



INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE ON THE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE OF KASHMIR: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract: Kashmir is known as the 'land of Gods' and it has a very unique geographical setting. The climatic and geographical conditions directly reflect the scenic beauty of Kashmir. The geographical factors have led to a very distinctive architectural style that can be seen in their residential, public and religious structures. The dynasties and their rulers have always contributed towards a new typology of temple architecture with one commonality amongst them i.e., the presence of a water body around it.

The topography of Kashmir allows the formation of five major rivers i.e., Jhelum, Indus, Chenab, Sulej and Ravi that further form into tributaries. Freshwater lakes are also very commonly seen in these areas. The presence of water bodies around these settlements is both a necessity as well as carrying out various traditional practices that are largely subject to an important cultural factor. Kashmir previously was at a convenient location which led to it becoming the center for Vedic, Hindu and Buddhist studies and various socio-cultural exchange activities. Kashmir eventually saw an influence in cultural art and practices from its neighboring sub continents within its settlements. The architectural design and its spaces are directly impacted by the cultural exchange as well the physical attribute of integration of water bodies in their settlements and traditional practices.

With the help of a few case studies, this paper will investigate the temple architecture in Kashmir and the direct association of this cultural landscape with the natural context, culture and traditional knowledge systems.

Index Terms - Kashmir, culture, geography, waterbodies, tradition, temple, architecture, cultural landscape

I. INTRODUCTION

Texts written on Kashmir have always stated it is described to be 'heaven on earth', its topography and climate reflect the scenic beauty that Kashmir is blessed with. In present-day Kashmir is in the north of India with Pakistan on the west and China on the east. The Kashmir valley which was earlier known as the Vale of Kashmir is in the middle of three territorial subdivisions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh each being surrounded by the Himalayan Mountain range. All three territorial subdivisions have a very diverse topographical setting with Ladakh having the influence of Tibet, Jammu in a comparatively lower elevation and plains and Kashmir in a completely mountainous setting. It starts from the Pir Panjal Range which is the western Himalayan Range. The topography of the location gives rise to three major rivers i.e., Jhelum, Indus, Chenab, Sulej and Ravi and many other tributaries. Freshwater lakes are also very commonly found within these very intricate mountain ranges.

Kashmir Valley is surrounded by Pir Panjal and Zaskar range. Jhelum River which originates from Verinag, Anantnag flows through the Kashmir valley and then finally flows out of the valley from Baramulla. Kashmir connects eastern and central Asia with Eastern Europe. Cultural, religious and various trade routes were formed through Kashmir. China, Central Asia and Tibet have a large influence on each other's customs, politics, culture and religion due to this. The imprints made by Successive waves of Buddhist, Hindu, Afghan, Mughal, and Sikh conquerors have left Kashmiris homogenous in their Race, language and arts. (Mayfield 1995).

The ancient Hindu temples of Kashmir have some unique features as Kashmir serves as a cultural bridge between India and Central Asia. The Temple Architecture of Kashmir possesses its own features which are affected by Indian as well as central Asia Art Styles (Dar, 2020). Temples in Kashmir have been geographically well placed with great natural sites, streams of water, and natural springs.

I. TEMPLES OF KASHMIR: HISTORY, CULTURAL INFLUENCES, ARCHITECTURE

The Hindu temple architecture is based on the placement of mandalas and energy where spaces are generated with the help of mathematical and geometrical calculations that are conceived on the plan of the human body. The understanding of the human body that is perceived as Purusha has a symbolic soul of the cosmos. The representation of each square is known as a pada and a combination of padas will define the size of the plan or a mandala. If each mandala is associated with the concept of cosmos, then the square will have the source of energy i.e., the 'bindu' and it shall also be considered as a void i.e., 'shunya'. The size of the temple and the placement of spaces are designed by the combination of these padas. The combinations may start from the simplest padas of 1 and will continue to one, four, nine, sixteen, twenty-five, thirty-six, forty-nine, sixty-four, eight-one, etc. Generally, and most commonly seen are mandalas with a combination of eight-by-eight grids i.e., sixty-four padas. The allocation of the different spaces within the temple is with respect to the limbs of the *purusha* but one cannot read the *purusha* without its soul i.e., the *prakriti*. The amalgamation of *prakriti* and *purusha* can be represented within the womb i.e., the *garbhagriha* where the sanctity of the energies is generated (Meister, 1887, p. 370) (Kramrisch, 2015) (Grover, 2009) (Brown, 1959).

