfit as a typical elongated turban-like portion which is haggard in the middle and a tall crown-like portion with *makara* kuṇḍala and *patra* kuṇḍala on both ears.

Skanda of the Somāskandamūrthi, is displayed in sitting posture. Skanda is shown clearly with a plump childish face. The head **karaṇḍa makuṭa** is well-knitted. The embellishment of the forehead is conspicuously displayed.

Skanda is seated with crossed legs in the Sōmaskanda Murtha statue seen at Vardhamanasvarar temple at Tirutturaippūṇṭi, (dated in the year A.D. 950). Skanda is seen to grasp flowers on both hands. He wears a little garland of flowers around his head and **sannavīra**. One hand is in the pose of **kaṭaka** mudra hand pose and other is in **varada** mudra hand pose.

Skanda of the Sōmaskanda Murtha statue seen at *Vaitṭīcuvaran Kōvil*, (dated to the last quarter of the 12th century A.D.), is portrays in the dancing posture called **catura** pose, with the right leg faintly lifted up and the left arm stretched out in dancing elegance. The right hand grips a flower. The hair is set as **keśa-makuṭa** manner.

The right hand of Skanda of the Sōmaskanda Murtha statue seen at Vēllur-airuverai, Tanjavur district (dated to the middle of the 12th century A.D.), is stretched out in **abhaya** mudra pose. The left hand is in **varada** mudra pose.

3. Give a detailed account of 'Vastu' with reference to Hinduism?

The derivation of the term 'Vastu' is from the phrase 'Vasanivase' which gives the meaning 'the place suitable for living'. Vastu is a branch of science of architecture which is followed from the period of Vedas. Vastu is said to be an Upaveda (minor Veda).

Vastu deals with four aspects;

- 1) Bhoomi - deals with selection of a site/land where a building is to be erected
- 2) Prasada - deals with structures like palaces and buildings
- 3) Yana – vehicles like carts and ships
- 4) Sayana - furniture, tools and utensils of a building.

'Artha Sastra' written by Kowtilya's describes Vastu as a basis for constructing Villages, Landscapes, Gardens, Bridges, Ponds and Lakes. 'Brihath Samhita' written by Varahamihira illustrates a vast knowledge of Vastu as forecasting of weather, forecasting of earthquake, forecasting of rainfall, architecture, exploration of water springs etc.

'Manasara' is a great script dealing with Vastu, explains the principles of architectural and sculptural construction. 'Mayamatam' of Maya is a script on Vastu with 36 chapters commencing from the basic question of selecting a site (land) for construction, building houses, palaces, temples, to the complex building structural construction.

'Viswakarmaprakasika' is another script which deals with the construction of, building different types of houses, palaces, temples, of complex building structures. 'Samarangana Sutradhara' written by King Bhoja (1018 - 1060 AD) describes different ways of house construction, town planning and temple architecture etc.

Four main directions are identified in all the works: North, East, South and West. Other four corners formed at the intersection points of these four directions, are called: SE, SW, NW, NE. The earth is a big magnet. Its magnetic North pole is located in universal South direction, and magnetic South pole is located in universal North direction. This means the magnetic lines of earth travel from South to North.

If anybody sleeps by placing his head towards North, there would be magnetic lines passing through his head in the same direction, and more blood is pumped into the head, thus creating head-related problems. This means the Earth's magnetism also influences our lives.

It is advisable if a building is aligned strictly in the four main directions, since the walls will be either perpendicular or parallel to the magnetic lines of earth. If we build a house putting an entrance in any of the four main directions, then, there will be prosperity for the resident in construction with the house is oriented into the corner directions, then the walls will cross the magnetic lines in a zigzag way, leading to mental disturbances and lack of peace and success.

In the construction of a house it should be confirmed that the house gets appropriate amount of Sun light and the sufficient amount of wind flow. The water should be available in the ground in the vicinity of the house. The Sun light has got different energies which are identified as around 45 different deities. Each type of energy is suitable for a particular task.

Accordingly, the place where the energy falls is allotted for living room, kitchen, dining room, bed room, etc. This provides a basic frame work for dividing the land for specific use. The land/plot is divided into $9 \times 9 = 81$ squares which is called 'Ekaseetipada Vastu'. These 81 squares will represent the spot for the erection of the pillars for construction. The main entrance, to the kitchen and other rooms, where to place what type of furniture, etc. must have enough sun light.

The Sun light along with other Planetary lights is represented as 'Vastu Purusha', the deity of all plots. The position of Vastu Purusha changes every day and also the seasons.

It is ideal to have a plot in square or rectangular form and aligned properly in the four main directions. The plot must be divided into 81 squares of equal size, and a plan should be drawn. Then construction work should start after offerings are made to Vastu Purusha and other deities and planets.

