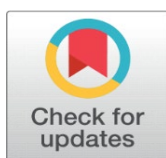


TEMPLES ALONG THE VITASTA

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ABSTRACT

Vitasta the ancient name of river Jhelum flowing through the valley of Kashmir in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is one of the important rivers mentioned in the Rig Veda. As per Nilamata Purana, the river emerges from the Nilnag which is called by the name Verinag in present context. Jhelum may be regarded as the lifeline of Kashmir valley, and it holds true in present as well as ancient context. The river has many important monuments right from its emergence up to its merger with Chenab in Pakistan. Most importantly, it may be regarded as cradle for the birth of Kashmiri Temple Architecture found in the valley which has found its distinct place in Nagara style of architecture in Temple architecture. The paper is presently focusing only on the Brahmanical temples built along the banks of the river and in its close periphery. More importantly from an architectural point of view, it will highlight the importance of river Jhelum (Vitasta) and its significance in the emergence of unique temple architecture.

Keywords: Vitasta, Gandharan, Trefoil, Nilamata, Karkotas, Utpala

1. INTRODUCTION

Gushing from the spring of Verinag anciently called Nilanag, the river Vitasta or Jhelum as known today is the most important river of Kashmir valley. The spring located in the Doru region of district Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is believed to be the source of the river Jhelum (Bates, 1980). The river finds its importance from historical, geological, and mythological point of view. Nilamata Purana (Kumari, 1994) describes Vitasta as a Goddess purifying everywhere. The river is equated with the River Ganga and removes sins and is known by many names. In Kashmir, the river is called Behat, a shorter name for the Vitasta (Bates, 1980). In ancient times, it was also called Hydaspes, a name given by the Greeks and the famous battle of Hydaspes also took place along this river although not in Kashmir. Rig Veda's 10th Mandala (Wilson, 1928) explicitly mentions the name of seven rivers with Vitasta, one of them. Again, in another Purana namely the Varaha Purana (Shastri, 1960), we see mentioning of the river Jhelum as Vitasta as a major river while

describing the nine-fold divisions of Bharata. In reference, Vitasta is referred to as a major river flowing from the foot of the Himalayas.

From Geological point, the river has its origin from the Verinag spring also called Vernag located in Doru in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The spring is fed by snow in the surrounding area. It emerges from the spring and is fed by a number of small streams before the major merger of Lidder river at Sangam in Pulwama district of J&K (Fig.1 & 2). The Jhelum basin has a very diverse topography. The reason for this diversity may be attributed by different geological formations. This includes features like high structural hills, extensive mounds of Karewas, colluvial fans, and alluvial filled valleys (Mir, Jeelani and Dar, 2016). As per De Terra and Patterson (Terra & Patterson, 2003), the Karewas has been defined as glacio-fluvio-lacustrine deposits of Plio- Pleistocene age.

