

Temples of Kashmir from medieval to modern period; History and Architectural style: A study

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Abstract

The Hindu Temple is a place where religious activities are performed. The Indian soil is dotted with an unmatched beauty and grandeur temples all around represent the evidences of architectural beauty, structural productivity and methodological skill of Indian artistry and master builders. This paper focused on the history, essential characters and constructional aspects of the temples of Kashmir. They were constructed by using the North Indian Nagar structural designs and building techniques which elaborate the Indian craftsmanship. Not only the common people indulged in erecting these aesthetic sacred monuments but the Emperors and Rulers were more zealous to construct or reconstruct it. During the medieval times the rulers showed less interest whereas, the Dogra Rajas made grants for temple's contraction and renovation in Jammu as well as in Kashmir.

Keywords: architectural style, history, master builders, monuments, temple

Introduction

A study of the history of architecture reveals that the human nature of construction varies according to the ideas and techniques. There is variation in architecture through ages and different civilizations. Thus, every civilization contributed a lot in the art of architecture (Rowland, 1953) [6]. The word temple is borrowed from the Latin word *templum* means a boundary.

A Hindu temple is a religious architecture where the followers of the Hindu belief perform their religious or spiritual practices, individually or collectively. A Hindu temple is intended to empower reflection, encourage refinement of an individual's brain, and activates the procedure of inner consciousness. Besides, the temples are the centres for the intellectual and artistic life (Michell, 1988) [9]. The essential divinity of various Hindu gods designs one's way of the life. The study of designs and arts (Vastu Vidya) was a branch of literature of Vedic period. The constructional form, styles, and iconography have seen during Vedic period (Kak, 2005) [10]. The literature of Vedic period, *Sthapath Brahman*, *Aitreya Brahman* and *Bramha samhita*, made the mentioned of art and architectural activities of early societies. Later during the Gupta Age, the construction attained its climax by providing beautiful use of geometry and artistic style, dressed and carved stone building and painting. There was a distinction in the North Indian temples to that were constructed in South India with simplicity to complexity respectively. The Kashmiri temples were simple in architectural style, as the North Indian temples.

Objectives

- To understand the concept of construction of Hindu temple architecture.
- To study the Hindu temple, its construction, its architectural styles and materials of construction.

Methods

- The archival work and research is conducted for the basic concept of temple architecture.

- The physical survey is conducted for the analyse of architectural style and the material used in construction

Use of geometry

The construction of any monument is based on the symmetrical designs like the plans, the overall external views, floor plans, doors, windows, floors, dressing, engraving and paintings. The choice of the selection of symmetrical plans shapes and layouts have great importance in accordance with the topographical feature. The square was selected as the form in Indian Hindu temple architecture and the use of square and triangle were the chief components of the geometrical designs for plans and layout in Northern India.

The structure is constructed on the pattern of right proportion of length, breadth and height which highlights the beauty of the temple which elaborates the right combinations of architectural features and craftsmanship.

The architectural parts

Jagati. It is a raised platform on which the temple is constructed (Thaper, 2004) [7]

Antarala. It is a small entrance hall between the garbha graha and the *mandapa*. This is special feature of north Indian temples (Thaper, 2004) [7]

Mandapa. A colonnade square or rectangular hall or open pavilion for rituals and religious performances (Achariya, 1927.468) [8].

Some temples have more *mandapa* named as *Ardha Mandapam*. The space between the exterior of temple and the *garbagriha*.

Asthana Mandapam. A Hall for assemble the worshipper.

Garbhagriha. The literally mean of *grabhagriha* is the 'Womb Chamber' a central part inside of the main structure in which the idol is installed.

Shikhara or vimana. Shikhara means peak, the tower which is built directly above the sanctum or *garbhagriha*. *Shikhara* and *Vimana* are the components of Nagar and Dravidian temples respectively.

Amalaka. *Amalaka* is a stone of flat circular shape having ridges which is placed on the *Shikhara*, the temple's main tower.