The following table helps you to judge the favourable direction for facing of the main door of your house. The 3rd column in the table represents the direction which you should see when coming out of the main door of your house.

Starting sound of Name	Example Names	Direction of main door
A, I, O, U	Aneesh, Iravatha, Omshankar, Udayan	West or North
Ka, Gh	Kandhar, Keeran, Ghanaresh	North
Ch, Ja	Chandra, Jaganmohan	West or North
Ta, Da	Talajith, Dashrath	West
Tha, Dha, Na	Thayanithi, Dhanapal, Nadaraj	North or East
Pa, Pha, Ba, Bha, Ma	Pandiya, Phalgun, Bhaskar Malathi	North
Ya, Ra, La, Va	Yadhav, Rajeev, Lagunath, Vasudev	East or South
Sa, Sha, Ha	Saranath, Sharma, Harekrishna	East

Guidance for vastu in the construction of a house

- A road on all four side are good, and other requirments should be as per Vaastu.
- Preference to north or east facing houses.
- Preference to more open land in north and east than south and west.
- Boring for tube well or well or any pit should be in north-east.
- Bhoomi Pujan to be preformed in North-East or centre or house.
- South & West compound walls should be heavy and higher than north & East compound wall.
- Preference to start excavation from north-west.
- Preference to start foundation from south-west.
- Preference to Kitchen in south-east and platform should be in east.
- Preference to the sinks of the kitchen should be on left side of the platform and gas (cooking range) should be on right side of the platform.
- Preference to the dining hall should be in the west.
- Preference to racks or almirahs should be in south & west direction in all the rooms.
- Preference to the doors of each room should be facing east.
- Never fix mirrors on south and west wall if possible.
- Preference to the toilets & bathrooms should be in south-east or north-west portion.
- Preference to cattleshed if any should be in north-west, away from north wall.
- Preference to bedrooms should be in south and west.
- Preference to master bed room should be in south-west.
- While sleeping head should be in south or west but never in north
- Preference to shrine room should be in north east. All photos or idols should be facing east or west only.
- Preference to all rain water should flow from south to north and west to east only.
- Preference to drainage pipes should be in north or east portion of the plot or house.
- Preference to slope of the plot should be south-west should be highest and north-east should be lowest.
- Preference to septic tank should be in central-east towards south or central-north towards west.
- Out houses if needed should not touch the compound wall of north and east side.
- In the construction of upstarir houses preference to staircase should be in south, west or south-west but if it is wooden than it can be anywhere even in north or east.
- In the construction of upstarir houses preference to Stairs should go from north to south or east to west.
- In the construction of upstarir houses preference to stairs should always be in clock wise direction.
- Over-head water tank should be in South-West. And if it is in north-west, then any other higher structure to be made in south-west. It

- should not touch the slab it should be above and on four pillars.
- Anything under ground should be in north or east.
- Anything above ground level should be in south or west.
- Porch should not touch the north or east compound wall.
- Face east while cooking, west will be allowed if there is no alternative, but never face south while cooking.
- Total number of windows and doors should be in even number for each floor, but should not end in zero like 10,20,30.
- Keep all the four sides of construction open, even in smaller constructions at least two sides should be kept open, keeping just one side open is bad as per vastu.
- Doors should open inside the room and not outside.

Vaastu Shastra divides the house into 16 parts wherein rooms or various purpose should be constructed, keeping the directions as follows: -

Direction Room to be constructed.

- South-east Kitchen
- East Bathroom
- South Bed room
- South-west Room for Heavy weights and weapons
- West Dining room
- North-West Grain store
- North Treasury
- North-East Room of worship
- Between East and South-East Room for churning curd
- Between South and South-East Room for storage for Ghee etc.
- Between South and South-West Latrine (W.C.)
- Between South-West and West Study room
- Between North and North-East Medicine Room
- Between East and North-East Common/Drawing Room
- North-west corner Cattle shed
- North-east Water bodies-tank, well etc
- North-west Toilet Bath room.

- i. In modern times it is not feasible to build big houses having large number of rooms as mentioned in Vaastu Sastra. Houses are built on small plots which can not accommodate many rooms. Therefore it is advised to construct the house in accordance with the principles of Vaastu, in abridged form having rooms as per necessity and convenience.
- ii. Bath Room: - Proper place for bath-room has been suggested in the east direction.
- iii. Slope of the floor of the bath room should be towards north or east. Water should drain out on the north or east side.
- iv. Kitchen: - South-east corner is the place of god of fire (Agni Dev), therefore, kitchen where fire has an important role must

