



**“The art and architecture of Kashmir: - An Analysis of Temple
Architecture of Kashmir during Ancient Times”**

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Introduction

Kashmir is bestowed with nature’s bounties and the mystical environment has fascinated people irrespective of caste, creed and language. Kashmir’s geographical location partly explains its cultural history. It is blessed with the natural bounties is rightly celebrated as the valley of Gods. Apart from its natural beauty an added attraction are the ancient stone temples of Kashmir, noteworthy for unique architectural elements and fine stone carvings.

The art and architecture of Kashmir has been subject of debate ever since the foreigners noticed it. They were first to identify them and relate them to the past. However to these cultural traditions, they compared the architectural edifices with those of the East, West Asian and Central Asian. Only the components of Kashmir architecture were analysed and attributed to by these foreign influences. However, Kashmir was the seat of learning since the time immemorial and scholars not only from India but its neighborhood visited Kashmir in pursuit of higher learning. Over the centuries it not only gained reputation for Vedic studies, but equally as a Buddhist seat of learning. Kashmir in real sense was brain of India and responsible for the movement of Indian art and thought to East Asia, West and Central Asia. Therefore Kashmir, which lies in the heart of the Asian continent, has geographically been of decisive importance for commerce and cultural exchanges. All the main trade routes connecting East and Central Asia with Eastern Europe and countries of the East (West Asian) lay across the territory. There was continuous exchange on the cultural and religious fronts as it was the meeting place of the cultural waves. The craven routes from China, Central Asia and Tibet met in Kashmir and this led to its greater impact on the political, social and cultural structure of the region.

The temple builders of Kashmir were way ahead of their contemporaries of the plains and peninsular India . The 8th century temples of Kashmir were constructed of evenly dressed ashlar masonry. Built of mammoth boulders, the joints were put together with lime mortar, which is seen at Wangat, and also steel dowels, used in the Martand temples. These engineering developments were in vogue in the neighboring western region of Kashmir . These refined techniques could not stand up the rigorous climate of the region and human vandalism and only a few of the vast number of temples, described so eloquently by Kalhana in Rajtarangni, have survived.



Despite limited means of communication there were interactions at the social, economic and cultural levels. The interactions in the field of architecture have been remarkable as it brought about a fusion. The resulting indigenous designs produced new art. Architectural projects were set amidst natural landscapes. Kashmir played a vital role in the understanding of art and formulating the canons for its appreciation.

Review of Literature

The ancient Kashmiri's splendid and wonderful ruins demonstrate that the ancient Kashmiris were great architects and produced a beautiful and impressive temple architectural style, distinct as compared the temple architecture of other parts of India (Havell, 1980). The ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir possess some unique features in many aspects because Kashmir since antiquity has been functioning as a cultural bridge between India on the one hand and central Asia, China and Tibet on the other hand. Consequently ancient temple architecture of Kashmir was greatly influenced by the art of these foreign countries very much, which is accepted by many national as well as international scholars like; Alexander Cunningham, Smith, Fergusson, D.R Sahani, R.C Kak, R.C Agarwal etc. (Cunningham, 1948). This is a reason that the great ancient Kashmiri architects created a distinct temple architectural style which possesses its own features but affected by both Indian as well as central Asian art styles. One more reason of these unique features of ancient temples of Kashmir is that the European art also imposed some influence on it because due to close contact of Kashmir with Gandhara Kingdom in the early centuries (Akhter, 2008). The unique features of ancient Hindu temple architecture of Kashmir, which differ it from the other parts of India, are mentioned as under:

During ancient Kashmir the architects have always invaluable choose the most natural spots for their sanctuaries than other parts of Indian (Ibid). Such as Martand Temple, Shankaracharya Temple, Payar Temple, Avantipora Temples etc. were built on superb natural sites, which are gentle slopes of grass lands, with snow mountains as a back ground and closes to fine trees and streams of cold water. The Ancient Kashmiri Architect was a wonderful gift of choosing high sites for their temple buildings so to command spacious views of the valley as also to ensure safety from the ravages of floods (Bakshi, 1993). Perhaps they choose high grounds as much as possible so as to avoid big floods. It must be believed that in those days the rivers in Valley were much fuller of water than they are now.