Kalasha. The *Kalasha* is topmost pointed part of the temple above *Amalaka*.

Temples of Kashmir

Temples in Jammu and Kashmir region are nearly all built on the same plan and pattern. Most probably this similarity culminated due to the topographical and climatic constraints. However, the simple style of the construction of temple was also influenced by ancient architectural styles of the temples. They attained a considerable height (Frishta.p.90) to maintain the beauty of the structure. A strong wall protects the temple. Inside this enclosure, there were pillars and the top of these pillars were adorned with square capitals. Most of the upper parts were pleased with a single dressed block of stone. The supports of the arches are tightened on the pillars. Each arch on the pillars was about three meters wide. Under the arches there used to be a huge hall and a gate. The pillars having a height of forty to fifty feet are found both inside and outside of the arch, having capitals of a huge monolith block.

The most skilful feature in the construction of Kashmiri temple was that the piled up of stones without use of any cementing material because no space left for mortar between the stone slabs (Dughlat.p.490).

During Sultanate and Mughal periods slow progress in temple construction can clearly be envisaged. During Sultanate period the temples were also destroyed and over some of the destroyed temple's plinth mosques or shrine were constructed. One such example is the mausoleum of the mother of Sultan Zainul-Abdin. Sultan Sikandar destroyed the temples during his regime in the Kashmir.

During Mughal rule in Kashmir, the materials of the destroyed or ruined temples reused for the construction of gardens and other buildings (Fergusson. 1994.256) [3]. The pillars of temple at Avantipore were transported by Shah Jahan and used for his summer houses and gardens. In spite of it, the temple construction went on but on a very small scale.

The Dogra rulers were keen to revive and reconstruct the old monuments especially forts and temples throughout the state. Maharaja Gulab Singh repaired the forts and also built new temples. The temples at Jammu province are found in greater numbers than Kashmir. These temples are almost all in the same style with minor variations in outer members of *Shikhara* and constructional style. The temples have been built almost in the similar Nagar style of the nineteenth century which was popular in northern India at that time. In nineteenth century line sandstone was used in the construction of temples and *dharamshalas*. In Kashmir region, the stone work along with the productive use of embellished woodwork had gradually been started. In nineteenth century almost all the temples in Kashmir were constructed in modern style using stones and cement instead of wood.

Hanuman Temple

The temple was built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1916 A.D. and dedicated it to Hanuman. The main structure has been raised on the octagonal plinth made of stones, which is treated with white paints. A platform was raised in the middle of the temple where the idol of Hanuman is installed. The height of

Hanuman's idol is about five feet. The face of the idol is towards a small door, which opens towards river Jhelum side.

Just over the *Garbhagriha* there is a small place in a corner, which is used by a *prohit*. A black stone slab bearing a Sanskrit inscription has been fixed on the wall on the right side of the idol.

A large chamber around the octagonal structure (*Garbhagriha*) is constructed for the worshipper to be used as *pradakshina path* (Wakefield, 1975. 118) [4] It is provided with a roof of concrete and cement. The temple built in the north Indian style which is often characterized by a spire which is conical, curvilinear and convex in form and is usually crowned by a vase-shaped member, known as *Kalasa*. It is referred to as *Nagara* and sometimes, as *Indo-Aryan* too by some historians.

Shiv Temple at Rambagh

The temple was raised at Ram Bagh Srinagar. It is dedicated to god Shiva and is an imposing edifice raised on a square platform. The whole establishment is marked by simple design. The cell housing a huge *lingum* about eight feet in height and in usual black colours is enclosed all around by a *verandah*.

The walls of *garbhagriha* elevated to a considerable height till they end in the cornice from which the curvilinear *Shikara* starts. The top of the *Shikaras* has bright *amalaka* and a lofty glittering *Kalasa*.

