

Greece in Jammu: Peeping through the melting of architectural patterns in Manwal Temples

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Abstract: *Manwal group of temples are located in the district of Udhampur (Dhar Road), 28 km away from the city, in the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) province of India. The temples were originally dedicated to Vishnu, Devi Bhagvati and Lord Shiva (as per the folk belief and some evidences) and date back to 10-11 century A.D. The site is protected by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). There are five temple complexes 50-100 meters away both sides of the rode at Manwal village, with magnificent gray stone blocks, sikhara fallen down, parts of facades suffered weathering, some of the columns broken or collapsed, yet narrating a golden history of the place.*

Temples having typical Indian style entrances, mandapam and antarālas, the garbha-grha (sanctum sanctorum) and side-doors; represent the perfect North Indian nāgara style of temple architecture. The most fascinating fact is the use of typical Hellenistic (Ionic order) columns in the mandapam halls and in the door-sides of the garbha-grha. Needless to mention the historic fact that the region was under political and cultural influence of the Indo-Greek chieftains for centuries and therefore, the Hellenistic influence on the architectural patterns is quite imaginable.[1] At the same time, the melting of the architectural patterns, in terms like blending of Ionic shafts and Indian capitals in the columns, and alike, report a constructive exchange between two cultures though maintaining the overall dominance of Indian style.

The present paper attempts a study of the possible details of the melting of two patterns, through which it is envisaged that a clearer understanding is imparted to the understanding of the cultural history of the region and to the dimensions of the absorption of other patterns by Indian temple styles.

Key Words: Hellenistic, mandapam, garbha-grha, sikhara, nāgara, yavana.

1. INTRODUCTION

Temple, considered as a sacred place, where the creation can meet its creator. In India, there lies a large variety of temples, diversified from the northernmost – Kashmir to Kanyakumari in the south. Nestled in the Himalayan range, unfurling the seraphic presence prevalent, all over its

neighbouring areas, the Manwal temples are located in Udhampur district, 28 km away from the district headquarters. This area belongs to the golden era in the history of the place, now well preserved by the archaeological survey of India (ASI). The ASI has defined a 200 m regulated zone on the temple periphery to provide a construction free zone.

As one approaches the temples, they take us back into time. These temples must have been a part of the great pilgrimage in the past, and might have been damaged or must have lost its importance. Magnificent temples, over a highly elevated platform with stone carvings, manifest the impressive art and architecture prevalent. The ruins of massive columns, beams and building blocks displaying the splendid detailing, significantly portray the solidity and serenity of the times left behind.

The Manwal temples have various attributes from the impressive bygone years. The majestic column and beam arrangement define the entrance of the temple followed by a walkway to the temple. The temple entrance is defined by a series of steps leading up to the *antarala*. Further, when one approaches the *ardhamandapa*, one finds they are ruined leaving it in shatters or partially destroyed at some places. *Mandapa* is the succeeding segment containing niches on the walls, where the sculptures of deities must have rested, which culminates to the *garba-griha* (*sanctum sanctorum*), where the statue of the deity rested. Returning back towards the approach, a wide path called the *parikarma-patha* surrounding the main building containing several sculptures of various deities is visible. Also the main temple entrance, with images of *navagrahas* and geometrically designed motifs add significantly to the rich temple architecture. The raised plinth, approximately 2 meters high, signifies the importance of the efforts made to reach out to the deity. Various sights of damaged *kalasha* ripped apart from the *shikharas* (pinnacle), traces of efforts made to demolish the complex are visible on the columns present there.[2] The temples belong to the *nagara* style of architecture justified by the square plan and the projections and contain columns decorated by floral designs.

2. THE ARCHITECTURAL PATTERNS OF MANWAL TEMPLES

As mentioned above, the temple styles follow the *nagara* style – the typical North Indian temple style which is characterized by the dominating pinnacle above the *sanctum sanctorum* and decorated with *amalaka* and carved panels generally representing the archetypal miniature of the whole temple. Apparently the plans of the Manwal temples are akin to some other Northern Indian temples, precisely to other Jammu-Himachal type of temples such as Krimchi, Billawar etc. excepting for some unique features, that will be discussed shortly, which builds a case for the present study. The temple complex *Kala Dera* exhibit two temples, each built on raised platforms, staircases leading to the entrances, *mandapam* with columns portraying Hellenistic influence and the *garbha-griha* though with absence of any idol of deity, though with signs of attempts of destruction. The *nandi* installed outside of one of the temples [as in picture 1] suggests, rather confirms, that the particular temple was dedicated to Lord Shiva.[3] The drainage carved out in stone also corroborates the arrangement of passage of water offered to the deity, which is a typical characteristic of Shiva temples.



Fig – 1: *Nandi* – a token of Shiva temple

The temple located opposite side of *Kala Dera* is west-facing and has three rack-type of spaces for deities, though no deity idol is presently available. Yet, the main hall or the *mandapam* of this temple is relatively large having eight elegant columns [picture 2] and exit door towards eastern and northern side.



Fig – 2 : Indo-Greek columns

The scale of the temple building is relatively large, largest among all the Manwal temples. The central ceiling of the temple is fallen, but the ceiling of the side roof suggests [picture 3] the style of the ceiling and the depiction of lotus, a significant symbol of Indian temple architecture.



