



Martand Sun Temple: An exposition of the Architectural Features

Shahid Qadoos Lone and Prof. M.C. Shrivastava

Research Scholar Dept. Of AIHC & Archeology APS University Rewa M.P.

Professor and Head, Dept. Of AIHC & Archeology APS University Rewa M.P.

Abstract:

Martanda Sun Temple, located in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir, is one of the few sun temples in India. Though the temple is in ruins, it retains its grandeur and majesty. There are numerous versions of the temple's history, ranging from mythological legends to literary traditions of recorded history. This paper attempts to understand Martanda's architectural feats by incorporating oral traditions as well as archaeological findings from the site.

Key words: Sun God, Martanda, Surya, Solar Energy, Architecture, Zodiac, Malot, Karkota, Kashmir.

Introduction:

The Martand Sun Temple built by Lalitaditya Muktapida of Karkota dynasty is a Hindu temple dedicated to Surya [the chief solar deity in Hinduism] and built during the 8th century CE. Martand is another Sanskrit synonym for Surya. Now in ruins, the temple is located 8 Km from Anantnag (See Fig.1) in the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir [Coordinates: 33°44'44"N 75°13'13"E]. The name Martanda derives from the temple's dedication to the Hindu pantheon's Sun God, though there is currently no idol or the remains of the Sun God's idol as the temple is in ruins, with some renovation carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Srinagar circle. The temple is currently protected as a protected monument by the ASI under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958. In front of the temple, a recreation park has been created, which has become a popular picnic spot for locals.

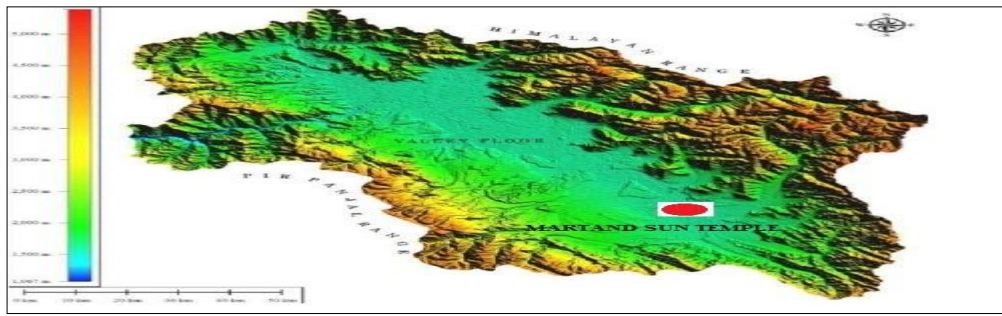


Fig.1. Digital elevation model of Kashmir and location of Martand Sun Temple

Architectural Features:

Martand, the most impressive and grandest of all the ancient temples, occupies undoubtedly the finest situation in Kashmir. This noble ruin is the most striking in size and position of all the existing remains. The temple itself is not more than 40 feet high, but its solid walls and bold outlines, towering over the fluted pillars of the surrounding colonnade, give it an imposing appearance. There are no petty confused details, but all are distinct and massive and most admirable suited to the general character of the building. The mass of buildings consists of one lofty central edifice with a small detached wing on each side of the entrance, the whole standing in a large quadrangle, surrounded by a colonnade of fluted pillars with intervening trefoil headed recesses. The length of the outer side of the wall which is blank is about 90 yards that of the front is about 60 yards. There are in all 85 columns, a singularly appropriate number in a temple of the sun, if, as is supposed, the number 84 is accounted sacred by the Hindus in consequence of its being the product of the number of days in the week and the number of signs in Zodiac.

The remains of three gateways opening into the court are now standing. The foremost of these fronts owing west towards Anantnag. It is also rectangular in shape and built with colossal blocks of lime-stone, 6 or 8 feet in length and one of 9 feet and of proportionate solidity, cemented with mortar. (See Fig.2)



Fig. 2. Martand Sun temple main entrance gateway

It is surprising how these huge stones were piled one upon the other to a great height with such accuracy. The central building is the most imposing structure and above all has as the temples in Kashmir possess in addition to the cella or sanctuary, a nave 18 feet square. The sanctuary alone is left entirely bare, the two other compartments being lined with rich paneling's and sculptured niches, it has been conjectured that the roof was of pyramidal form and that the entrance chamber and wings were similarly carved. There would thus have been four distinct pyramids of which that over the inner chamber must have been the loftiest, the height of its peak above the ground being about 75 feet.