Figure 1

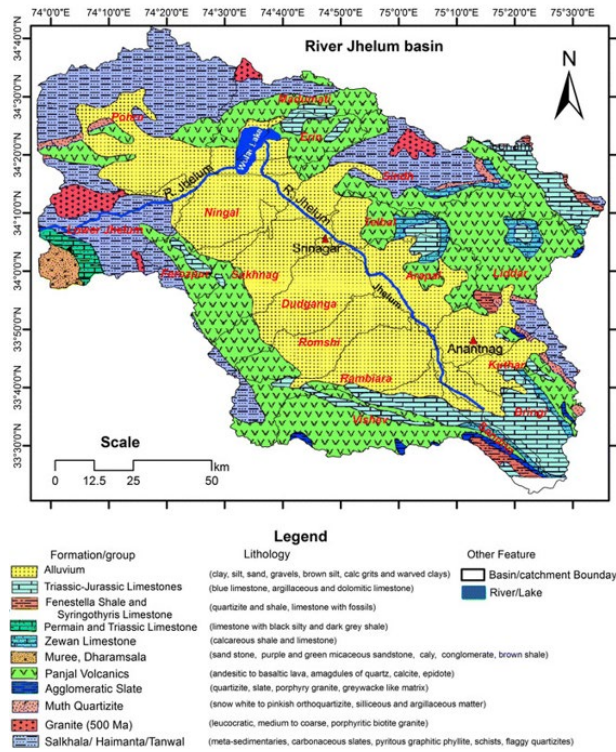


Figure 1 Jhelum River Basin

Source: Geological-Map-of-the-Jhelum-Basin-Modified-After-Thakur-and-Rawat-1992

Figure 2

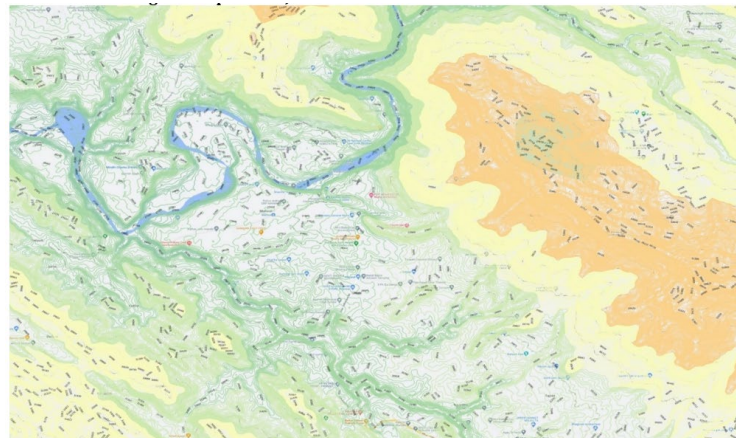


Figure 2 Map showing elevation of Jhelum in Srinagar

2. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

The work was primarily based on the Quantitative method of field survey method supplemented by both primary & secondary sources. The objective is to highlight the history of the development of the temple along the river Jhelum in the Kashmir valley

2.1. STUDY AREA

The river Jhelum serves as one of the major rivers in Kashmir valley and may be regarded as lifeline of Kashmir and cradle of civilization. A number of historical monuments as well as towns are located along its banks and the river also witnessed the rise of many important dynasties in the valley. The study area has been restricted to the historical temples found along the banks and its periphery ranging about 5 km from either bank of the river. Most of these temples are built using the local stones quarried from within the valley. The valley of Kashmir saw an unprecedented emergence of temple architecture ranging from 7th century C.E. to 13th Century C.E. before the advent of the Islamic rule.

Most temples of the period are found along the river Jhelum and are discussed. Many of the temples have been mentioned in the Sanskrit Chronicle of Kalhana's Rajatarangini (Stein, 1900). For understanding the concept, the temples are divided on the basis of their location from the river i.e., from its origin up to its limits in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

3. DISCUSSION

A number of temples are located from the origin of the Vitasta River. Right from its emergence from the spring in Verinag up to its exit from J&K in Uri, a number of temples are found along the banks of the river Vitasta. Some of the temples are located on high land i.e., either on hillock or Karewa (the local name of plateau formed due to deposits of moraines, loess, etc). Interestingly, when these temples are studied, most of the temples on high land were built before the 9th Century C.E. and those temples built in low land were built after 9th Century C.E. or at the later part 9th Century C.E. Although, the spring of Verinag itself is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), but it doesn't truly satisfy for categorization as a temple though some cells of the monuments have idols of God. The list of selected temples has been mentioned and depicted on a map (Fig. 3).

Figure 3



Figure 3 Temples along Vitasta (in Yellow)

Source: Google Earth

3.1. AWANTISWAMĪ TEMPLE

Right from the emergence from the Verinag spring, the first important temple found along the bank of Vitasta is the temple of Awantiswami dedicated to God Vishnu. The temple is a 9th century C.E. marvel built during the reign of King Awantivarman (Fig. 4).

Figure 4



Figure 4 Temple of Awantiswami

The main shrine is well placed in the centre of a spacious oblong (rectangular) courtyard with more than four subsidiary shrines. The temple is built inside a cellular peristyle and a grandeur gateway having relief carving of temple architecture and deities. An interesting feature of the temple is that it is built in two tiers. The grabhagriha (sanctum) is triratha on plan externally while the interior is square (Mitra, 1987).

3.2. AVANTISVĀRA TEMPLE

The second temple found along the course of the river Avantivāra Temple. It is in close vicinity of the Awantiswamī temple and patronized by the same king i.e., King Awantivarman of Utpala Dynasty. Although, the temple is patronized by the same king, the temple is dedicated to God Shiva. The temple complex has a single plan and the temple is itself a Panchayatana temple, i.e., until the subsidiary shrines that are placed inside the courtyard, the temple plan has all the shrines placed on the plan itself. Apart from this, two subsidiary shrines are well placed in the north-east and south-east direction of the temple plan (Mitra, 1987). All these features are well placed inside a quadrangular array of cells (peristyle) which is accessible from the west side by a double-cambered gateway (Fig. 5).