Fig – 3: Depiction of lotus in the ceiling

The unique features: The most notable feature of Manwal temples is the use of Greek or Hellenistic Ionic order columns (which we would prefer calling Indo-Greek columns), some are monolithic and some assembled in pieces. They have Indian type of capitals [picture 4], at least not following any of the Greek ones. Very specifically, one of the temples exhibits a unique pattern of elephant capitals [picture 5], which is nowhere else found in either in India or other parts of the world.

The other specific feature, though not rare, is the use of rack-type of spaces for deity sculptures instead of proper *garbh-griha* in one of the temples, as mentioned above, and use of proportionally larger *mandapa*. Additionally, the use of window outlets are interesting in these temples, which are proportionally larger also and not usual to Indian temple style.



Fig – 4: Indian capitals upon Indo-Greek columns



Fig – 5: Elephant capital

As it is an established fact that the region was under influence of Indo-Greek chieftains after Alexander's invasion of frontier India, there are evidences of Indo-Greek political influence in 1st Century CE, as well described by A. K. Narayan, the influence of the Greek architectural style upon Indian temple architecture is not surprising. The important fact in this regard is that, the influence continues till 10-11th Century CE, resulting into the state-of-the-art construction of Manwal temples in Jammu region. The local scholars have recently debated if these columns have Greek influence at all, but the influence is obvious and undeniable. It is rather a matter of interest for a student of architecture as well as of history, that how finely the blending of two styles took place. This point will be shortly discussed.

3. CULTURAL OVERLAP AND ACCOMMODATION

The influence of the Greek architectural characters, precisely the use of Indo-Greek columns, is though the main characteristics that temples borrow from the Greek style, but its subtle influences can also be seen in some other terms. To note at least one, the use of Greek columns allow the temples plan and accommodate proportionally larger size of *mandapa* halls, which is otherwise not seen in other Indian temples generally. Sometimes, rather, it surprises us that in proportion to the halls, the racks of the deities are smaller, excepting for those temples wherein the proper *garbhagrihas* are constructed.

Now, it can be questioned why only a single feature of the Greek style, i.e., shaft of the columns, is adopted in the temples, and so uniformly? The possible answer may be that as the shafts are perhaps the most elegant feature of the Greek style and possibly the most suitable to fit into any other architecture without much damaging the genre of any

other building style. Adoption of such shafts adds aesthetic value to any architecture using columns even today. In turn, the Indian capitals, particularly the floral ones, also adds value to the Greek shafts, making a rare combination altogether. The floral embellishments of the capitals with Greek shafts deserve to be identified as a new order of columns, which we hesitate to claim right here due to lack of similar and plenty of examples.

When we observe further minute features, we see the intact uses of Indian motifs above gates and sides of entrance [picture 6], and complexity of paneling. The deities like Ganesha are carved in the center above doors. Even the bases of the columns are typically Indian.



Fig – 6 : Side carvings

This is suggestive of consciousness behind a temple construction, i.e., the narrative of the structure remain intact even if certain building features are borrowed or adopted from other style.

4. A CRITICAL REVIEW

It can be argued that the constructors of the temples used Greek style only to add elegance to the temple style, and seem to have no honour for the overall Greek style. This is proclaimed for certain reasons, as the use of motifs and other carvings remain Indian, and also, the overall dominance of the *nagara* style. None of the features of Greek entablature or frieze is ever replicated, blended or imitated. Whereas, in other parts of the world, where there was Greek influence, the local architecture underwent almost complete overhaul. It can also be argued that the Ionic type of Indo-Greek shafts was adopted because of their simplicity and lesser complexity in construction as compared to the densely carved and embellished usual Hindu columns. This argument can be corroborated with the fact the shafts of columns used in the above temples are not very finely finished or polished, as if they were either constructed in a hurry or under less financial support.

Yet, the imagination of proportion and space in the *mandapa* halls are the main marvel of the temples. This is the feature that characterizes the whole complex, even the overarching *nagara* style is not much at issue here. What is at issue is not the Indian identity, but the reasons for limited adoptability or incorporation of the Greek style. On the other hand, we have no Greek structure that depicts Indian influence.

After all, in the Manwal temples, the instinct for Indian dominance in the construction is at work, but the shafts of the Indo-Greek columns, that transform the *mandapa* space, are the features that attract an informed visitor *prima facie* and remain difficult to ignore even today. The actual importance and grandeur of the place can be just a matter of historical conjecture, but the ruins remind us nevertheless a Delphi in India.

5. CONCLUSION

The brief discussion above makes a ground to establish that the adoption of a style or features of an architecture by another style culturally altogether different, is possible even without damaging the style of the adopter. Both can mutually add value to each other and come up as an epitome of constructive cultural exchange and melting of cultures. This can be taken as a suggestion not only for understanding the history of the time, but also for blending the old and new, i.e., extrapolating the example, an insight for preserving the old in new style can be drawn.

The study also invites the writers on Indian temple Architecture and some important works like Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture [4], to incorporate in their study and reporting the features of above temples which are so far ignored.

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REFERENCES

- [1] Narayan, A.K., The Indo-Greek, BR Publishing Corporation (2003)
- [2] The folklore and some of the local writings suggest that Timur had invaded the place while his expedition to India and demolished the temples, whereas some other inferences may be drawn that the ruler of Kashmir – styled as 'devotpatana-nayaka' – the demolisher of the idols of deities, might have destroyed these temples.
- [3] In all Shiva temples of India, it is mandatory that they install a sculpture of *nandi* – the bull, which looks at the main deity – the lingam of the Shiva in side the *garbhagriha*. Therefore, placing a *nandi* outside a temple main entrance is token of the temple being a Shiva temple.
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BIOGRAPHIES

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