

Structure and Arrangement of Church building

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The Orthodox Churches from the Indian tradition follow the pattern of the tabernacle and the Temple of Jerusalem.

Tabernacle is the sacred tent, the altar expanded by the divine revelation. References from Exodus chapters 25 to 28 give a description of the tabernacle, the worship pattern, and the practices of the people of Israel. Holy place, Holy of Holies, and a curtain dividing the two sections are the brief description of the Tabernacle.

The temple of Jerusalem had different areas.

Court of the Gentiles – Only place where foreigners can go

Sacred Enclosure – 3 feet above the court of the gentiles.

Court of the women – commonly called treasury, Jewish women could come up to this area.

Court of Israel – Male Jews had access to this area.

Court of the priests – priests only had access to this area.

Home of the God – 8 feet above the court of the priests – Holy place and the Holy of Holies.

Altar is a raised structure upon which sacrifices were offered and/ or incense burned. We can see the building of altar from Noah's time. Immediately after leaving the ark Noah erected an altar, Abraham erected altars at different places and offered sacrifices, Jacob built an altar, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David etc. built altars.

In the Christian tradition, the church met in private houses until the time of Constantine. Rise of Constantinople is the historic time that we can trace the Cathedral kind of settings for worship. Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuesta, Maximus the Confessor and other church fathers report the growth and development of the churches and church buildings. Hagia Sophia in the sixth century is standing as a model of church buildings in the west. Diaspora and the expansion of church and worship in Rome, Alexandria and Antioch established permanent church buildings in the west.

In the **Indian tradition**, St. Thomas came to India and was establishing churches at prime locations in Kerala. History of Christianity in the Indian sub continent starts by the seven and a half churches founded by St. Thomas.

(Niranam, Palayur, Nilakkal, Kottakkavu, Kokkamangalam, Kollam, Malyamkara) If we look the Indian churches, we keep the traditional church patterns from the older times. Interior and the exterior have a unique pattern.

Inside the church, we have **Madhbaha** representing the holy of holies separated with a curtain, and are elevated up.

The curtain symbolizes the sky that separates the heaven and earth.

Sanctuary is the Holy of Holies corresponding to the temple of Jerusalem. (Heb. 9: 4-5), symbolic to the altar where Malchesadek worshipped (Gen 14:18) Mount Sinai Ex 19: 16-25 and is symbolic to the paradise in Rev. 2:7.

Altar is the table of sacrifice, throne of God in heaven and symbolic to the tomb of our Lord Jesus.

There must be a cross at the altar, preferably a wooden cross, and 13 candles symbolic to the twelve disciples and Jesus. Candles are similar to the menorah, the seven-branched candlestick in the temple of Jerusalem.

Altar cover on the top will be in white, this symbolizes the winding sheet or shroud in which the body of Jesus was wrapped. Altar cloth is made up with costly materials and represents the glory of God in the throne. The tree divisions represent the Trinity and the cross in the center is symbolic to Jesus.

Tabaleetho or the portable altar is essential to conduct the Holy Communion. This usually made of wood 18 inches to 9 inches, represents the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Some churches has tabaleetho made of marble stone. Paten and the chalice are placed on the Tabaleetho. Holy Quirbana can be conducted at any place with a Tabaleetho. This portable altar will be consecrated at the time of the consecration of church. Tabaleeto will be covered with virikoottu.

Virikkottu, usually in three colors – red for heaven, green for world and white for hades.

Altar step represents the ladder to heaven where the ranking of angels ascends and descends.

Azhikkakam (Place inside the rails) is the place we have the table for prayers, children usually will be located at this area at the time of the worship. Curtain separates the altar and the believers.

Hykala. (Nave) Worshippers will be in this area at the time of worship. Left-hand side for the male and the right hand side for the females. The color for this area will be light colors and usually be green. The section for the male and female separated by a red middle line. The traditional belief points that this area is the designated area for the saints. No one is allowed to stand or sit in this section at any time. We believe that in the day and night, all the departed souls worship in the church singing praises to the Lord, and that is why church will not be used for any other purpose.

Laity participate in service by supporting the prayers led by the priests and assisted by the deacons.

When the curtain moves, the heaven and earth are joined together symbolically.

Poomukham (Northex) This area is designated for the gentiles.

In the Indian churches, there will be a hanging lamp at the middle of the church. This came from the Hindu tradition, where they use the nilavilakku at the temple. In the olden times there will be a room for baptism, the baptism pool will be seen at the further right side of the church.

Chalice and paten (Kasa and Peelasa) This is the cup for the wine and the flat plate for the bread.

Tharvado: The spoon used to take wine.

Kavukubo: This is the support in the design of a cross over the paten so that the covering over it may not touch the bread.

Shooshopo (sosaffa) : This is the cloth that covers the paten and the chalice. It signifies the swaddling cloth of baby Jesus in the manger. It symbolizes the shakkina over the mercy seat of the covenant box. (Num: 9:15). More over it is the bright cloud overshadowed at transfiguration. (Mt. 7:15) When the shoosofa is covered, the left corner will be folded up. The prayers at the time of the folding signifies the Son of God. The celebrant censors the middle of the soosoffo and remembers the Father, the left corner remembers the Son and the right corner for the Holy Spirit.

Mkabalono (Receptacle) : This decorated pieces cover the Chalice and Paten.

Gmurtho (Small Cushion) : It is used to wipe and clean the wine.

Censer (Dhoopakutty) : In the book of Revelation 8: 3-4 , An angel who had a golden censer came and stood at the altar...The smoke of the incense together with the prayers of saints...

Lower cup represents the earth and the upper cup represents the heaven. The four chains represent the Holy Trinity. At the time of the blessing, the priest holds two chains at the time of the prayer to the Son. The twelve bells represents the 12 apostles. The 72 links on the chain represents the 72 evangelists. The charcoal represents the sinners. Fire represents the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 141:2 As the smoke goes up to the high so also our prayers should go high.

Marvahso : Represents the angels and the fluttering of the wings.

Hand Bell; used to notify the worshippers the important occasions.

Big Bell : The sound of the bell notifies the time of worship. Before the start of the worship the big bell rings 33 times remembering the 33 years Jesus lived on the earth. Second bell informs that the worship will start soon. Third bell rings when the Quirbana begins. This bell will ring at the time of the elevation of the chalice and paten and at the procession of the chalice and paten.