- be built in this corner. Kitchen should never be built in the north-east, South-west or in the centre of north, south or west side.
- v. Burner (gas burner, stove, etc.) should be kept in the south-east corner of the kitchen room, such that while cooking the person may face towards the east. Water arrangement should be made in the north-east corner. Shelves for keeping raw commodities, utensils etc. should be kept on the south or west side.
 - vi. Bed Room: - Main bed-room for the head of the family should be in the south- south-west direction.
 - vii. Dining Room: - Best place for dining room is in the west.
 - viii. Dining table should be arranged in the South-west or north-west portion of the room. Water arrangement should be in the north-east corner and fridge etc. (electrical appliances, if any) should be kept in south-east corner. Persons should face towards east or north while taking meals
 - ix. Grain Store or Cattle Shed: - On the north-west corner a store for grains should be built.
 - x. Treasury: - In the north a room should be built for keeping valuables such as jewellery, ornaments, cash, costly utensils, etc. This is the place of Kuber the god of wealth and prosperity.
 - xi. Shrine(Pooja) Room: - North-east corner is governed by Eeshwar; Pooja room should be built in this corner.

4. Give a brief historical account of Angkor Wat temple at Angkor, Cambodia?

Angkor Wat is the biggest Khmer temple complex in the whole world, located at Angkor, Cambodia, built by King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century. Angkor Wat, means "City Temple". Angkor Wat temple was the state temple in the capital city of King Suryavarman II. The temple is admired for the grandeur and harmony of the architecture, its extensive bas-reliefs, and for the numerous devatas adorning its walls.

Angkor Wat is situated 5.5 kilometres (3.4 mi) north of the modern town of Siem Reap, and a short distance south and slightly east of the previous capital, which was centred at Baphuon. It is in an area of Cambodia where there is an important group of ancient structures. It is the southernmost of Angkor's main sites.

Angkor Wat temple at Khmer was originally, dedicated to the god Vishnu, then to the Buddhist. The temple is at the top of the high classical style of Khmer architecture. Angkor Wat combines two basic plans of Khmer temple architecture: the temple mountain and the later galleried temple. Angkor Wat temple was planned and designed to represent Mount Meru, (home of the devas in Hindu mythology): within a moat and an outer wall 3.6 kilometres (2.2 mi) long are three rectangular galleries, each raised above the next.

At the centre of the temple stands a quincunx of towers. Unlike most Angkorian temples, Angkor Wat is oriented to the west.

The original design and erection of the temple took place in the first half of the 12th century, during the reign of Suryavarman II (ruled 1113 – c. 1150). Angkor Wat temple was originally dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Angkor Wat temple was built as the king's state temple in the capital city.

The original name of Angkor Wat temple is unidentified, but it may have been known as *Vrah Vishnu-lok* (literally "Holy Vishnu –Location") derivation of the nomenclature is from the presiding deity Lord Vishnu. The construction work of the temple seems to have finished shortly after the death of the king, leaving some of the bas-relief ornamentation incomplete.

In the year 1177, approximately 27 years after the death of the king Suryavarman II, Angkor was sacked by the Chams, the customary enemies of the Khmer. Subsequently when the empire was restored by a new king, Jayavarman VII, he built a new capital and state temple (Angkor Thom and the Bayon respectively) a few kilometres to the north. In the late 13th century, Angkor Wat gradually moved from Hindu to Theravada Buddhist worship.

One of the first Western visitors to the temple was António da Madalena, a Portuguese monk who visited in the year 1586 and said that it "is of such extraordinary construction that it is not possible to describe it with a pen, particularly since it is like no other building in the world. It has towers and decoration and all the refinements which the human genius can conceive of."

In the mid 19th century a French naturalist and explorer, Henri Mouhot, visited the site and has written that "One of these temples—a rival to that of Solomon, and erected by some ancient Michelangelo—might take an honourable place beside our most beautiful buildings. It is grander than anything left to us by Greece or Rome, and presents a sad contrast to the state of barbarism in which the nation is now plunged."

There were no usual residence, houses or other signs of settlement including cooking utensils, weapons, items of clothing usually found at ancient sites.

Angkor Wat needed extensive re-establishment in the 20th century, largely the removal of accumulated mud, earth and vegetation of enormous trees.

The temple is considered a dominant symbol of Cambodia. A depiction of Angkor Wat has been a part of Cambodian national flags since the introduction of the first version circa 1863.

The splendid artistic legacy of Angkor Wat and other Khmer monuments in the Angkor region led directly to France adopting Cambodia as a protectorate on 11th August 1863 and invading Siam to take control of the ruins. This quickly led to Cambodia reclaiming lands in the North-Western corner of the country that had been under Siamese (Thai) control since 1351 AD (Manich Jumsai 2001), or by some accounts, 1431 AD. Cambodia gained independence from France on 9th November 1953 and has controlled Angkor Wat since that time.