Figure 5



Figure 5 Avantivāra Temple

3.3. LADHUV TEMPLE

The next temple along the river is the ancient temple of Ladhoo or Ladhuv or Lodu. The temple is among the earliest stone temples of Kashmiri tradition dateable to early 8th Century C.E. or even earlier (Meister, 1996). The temple of Ladhuv from its architecture might have served as a prototype for the emergence of Kashmiri temple architecture. The circular roof and the crude triangular pediment coupled with hemispherical dome placed inside a water tank are unique to the region. Such temple roof and the situation of the temple inside a water tank (spring) are not found anywhere in Kashmir. Although, similar architecture resemblance is found beyond the territorial border of India i.e., in Guniar temple in swat in Pakistan (Meister, 1996).

3.4. KAKPORA TEMPLE

The Ancient Temple of Kakapora or Kakpora is next in line along the banks of river Vitasta. The temple is almost in a ruined state. Except for plan, no other feature is prominently left. Like the Awantiswami temple, the temple at Kakpora at present seems to be below the normal ground level. With its oblong courtyard, the main shrine consists of a pancharatha sanctum and portico on plan above the common jagati and preserves only its basal mouldings. Accessible from eastern side by steps the courtyard of the temple is enclosed by a peristyle, the upper platform of which is also damaged. It has a double-chambered gateway in the middle of the eastern side, the roof of which is missing now. The temple at present is in a ruined state (Fig. 6).

Figure 6



Figure 6 Ancient Temple, Kakpora

3.5. PANDRETHAN TEMPLE

One of the almost perfect living examples of Kashmiri temple architecture is the temple of Pandrethan dedicated to God Shiva built inside a natural spring. As per historical sources, the temple is believed to have been built by Meruvardhana, the minister of Pratha in the beginning of 10th century C.E. (Postel, Neven and Mankodi, 1985). The temple is built on triratha plan. With its gable roof architecture, it helps to understand the architecture of temples in Kashmir due to its intact structure. This temple is specifically important since it is among the few specimens and probably the only specimen depicting true architecture of Kashmiri temple architecture. But as per D.R.Sahni who excavated the remains of the Pandrethan in 1913 observed the presence of Lakulisa, which according to him was a Shiva temple and not Vishnu dedicated and also points out to the fact that the mentioned temple could be another one (Marshall, 1915).

3.6. SHANKARACHARYA TEMPLE

Shankaracharya or Sankracharya or Sankaracharya Temple (Fig. 7) is one of the most important temples of Kashmir valley. The temple serves as the symbolizing structure of Hindu faith in the region. The hill earlier called Gopadri hill was changed to Shankaracharya hill after the name of Shankaracharya, the great apostle of monism. Among all the temples

found in the Kashmir valley of late ancient or early medieval origin, the temple of Sankracharya is unique panchratha plan built inside a larger octagonal plan. One important aspect of Sankaracharya temple is its plan. It seems that being among the earliest temples in the region, the temple has the earliest evidence of a peristyle but lower in height. A similar pattern was observed in many other temples especially during the reign the Karkota and Utpala dynasty. But one can see that the use of peristyle was much livid in the later phase. Thus, it could not be wrongly estimated that the Sankaracharya temple served as one of the earliest prototypes of Kashmiri temple architecture. The temple roof was destroyed over the span of time and re-built on course of history. During the expedition of British officer H.H. Cole (Cole, 1870), a conjectural was designed and subsequently published in his work depicting how the temple could had been in its glorious days (Fig. 8).

Figure 7



Figure 7 Sankaracharya temple (General view)

Figure 8



Figure 8 Conjectural of Sankaracharya Temple

Source: After H.H. Cole, *Illustrations of Ancient buildings of Kashmir*, 1870

3.7. ANCIENT TEMPLE, BOHRI KADAL

The temple of Bohri kadal (Fig. 9) proved to be among the last of the temples constructed in the valley. The reference is related to Queen Didda erecting a temple in vohri kadal region in Srinagar (Agrawal, 1992). The temple at present is a ruined state and is surrounded by graves, mostly built over a long span of time. The temple is quite different on ground plan from the rest of the temple found along the Vitasta River. The plan from the impression may suggest that the temple is west facing. Only a prominent gateway with typical Kashmiri architecture arch remains with stairs.