A beautiful spring of clear water overshadowed by splendid shady trees and often teeming with sacred fish, a bold scarp of rock, a magnificent mountain torrent, or a sequestered glade are the accompaniments of the holy places where Hindu's bathe and offer their gifts. In the temples, the universal emblem is the *Linga* surrounded by a stone trench, around which the worshipper's circle, sprinkling water and flowers. Inside the temples are various emblems and relics and outside are piled up old stone images of past ages (Walter 1895). The temples are built of solid masonry. The roof is high and pointed and in Srinagar city covered with tin. When the sun casts its rays on the tin roof, there is an effect of burnished silver from the distance that is very striking. Away from the haunts of men stand the old temples of ancient Kashmir Silent and Grand.

Martand Temple, stripped of its gold and cruelly maimed by the Iconoclast, stands on a high tableland and looks proudly down on the beautiful valley. Panderathan lies under a cliff and once it was almost hidden by dense groves of trees, and Mamleshwar Temple is standing on the High Land, it manages its grandeur and Aesthetics. Kheer Bhawani is one of the most sacred places in Kashmir in the spring of Kheer Bhawani at the mouth of Sind Valley. The important part of temples in Kashmir is the water springs. The existence of water bodies in the temple complex in the form of springs, streams or a river shows the inclusion of nature in the rituals as well as the cultural aspects of Kashmiri Hindus.

The architecture of Kashmir is very different from the rest of India as the temples of Kashmir are mostly square in design. There are mainly two types, one is closed and the other is the open type. Kashmiri Temples are constructed with one kind of material from the plinth to the vertical apex. The temple construction in Kashmir started around the 8th Century. Evenly dressed ashlar masonry built from mammoth boulders and lime mortar. This type of construction was seen in Wangat and the use of steel dowels was seen in the Martand temple. The western region of Kashmir did not have this type of construction. The temple of Lodhu situated twenty km from Srinagar is constructed in the center of the spring. It is one of the earliest remains of the stone structure. Any temple in Kashmir that is situated in the centre of spring is considered a sacred site, Kheer Bhawani temple being one such example. The temple at Narasthan situated in district Pulwama is where we can see the incomplete arch motif that is in the process of development. The temple space is approached by triangular canopies, sunken trefoil niches and enclosure walls with a prominent gateway.

II. CASE STUDIES

2.1 Pandrethan Temple

Pandrethan was originally the old capital of Kashmir. Pandrethan is a beautiful stone temple built by Meru, minister to king Partha. The temple is built in all stone with a huge square plinth of almost 2 meters which is now submerged in water, which is in a tank shaped structure all around the temple. The pyramidal roof of the temple is divided by the ornamental band. The roof pitch is 60 degrees, forming an equilateral triangle on the gable. Above the opening and piercing the gable is a trefoil arch, corbelled, supported on pilasters of a still lesser order. The tired roof reflects the vernacular architecture.

The square sanctum has a single wide projection on each side. There are four doors of the temple with one opening acting as the main accessible entrance and the other doors on the remaining three sides for the purpose of architectural aesthetic only. The temple is surrounded by water like most of the temples in Kashmir. Water always acted as an integral part of the temple structure either as a river, spring or any other form of the waterbody. Pandrethan temple is a typical one with no attached mandapa. The form of Kashmiri temples can be described as a peaked-roofed version of the domed-cornice form.