Temple of Shri Gadadharji

The temple was constructed by Maharaja Ranbir Singh and dedicated to Shri Gadadharji. Maharaja constructed the temple in Jammu with the same name. The temple has been built in same Nagar and nineteenth century North Indian style. The main shrine is in the centre of the single square structure and the entire building has been erected on the walls end in a cornice and finally, a *Kalasa* or crown is placed on the top enhancing the beauty of the temple.

Sri Raghunath temple in Kashmir:

The temple was built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, almost in the same style with a minor change in constructional embellishments. The Raghunath temple is a square edifice containing central shrine housing the Raghunath idol. The walls after attaining the height of about 20 - 25 feet end into cornices and spires finished with pointed end over which the crown *Kalasa* of metal is placed.

The adorned walls have been constructed with local sandstone and plastered with cement.

Shri Sharika and Jawalaji temple

Maharaja Ranbir Singh constructed this temple and dedicated to Sri Sharika and Jawalaji. The shrine has the same characters and style as the other temples in Jammu and Kashmir. The main shrine housing with Hindu deities is surrounded by a chamber for *pujaris* and pilgrims over the raised square platform. The crowned and adorned structure looks quite beautiful.

Khair Bhawani

The temple was reconstructed by Maharaja Ranbir Singh in Srinagar. It is said that in ancient time people of Hindu

community visited there to offer *khir* (the cooked rice with milk) whenever their prayer was granted.

Temple at Anantnag

Temple is situated in the Anantnag district of Kashmir. It was reconstructed or built afresh by Maharaja Rambir Singh in the same style but with a minor change. He made use of stones and bricks in the construction of the temple. The square plinth was raised on the concrete platform and walls over it finished into a cornice after attaining the height of about 28 feet. All the sides of the spire culminated into minor *Shikaras* over which a golden crown has been placed. The upper portion is simply embellished by architectural designs. The outer walls of the chamber are also decorated above the *verandah* level.

Temple at Bijbihara

The entire structure is in singular form, attaining the height of about 45 feet was reconstructed afresh by Maharaja Ranbir Singh at Bijbihara. The temple is almost in the same style with minor variations in constructional embellishments. It is a small edifice containing a central shrine dedicated to the Hindu deity. A small seat near the deity was raised for *pujari* performing the rituals. The idol is surrounded by walls around it. A chamber around the main shrine is built for pilgrims and *pujaris* executed in a very simple style. The lofty spire is crowned with a decorative motif.

Temple at Rajouri

A lofty temple is situated on the right bank of the Mini Tawi river (at district Rajouri). The temple is in traditional style. But it is said that it was built in the first half of the nineteenth century. The temple was constructed on a raised platform of about 10 feet constructed over a precipice. The elevation of the temple plinth was undertaken due to the fear of the flooded river which could have damaged it.

The temple is a square building divided into two parts, the main shrine, and the *verandah*. It is dedicated to some Hindu deity installed near the north western wall. The three archways of equal size in the front of the *verandah* and remain open all the time for the convenience of pilgrims. It is in the similar Nagar style of the nineteenth century which was popular in Northern India at that time. After attaining sufficient height all the four walls taper towards each other forming a *Shikhara* instead of *Kalasa*. The locally available sandstone has been used for the construction of the temple.

Temple at Thanamandi:

A small temple situated at old Thanna some 300 meters north to a Mughal rest house the *sarai*. The temple is a single roomed square structure in which an idol has been installed in the centre for worship. The walls end in a cornice and further meet at the top making a pyramidal structure. It was once the property of the state under Dogra rule.

Temple at Poonch

It was also a small structure in singular form having a square room containing the idol, and an arched gateway. The structure is similar to that of Thanamandi. It was also the state property under Dogra rule.

Conclusion

After study and conducting the survey of the temples constructed during the period selected for this paper, it is observed that all these monuments were constructed in the simple and North Indian Nagar Style show the master skill, aesthetic architectural designs and constructional artistry in masonry work. Some temples are standing in highlands while other shows their presence at the riverside. They attract the pilgrims from the rural as well as urban settlements for the purification of their spirit and mental peace.

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