Unique Features of Ancient Temples of Kashmir under Karkota Dynasty

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Abstract:

Kashmir is full of archaeological interest right from ancient period. During the period of Karkota dynasty through the length and breadth of the Kashmir Valley, a network of Hindu Temples was spread like, Martand Temple or Sun Temple, Siva temple Buniyar, Wangath Temple, Vishnu temple or Muktasvami Temple, Ushkar Baramulla etc. In this paper the unique features of ancient temples of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty in terms of style, material, designs and methods of construction has been discussed in a considerable length as compared to other parts of India.

Key Words: Archeology, Karkota Dynasty, Martand Temple, Siva temple Buniyar, Wangath Temple, Vishnu temple or Muktasvami Temple, Ushkar Baramulla, Architecture, Shrine etc.

INTRODUCTION: 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 under Karkota dynasty, distinct as compared the temple architecture of other parts of India. The ancient temples of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty 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 under Karkota dynasty 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. 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. The unique features of ancient temple architecture of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty, which differ it from the other parts of India, are mentioned as under:

➢ During ancient Kashmir the architects have always invaluably choose the most natural spots for their sanctuaries than other parts of Indian such as Martand Temple, Buniyar Temple Wangath Temple 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.

➢ 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 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.

➢ 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.

➢ 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.

➢ All the ancient temples of Kashmir except those of Wangath and Buniyar, in which the material used is granite, are built of lime stone like Martand Temple etc.

➢ These lime stones were brought from Zewan and Dachigamnala. 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.

➢ The roofs of ancient temples of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty are invariably
pyramidal. The Pyramidal is a double one.

- 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 different 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 temples of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty are almost always in an erect position, without any inscription.

- Mostly figures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses were engraved like: Shiva, Vishnu, Ganga, Yamana and Kamdev. The number of flutes in the columns of different temples in the Kashmir valley is 12, 16, 20 and 24.

- 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.

- The one more important and unique feature of ancient 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.

- During the long period of King Lalitaditya of Karkota Dynasty, capped and simple triangular gable became a favourite motif of Kashmiri temple architecture. These gabbles were especially used in Sun Temple of Martand, which is a unique feature in India.

- As compared to the North and South Indian temple architecture, the Kashmiri temples have the great width of the intervals between the columns but it is constant. The inter-columniation followed in Kashmiri temples was never less than twenty four meters.

- The ancient temples of Kashmir are simple, attractive and impressive but smaller in size than other parts of India.

- However, all the ancient temples of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty have a single storied elevation and the double story 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 temples of Kashmir
according to Stein are, irrespective all ancient temples built in the middle of water tanks.

**CONCLUSION:** The conclusion that I reach on the bases of remarks made above is that the ancient temple architecture of Kashmir under Karkota dynasty represented a tradition of its own. The ancient temples of Kashmir possess some unique features as compared to other parts of India, because the great ancient Kashmiri architects used many own styles, designs, and techniques as well as local material from base to the top for the construction of their temples. But it is true that the ancient Kashmiri temple architecture is greatly affected by many foreign art styles like Bactro-Gandhra, Graeco- Egyptian and Tibetan elements than the art styles of other parts of ancient India.

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