2.2 Martand Surya Temple

The sacred temple of Martand is in Mattan i.e., six km from Anantnag district that sits on the foot of a plateau and has a view of the whole Kashmir valley. The Mattan habitation is geographically placed with two springs called Vimala and Kamala. The Martand Sureya temple is a Hindu temple and it is considered to be one of the earliest sun temples in India, evidence suggests that

it was constructed even before the Konark temple. The rulers of the Karkota dynasty were considered to be from the lineage of Sun God and therefore the Martand Temple was built. There is always a sense of certainty within the discourse by the Kashmiri pandits when the narration of the temple's existence is stated affirming the involvement of the Karkota dynasty (Martand Sun Temple in Anantnag Jammu Kashmir, n.d.). There are some stated perspectives associated with the temple's origin. The Martand temple has been derived from the popular 'Aditya concept' by the Kashmiri Pandits as the offspring of Aditi and Kashyapa. The temple is said to be built by either Rana Aditya or Lalit- Aditya Muktapid from the Karkota dynasty in 8th CE, both rulers are considered to have contributed in evolving temple architecture in Northern India. Rana- Aditya as well as Lalit- Aditya have the direct indication of the sun in their names thus suggesting their association with Sun God and their continuity within their lineage. The power of the sun beautifully reflects in the energies of the temple (i.e., Bindu), irrespective of the exact knowledge of the known ruler who had constructed the temple. It can be safely assumed that the initiation of the temple was done by Rana- Aditya and his work was enhanced and completed by Lalit- Aditya. Some texts suggest that the construction of the temple was initiated by the Greeks due to its strong architectural relevance with Greek architecture. Local Kashmiri's also state evidence of Greek settlements in the vicinity of Matan (Dar & Lone, 2021). The Martand Sureya was discovered to be in ruins in the 1870s and yet the temple reflected perfect scales, geometry and proportion that blended with its natural context. There is a strong Greek architectural influence seen within the temple complex. The temple is constructed in Devri stone masonry with lime mortar as the binding material.

The temple complex sits in a peristyle courtyard surrounded by 86 fluted columns. The peristyle forms into cells and it is said that this temple has a maximum of cells that are seen in the temples of Kashmir. There are twenty-five cells in the north and south of the peristyle whereas there are nineteen and twelve cells on east and west respectively. The entrance is as wide as the width of the main temple building and carves itself from the west of the peristyle. The main temple building is a tri-ratha plan i.e., placed on a heightened plinth supported by a flight of stairs to approach the *garbhagriha*, *antarala* and *mandapa*. The plinth has figures of Aditya (the sun god), Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, Ganga and Yamuna. A restored sketch from Letters from India and Kashmir by J. Duguid, 1870-73 gives us a fair idea of the architecture and massing of the temple complex indicating the presence of water in the courtyard (a feeling of floating in water) and each structure being connected by pathways (Dar & Lone, 2021) (Bangroo & Kamboj, 2013).

During the reign of Sultan Sikander Bushtikan, there was a mass conversion of Hindus to the religion of Islam. Most Hindu structures were destroyed and the Martand temple was also a part of it. The sultan dedicated over a years' time investing his labors to demolish the Martand Temple due to its mass, architectural essence and grandeur. At present the Archaeological Survey of India- Jammu and Kashmir circle has listed the temple complex as a protected monument of national importance (Bangroo & Kamboj, 2013) (Martand sun temple guide: The lost sun temple of Kashmir, 2021).

2.3 Kheer Bhawani Temple

The Kheer Bhawani temple is located at the mouth of Sindh valley in the Tulamula village situated in a plain region approximately twenty-five km from Srinagar. The Kashmiri locals are also known as the Kashmiri pandits who are followers of Hinduism and worship Lord Shiva. This temple is regarded as one of the most auspicious and sacred temples for the Kashmiri pandits. The temple was constructed in the year 1912 by Maharaja Pratap Singh that was later completed and conserved by Maharaja Hari Singh (Kheer Bhawani Temple, n.d.).