Figure 9



Figure 9 Ancient Temple, Bohri Kadal

3.8. ANCIENT TEMPLE AT BUNIYAR

One of the large well-preserved temples of Kashmir, the Buniyar temple (Fig. 10) is situated on the left bank of river Jhelum. The unique nature of this temple is the material used in the construction. Among the early medieval temples found along the River Jhelum, only this temple is built using Grey Granite and not limestone (Agrawal, 1992). The structural part except for the shikhara is still intact. The temple is built on a high double base platform with the garbhagriha having entrance from the north-eastern side. One major aspect is the almost well-preserved colonnaded peristyle which is absent from all other temples of Kashmir. On plan, the complex is quadrangle accessible through a double chambered gateway almost equal to the temple.

Figure 10



Figure 10 Ancient Temple, Buniyar, Distt. Baramulla

3.9. BANDI TEMPLE

Detha Mandir located in Bandi area of Baramulla is another major temple located at the bank of river Jhelum. Although the temple is close to the temple of Buniyar, the material used is quite different. The plinth of the temple is made of green limestone while the superstructure is made of kanjur stone (Greenish coloured limestone). The temple also has a double base platform surrounded by a dilapidated peristyle. The entrance gateway is also large, close to the height of the temple and faces north-east. On the jambs of the main temple shrines, one can see depictions of the river Goddess and other figures which are now defaced (Agrawal, 1992). The whole temple is in quite dilapidated condition and most of the architectural fragments have lost its ornamentation and depiction carved in base relief owing to weathering and anthropogenic factors.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1. ARCHITECTURE INFERENCE

It was noted that the earliest temples had trefoil arches and triangular pediment but were in a crude phase or maybe the prototype for launching large scale temple architecture. In the case of Ancient temple, Ladhu and Sankracharya Temple, the roof was found to be circular which is almost absent in any other temple of Kashmir except for temple group at Wangath. The dating of the temples by scholars coupled by architectural inferences suggests that these temples were the earliest type of temples to have developed in the valley before the onset of architectural marvels.

4.2. TREFOIL ARCHES AND TRIANGULAR PEDIMENT

This feature was the most prominent of all the features found in the temples of Kashmir. No temple in Kashmir during the period was found without these features. Even the miniatures shrines found had this architectural feature in the truest sense. Although, the trefoil arch is found in some other regions like the temples of Himachal Pradesh which include Basheshar Mahadeo temple at Hat in Kullu, Gaurishankar temple in Kullu but the prominent triangular pediment is absent in them. This combination is profoundly found in temples of Kashmir along Jhelum (Fig. 11).

Figure 11



Figure 11 A Trefoil Arch in Triangular Pediment (Buniyar Temple)

Figure 12



Figure 12 Shikhara of Pandrethan Temple, One of the Best Preserved Shikhara in Kashmiri style (in Red) of Temple Architecture

Source: ASI Srinagar Circle

Figure 13



Figure 13 Source: After H.H.Cole, Illustrations of Ancient buildings of Kashmir

Figure 14



Figure 14 Courtyard or peristyle (Buniyar temple)

4.3. SPIRE (SHIKHARA)

Most of the temples of Kashmir had been destroyed either by natural calamity or by invaders (Mitra, 1987). The shikhara or the spire had not survived over the course of time. But still, there are temples where the spire is still intact, or the remains give an impression of their glorious past. The proof as well as the remnants of the shikhara helps us to understand the nature and style of the shikhara (Fig. 11). The temples at Pandrethan and Payer are intact examples of this architecture. Further, the remnants found at major temples in Kashmir and along the Jhelum River points to the fact that the temple has straight or pyramidal shaped shikhara (Fig. 12). Unlike the curvilinear shikhara that has been found across India like temples of Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and other South Indian temples, similar pattern is absent in these temples. Thus, it would not be wrong to infer that the temple architecture developed in the valley has little influence of temples of Central India.

4.4. COURTYARD AND PERISTYLE

All the temples mentioned here have oblong courtyards except for Shankaracharya temple. The majority of these temples have rectangular courtyards with a profound peristyle. One of the prominent features of the temples found along the Jhelum River is the presence of peristyle. Usually, the peristyle is rectangular in shape surrounding the temple (Fig. 13). If there is any absence of a peristyle, the temple will be located inside a natural spring. Pandrethan temple and Ancient Temple Lodhuv are fine examples of this type. In case of Shankaracharya, peristyle do exist but in octagonal shape.