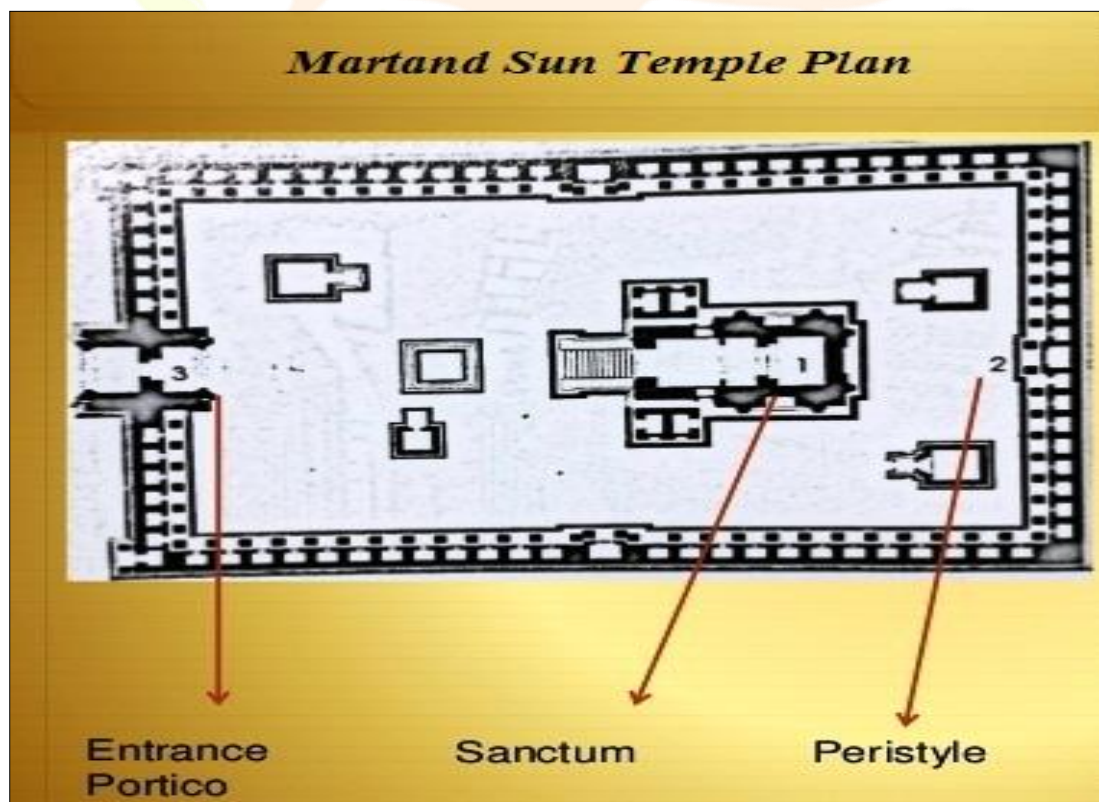
The temple is 60 feet long and 38 feet wide, its height, when complete must have been 75 feet, the courtyard that surrounds and encloses the temple, is a more remarkable object than the temple itself. Its internal dimensions are 220 by 142 feet. On each face is a central cella, larger and higher than the colonnade in which it is placed. The height is 30 feet and the pillars on each side are 9 feet high- not haughty but they have a Grecian aspect which is interesting. (See Fig.3)



Fig.3. Collanade and enclosed walls of Martand Sun Temple

In accordance with Hindu Temple architecture, the primary entrance to the temple is situated in the western side of the quadrangle and is the same width as the temple itself, creating grandeur. The entrance is highly reflective of the temple as a whole due to its elaborate decoration and allusion to the deities worshipped inside the complex. It is thought that the whole of the interior of the quadrangle was originally filled with water to a level up to one foot of the base of the columns and that access to the temple was gained by a raised pathway of slabs supported on solid blocks at short intervals which connected the gateways flight of steps with that leading to the temple. The same kind of pathway expanded right across of quadrangle from one side doorway to the other. A constant supply of fresh water was kept up through a canal front the river Liddar, which was conducted along the side of the mountain for the service of the village close through.

