



Traces of Martand Sun Temple of Kashmir Valley: An Architectural Study

Shabir Ahmad Lone¹

¹Research Scholar of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar- 608002, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, India
Email: loneshabir714@gmail.com, (7006808798)

ABSTRACT:

The Martand Sun Temple, also known as Pandou Laidan, was an 8th-century Hindu temple dedicated to Surya. Lalitaditya Muktapida, the third ruler of the Karkota Dynasty, commissioned its construction. Unfortunately, it now lies in ruins, having been destroyed by the Muslim ruler Sikandar Shah Miri. Situated five miles from Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir, the temple showcased a blend of Gandharan, Gupta, and Chinese architectural forms. Designated as a centrally protected monument, it is listed as Kartanda (Sun Temple). The author highlights the traces of Martand Sun Temple of Kashmir Valley.

Keywords: Architecture, Temple, Kashmir, explore

1. INTRODUCTION:

Constructed in the eighth century in Kashmir, the Martand Sun Temple was a Hindu sanctuary commissioned by Lalitaditya Muktapida. This architectural marvel was dedicated to the worship of Surya, the chief solar deity in Hinduism. Tragically, the temple met its demise in the 15th century under the orders of Sikandar Shah Miri, who sought to Islamize the region based on the counsel of the Sufi preacher Mir Muhammad Hamadani. The destruction of the temple resulted in a period of severe persecution for the local Hindu population. Responsibility for this persecution is often attributed to Sikandar Shah Miri and his chief counsel Suhabhata, who was a Brahman neo-convert. The motive behind the temple's destruction was rooted in the broader strategy of Islamizing the Kashmir region. The temple, which had once stood as a testament to Hindu heritage and architectural prowess, became a symbol of religious and cultural upheaval.

The consequences of the destruction extended beyond the physical loss of the temple. The event significantly impacted the local Hindu community, leading to a period of intensified hardship and discrimination. Despite the tragic episode, the Martand Sun Temple continues to hold deep religious and cultural significance, being revered as one of the holiest pilgrimage sites for Kashmiri Pandits. The legacy of the temple remains a poignant chapter in the history of Kashmir, reflecting the complex interplay of religious and political forces in the region.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- 1.To explore the famous Martand Sun Temple of Anantnag District of Kashmir Valley.
- 2.To mention the traces, History and Architecture of Martand Sun Temple.
- 3.To mention the Legacy of Martand Sun Temple and it's importance as a famous historical site and tourist place of Kashmir Valley.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The current study is descriptive, historical in nature and relies on secondary sources. Secondary data were gathered from journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, research articles, books, Archives of Srinagar, the internet, and public and unpublished records from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, J&K Tourism Development Corporation, and Directorate of Tourism (Jammu/Kashmir).

4. DISCUSSION:

Jonaraja, appointed by Sikandar's son, aimed to reintegrate the Brahminical elite into the royal fold, while later Muslim chroniclers sought to portray the past through an idealized lens of orthodox Islamic morality. Scholars like Chitralekha Zutshi and Richard G. Salomon argue that Sikandar's policies were

driven by realpolitik, aiming to assert state power over Brahmans for political legitimacy and access to wealth held by Brahminical institutions, consistent with strategies employed by previous Hindu rulers. J. L. Bhan points to a stone sculpture dedicated to Sikandar, challenging notions of religious persecution and suggesting complex religious dynamics. Slaje acknowledges religious motivations but attributes Brahmin chroniclers' aversion to resistance against the Varna-system's disintegration under Muslim rule and the growth of Islamic traditions.

4.1 Degradation and Architecture

Regarding degradation, earthquakes further damaged the already ruined remnants of the Martand temple. In terms of architecture, the temple, situated on a plateau offering panoramic views of the Kashmir Valley, exemplified a blend of Kashmiri, Gandharan, Gupta, and Chinese architectural forms, as evidenced by archaeological findings.



Panorama of the ruins from inside the main enclosure

The temple comprises a colonnaded courtyard featuring a central primary shrine surrounded by 84 smaller shrines, extending 220 feet in length and 142 feet in breadth, inclusive of a pre-existing smaller temple. It stands as the largest peristyle example in Kashmir, characterized by its intricate design with proportionally sized chambers aligned with the overall temple perimeter. Following Hindu temple architectural principles, the main entrance is situated on the western side of the quadrangle, mirroring the temple's width and imparting a sense of grandeur. The entrance, adorned with elaborate decorations, symbolizes the temple's overarching reverence to the deities housed within. The central shrine, located in a centralized structure presumed to have had a pyramidal top, adheres to a common feature observed in Kashmiri temples. The antechamber of the temple proper displays wall carvings depicting various deities, including Vishnu, and river goddesses such as Ganga and Yamuna, alongside the solar deity Surya. Construction employed lime mortar and large grey limestone blocks. The noteworthy use of lime mortar, a material widely adopted in North India only after the ascent of the Delhi Sultans in the 13th century, suggests the possible involvement of immigrant Byzantine architects under Lalitaditya's patronage.

4.2 Conservation

The Martand Sun Temple has been recognized by the Archaeological Survey of India as a site of national significance in Jammu and Kashmir. It is listed among the centrally protected monuments under the name Kartanda (Sun Temple).



Details sign-ASI

Source : www.google.com

4.3 In popular culture

In 1970, the Hindi film "Man Ki Aankhen," featuring Dharmendra and Waheeda Rahman, utilized the Martand Temple as a backdrop for the Rafi-Lata song "Chala Bhi Aa Aaja Rasiya." Similarly, the 1975 Hindi film "Aandhi," starring Sanjeev Kumar and Suchitra Sen, incorporated the Martand Temple in the background for the Kishore-Lata song "Tere Bina Zindagi Se Koi Shikwa Nahiin."

In 2014, the temple was chosen as the setting for the song "Bismil" in the Hindi film "Haider," which is modeled on Hamlet and set against the backdrop of the Kashmir conflict. This depiction stirred controversy, with some Kashmiri Pandits asserting that the site was portrayed negatively, labeling it a "den of evil," thereby causing offense to their sentiments. Consequently, calls were made for a ban on the film.



Temple ruins as seen from the entrance to the main temple structure

5. CONCLUSION:

Kashmiri architecture is distinct, featuring square or oblong temples, categorized as closed (vimana) or open (mandapa). These 'Suddha' structures use a single material from base to summit. The region has been a significant Hindu center since prehistoric times, with temples dedicated mainly to Lord Shiva. The Martand Sun Temple, built by Lalitaditya Muktapida in the 8th century, was devoted to Surya. Sikandar Shah Miri ordered its demolition in the early 15th century. The temple's ruins, located near Anantnag, are recognized as a site of national importance. The characteristic features of Kashmiri architecture include pyramidal roofs, trefoiled doorways, and wide intercolumniations. The Martand Sun Temple, a medieval Hindu shrine near Anantnag, was dedicated to Surya, the chief solar deity in Hinduism. Sikandar Shah Miri ordered its demolition. The temple's ruins, considered a site of national importance, exhibit distinctive Kashmiri architectural features.

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