In plan, the ancient Hindu Kashmiri temple is a rectangular quadrangle built in the centre of open courtyard surrounded by a range of cells on all the sides whereas this plan is absent



in other parts of India (Kak, 1971). The main gate, which is always equal in dimensions to main shrine, is double chambered structure and is always built in the middle of the shorter side of the Peristyle, it consists a double flight of steps one external and the other facing the temple with pyramidal roof (Ibid). As compared to the other monuments of India the internal surface of the cella of Kashmiri temple is generally kept plain and externally the walls of Peristyle are also plain (Ibid).

All the ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir except those of Wangath and Buniyar, in which the material used is granite, are built of lime stone like Shankaracharya Temple, Martand Temple, Avantipora Temple etc (Ibid). These lime stones were brought from Zewan and Dachigam nala. Bricks and wood was not used. However, Mortar was used in less quantity. There exist no traces of any windows or sky light in any of the known ancient temples of the Valley (Op. Cit. P-63). The only openings therefore, that are found in the walls of these ancient temples are the door ways.

Some of the ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir such as Avantisvara Temple, Avantiswami Temple and Martand Temple possess subsidiary shrines (Op. Cit. P-5). But these subsidiary shrines are usually built in an angle of the courtyard and are similar in plan to the main shrine; it is a unique feature in India. The basement of the Kashmiri temples consists of both single and double platforms as compared to the temples of other parts of India. These can be seen in Narag, Pandrathan and Payar Temples. The core of these platforms is composed of stone rubble and the walls in dressed stone (Agrawal, 1998).

The roofs of ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir are invariably pyramidal. The Pyramidal is a double one except the roof of small temple at Naranthal which consists of a single plan pyramid (Chandra, 1970). Perhaps pyramidal shape of roofs was necessitated by the climate of the valley, where snowfall and heavy rain is a common feature. In this way, the pyramidal roofs of ancient temples of Kashmir are fundamentally differs from the roofs of the temples of other parts of India, which are either of the carved pyre or of the stepped roof type.

The figures or sculptures in all the ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir are almost always in an erect position, without any inscription (Shafi, et. al, 1998). Mostly figures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses were engraved like: Shiva, Vishnu, Ganga, Yamana and Kamdev. Whereas only in two temples of Avantipora figures of King Avantivarma and his family members were engraved on some stones. The number of flutes in the columns of different temples in the Kashmir valley is 12, 16, 20 and 24 (Manohar, 1971). But the number of these flutes in the columns is never less than 12 nor more than 24. The shafts of the



Kashmiri Pillars of these temples being almost identical with those of the Grecian – Doric and unlike anything of the class found in other parts of India (Ibid).

The one more important and unique feature of ancient Hindu Kashmiri temples as compared to other parts of India is the unity of design. All these ancient temples are similar in terms of material, style, techniques etc. (Ibid). During the long period of King Lalitaditya of Karkota Dynasty, capped and simple triangular gable became a favourite motif of Kashmiri temple architecture. These gables were especially used in Sun Temple of Martand, which is a unique feature in India (Herman, 1996). In the Laduv Temple round cella was built like the Guniyar Monastery in Swat Valley which is an influence of Gandhara art and is a unique feature in India (Ibid).

As compared to the North and South Indian temple architecture, the Kashmiri Hindu temples have the great width of the intervals between the columns but it is constant. The inter-columnisation followed in Kashmiri temples was never less than twenty four meters (Lawrence, 1985). The ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir are simple, attractive and impressive but smaller in size than other parts of India (Kapoor, 2010). However, all the ancient temples of Kashmir have a single storied elevation and the double storey was never used. The temple was conceived as a single whole and after its construction afforded no scope for subsequent additions. Another unique feature of ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir according to Stein are, irrespective all ancient temples built in the middle of water tanks (Stein and Tours, 1894). Perhaps the objective of erecting in the midst of water was to place them immediately under the protection of the Nagas or snake gods, who were zealously worshiped for ages throughout Kashmir.

Rational of the Study

It is evident from the above analysis of previous research that the temple architecture of Kashmir is unique and different from the Indian temple architecture. The design, style, location and material used in temples of Kashmir are completely different from the rest of Indian. The various reasons for the same could be foreign influence on art and architecture of Kashmir, geological factors, and climatic conditions. Hence the present study aims to understand how temple architecture of Kashmir is different from rest of India, factors which led to this differentiation and the foreign influence on temple architecture of Kashmir.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analysis the temple architecture of the Kashmir
2. To examine how temple architecture of Kashmir is temple is different from the rest of Indian architecture.



3. To analyze the factors that affect ancient temple architecture of Kashmir
4. To understand the role of foreign influence on temple architecture of Kashmir

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