Bates says that the interior must have been as imposing as the exterior. On ascending the flight of steps now covered by the ruins, the votary of the sun entered a highly decorated chamber with a door-way on each side covered by a pediment with a trefoil-headed niche containing a bust of the Hindu harmony. On the flanks of the main entrance as well as those of the side doorways were trefoil niches, each of which held a deity. The interior decorations of the roof can only be conjecturally determined, as there do not appear to be any ornamented stones that could, with certainty, to assign to it. (See Fig. 4)

*Fig.4 Plan of Martand Sun Temple*

Cunningham thinks that the erection of this sun temple was suggested by the glorious sunny prospect which its position commands. He remarks:

“....It overlooks the finest view in Kashmir, and perhaps in the known world beneath it lies the ‘Paradise of the East’, with its sacred streams and glens, its orchards and green fields, surrounded on all sides by vast snowy mountains whose lofty peaks seem to smile upon the beautiful valley below. The vast extent of the scene makes it inspirational, for this wonderful view of Kashmir is no nice-looking gaze in a half mile glen, but the full display of a valley 30 miles in breadth and 84 miles in length, the whole of which lies beneath the can of the wonderful Maitand.”

What is most impressive in Martand is the apparently over whelming size- to some degree an optic illusion- and the complete synchronization of the buildings and of all their decorations and figure sculptures. As we have already seen they represent the conclusion of a long development from the simple start depicted by the temples of Sankarcharya and Pravaresa, through the Parihasapura *stupas* and temples to the very zenith of Martand.

On the other hand, records Dr. Goetz, ‘Martand stands not quite isolated. It has a smaller counterpart in the plains, the temple of Malot in the salt range. Malot raises the problems of the Martand temple even more acutely. For it has a façade of purely Roman- Corinthian half-pillars enclosing trifoliated archways crowned by a set of high *sikharas*. If the first has already been proved characteristic for Lalitaditya’s reign, the second was possible only in a time of the closest contact with Bihar and Bengal- *i.e* when the king of Gauda had become Lalitaditya’s vassal and prisoner. Martand has also quite a following of temples of the same layout and construction, through of simple execution, as for example Wangath and Buniar, which must belong to the same period.

Conclusion

The Martand Sun Temple is highly revered as one of the most inspiring and memorable masterpiece that was erected during the reign of King Lalitaditya who ruled this region during the ancient era. He ordered the construction of this spacious and spectacular Martand Sun Temple in Kashmir in honor and dedication to the Sun God, also referred to as Surya. The King belonged to the Surya dynasty period, and was a Kshatriya, considered to be a highly authoritative figure, yet considerate and gentle leader to his people, during those times. It was during his era when the Sun, Moon and Holy entities were greatly worshipped and believed to possess spiritual and supernatural powers. Built to represent this Solar or Surya Dynasty, King had the Martand Temple built to commemorate Bhaskar, known then as the Sun God. The Ancient Temple Architecture of Kashmir undoubtedly bears Greek influence. This influence is starkly visible in the use of stone pillars, columns, trefoil doorways, ornamental fritters, geometrical designs especially the rectangle and triangles, image of gods carved on stones and pediments. Kashmir stone architects made some amendments to suit harsh winters. This influence is clearly visible in Martand and Awantipora Stone temple architecture.

References

- ❖ Agrawal, R. C. 1998. Kashmir and its monumental Glory. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- ❖ Bamzai, P. N. K. 1994. Cultural and political History of Kashmir. New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- ❖ Banerjee, S. C. R. C. Majumdar. 1965. Cultural Heritage of Kashmir. Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak.

- ❖ Basham, A. L. 1948. Harṣa of Kashmir and the Iconoclast Ascetics. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 12. pp.688-691.
- ❖ Brown, P. 1942. Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu Period. Bombay: Tobey Press.
- ❖ Cole. H. H. 1869. Illustration of Ancient buildings in Kashmir. London: W. H. Allen and Co.
- ❖ Cunningham, A. 1848. An essay on the Aryan order of Architecture as exhibited in the temples in the temples of Kashmir. JASB 17. pp. 21-327.
- ❖ Fergusson, J. 1910. History of Indian and Eastern Architecture. Delhi: D. K. Publishers.
- ❖ Fisher, R. E. 1989. Stone Temples. in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.). Art and Architecture of ancient Kashmir. Bombay: Marg Publications.
- ❖ Goetz, H. 1969. Studies in the History and Art of Kashmir and the Indian Himalaya Wiesbaden - Germany: Harrassowitz.
- ❖ Kak. R. C. 2000. Ancient Monuments of Kashmir. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- ❖ Mitra, D. 1977. Pandrethan, Avantipur and Martand. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- ❖ Paul, P. G. 1986. Early Sculptures of Kashmir. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Leiden: University of Leiden.
- ❖ Ray, S. C. 1970. Early history and culture of Kashmir with a foreword by Sardar K. M. Panikkar. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- ❖ Sahani, D. R. (1915-16). Pre- Muhammadan Monuments of Kashmir. Annual report 1915-1916. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- ❖ Stein, M. A. 1900. Kalhana's Rajatarangni. Vol. 1. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company Ltd.