4.5. AN OBSERVED PATTERN

During the study, a particular pattern was observed. It was seen that the temples belonging to the Karkota dynasty or earlier were built on a hillock or high karewa. But temples after the Karkotas i.e., roughly after 850 C.E. were built in low-lying areas especially the region of Srinagar and Pulwama. It seems that such shift of building temples had emerged only after Utpala dynasty which was carried forward by other dynasties. Even the Islamic structures were centered in the heart of Srinagar only. This shift can be attributed to the earthquake that occurred in 9th century C.E. as per Rajatarangini (Stein, 1900), Kalhana has explicitly mentioned that the valley was rocked by a major earthquake. Not only Kalhana but Tarikh-i-Hasan also records an incident of earthquake in 9th century C.E. during the reign of King Awantivarman of Utpala dynasty. As per seismic studies done so far (Bilham and Bali), the water level in the valley had mostly receded whose tracts can be found in the study conducted in Parihaspora in Dist. Baramulla (Fig. 15) (Bilham and

Bali, 2014). From the 9th century visualization and present context of Parihaspora, it can be estimated that the water level of the valley was the major cause of selecting sites for temple construction by respective dynasties.

Figure 15

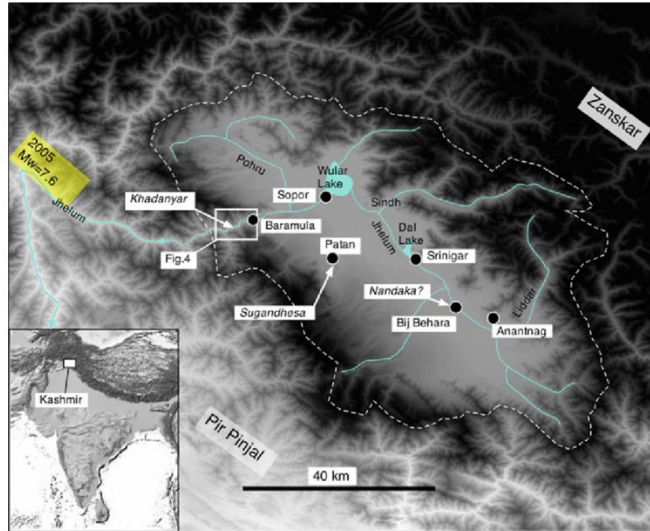


Figure 15 Source: A Ninth Century Earthquake-Induced Landslide and Flood in the Kashmir Valley, and Earthquake Damage to Kashmir’s Medieval Temples”, Bulletin of Earthquake engineering

Figure 16



Figure 16 “Location of Kashmir’s stone temples relative to the shoreline of a 1,600 m flood. Black arrows indicate towns, white arrows indicate temples. Seven of the ten limestone-monolith temples indicated lie close to the 1,600 m shoreline. The Buddhist temple complex of Parihasapura lies on an island. Only Naranag, constructed from local granite, and Martand, constructed of limestone, are located in the hills”

Source: After Roger Bilham and BS Bali: A ninth century earthquake-induced landslide and flood in the Kashmir Valley, and earthquake damage to Kashmir’s Medieval temples”, published in Bulletin of Earthquake engineering

4.6. ASSIMILATION OF ROOF STYLE

The roof pattern when analyzed seems to have been influenced by climate and surrounding temple architecture as well as vernacular architecture. The gable shape is prominent in Himalayan region found in Himachal, Utrakhnad and even in Nepal have a great degree of influence on the development of temple architecture of Kashmir. It is a known and established fact that the wooden temples were preceded by stone and brick temples. As per Coomarswamy (Meister and Coomaraswamy, 1988), the wooden structures were the earliest attempt to reside the God in a structure. Further, the

vernacular architecture known as Kath kuni shows a great degree of impression on the shikhara of the temple. It becomes a subject of study whether the kath kuni was inspired from this temple or vice versa happened.

4.7. GANDHARAN INFLUENCE

Gandharan influence is very profoundly found in the iconography of these temples. The architecture of enclosing the temple inside as peristyle is very similar to the Greco Roman temples. One important clue is the iconography of the ceiling of Pandrethan temple. The Flying figurines (Vidyadhara) in the ceiling of the temple (Pl.) is a testimony to it. The Vidyaharas (flying Gandharvas) are depicted in a typical Hellenistic style which are rare to iconography in Indian temples.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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