It has been said that Kheer Bhawani came from Sri Lanka, after portraying her nine forms to her devotee Ravana. Ravana's powers were directly associated and manifested from worshipping Shiva and Parvati, Kheer Bhawani was a form of Parvati. Although Ravana was cursed by Kheer Bhawani for his mistreatment of Sita and ill use of his powers thus leaving Sri Lanka and being moved to Tulamula village as per her request to Hanuman. It is considered to be one of the most sacred and serene temples due to its geographical location and its direct association with springs (Bhat & Shyju, 2015, p. 57). The Kashmiri Pandits who left the region during the conflicted time annually return and gather at Kheer Bhawani temple to offer their prayers. Eighteen days in May annually are dedicated to this celebration where Kheer and milk are offered in the spring creating an intangible association of the Kashmiri pandits with temple shrine and the spring. (Dar, 2020)

The main temple shrine is very small in a square layout with four columns in four corners placed on a lifted plinth that is completely built with white marble. There are many streams and shrines that surround the temple complex. The spring that the main shrine sits within does not have a distinguished layout, it has rather been left to look raw and natural. The feet of the spring if seen on the layout would be called the '*pad*' and it faces the east while the head of the spring known as the '*sher*' faces the west. The northern and the southern face of the layout are longer than the eastern and the western face, making the spring irregular in layout (Bhat & Shyju, 2015). Over the years many interventions have been made where the spring has been given a comparatively more defined hexagonal enclosure (Kheer Bhawani Temple, n.d.). This temple complex has been catered and transformed into a pilgrim site and eventually many spiritual centres were also constructed as Swami Vivekananda used this temple complex for meditation in 1898 (Bhat & Shyju, 2015, p. 60).

2.4 Mamleshwar Temple

Mamleshwar Temple is situated at the top of mountains in the Pahalgam area in Kashmir. It is almost twenty km from the Amarnath caves. The temple was built in the Lohara dynasty by Jayasimha, along the river Lidder. It is believed that the king adorned the temple so much that it was decorated with a golden *kalasha*. It is a small temple with such importance that it has been mentioned in *Rajatarangini* (an important literature source of ancient Kashmir) (Gadoo, 2019). The local Kashmiris believe that Lord Shiva moved his coronation from Thojware to Mamleshwar and Lord Ganesha was kept at the entrance door to prevent the Davas from entering the complex therefore the temple is called Mammal temple which means "don't go".

Mamleshwar temple faces southwest and is eight square feet internally. There is a front porch supported by two stone columns and contains a stone *linga* which is said to be made of sand. There is a natural spring in the front of the temple which is rectangular almost twelve square feet and water flows from under the temple. The water levels directly impact the staircase submerging in front of the temple. The temple construction was done with stone masonry with lime mortar as a binding material. The temple has the typical features of Kashmiri temple architecture such as the rectangular layout plans, pyramidal roof and water as a component in the main temple complex.

III. UNDERSTANDINGS

The Indian traditional knowledge systems play a huge impact on architectural typologies. The temples as seen have various intangible practices associated with them, some practices can be born after the construction of the temples whereas some practices led to the establishment of the temples. The natural context irrespective plays a strong role in developing the associational value and connecting the three mediums of nature, built and culture together. Various kinds of modifications and frameworks were drawn out by the locals to indirectly develop a sustainable approach that binds architecture and its people for the successful functioning of the cultural landscape (Shah, 2016).

The research attempts at assessing a few case studies from different geographical locations around Kashmir. Each of the temple structures has been laid out in a manner where there is the intervention of a water body in its vicinity. The structures have very intricate details that are depicted in the architecture showcasing the local folklore and the mythological stories of Hindu gods and goddesses. The construction techniques give us this piece of evidence about the locally available resources like ashlar stone, lime mortar and timber. Irrespective of the various invasion and the voluntarily attempted destructions that have happened over the years, the structures remain soundly intact as per their respective situational history. Many cultural practices revolve around these temple complexes that were born due to regional conflicts or religious beliefs. Their intangible practices help the local Kashmiri pandits to date to be connected with the region because of these religious historical buildings.

The research evaluation would be continued further where the mapping of more temple complexes would be conducted to develop a significance of the cultural landscape in the region.

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