



Indian Sun Temple: An Introduction

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Abstract-- India's culture is ancient and rich. Religion has played a vital role in life here. Religion has influenced people's thoughts and lifestyles. People have expressed their devotion through art and temples. This is why temples hold a special place in India. Indian temple architecture is a confluence of cosmic symbols, craftsmanship, spiritual consciousness in our country India, depicting the connection between God and the soul through the sanctum sanctorum, the spire, and the mandapam. It is not merely a stone structure, but rather the centre of the human soul's journey. Religion has been a prominent figure in our country, India, since ancient times. In ancient times, people's religious sentiments were very strong. People built idols and temples to worship their gods and express their faith. Gods were imagined in different forms, and grand and beautiful temples were built according to those forms.

Keywords-- sun, temple, konark, modhera, katramal, martand

I. INTRODUCTION

The worship of gods and goddesses has been prevalent in India since ancient times. Deities like Surya, Vishnu, and Shiva have been worshipped since the Vedic period. Ancient records indicate that Hindu temples were few until the third century AD. Following this, the Gupta period saw the rapid spread of Vedic religion and Brahminical power. Under the influence of Buddhism, stupas, viharas, and chaityagrihas were first built, but later, Hindu rock-cut temples also began to develop. Temple construction was prominent during the Gupta period. The Gupta period is called the golden age of Indian history. In the earlier times, temples were built very rarely, but later big and beautiful temples started being built. During this time, the art of temples and sculptures developed a lot. Most of the temples of that period are now destroyed, only the remains of a Buddhist temple are found in Sanchi. During this period, rock-cut temples, called cave temples or Shaivite temples, were built. Later, rock-cut temples started being built in North and South India as well. Among these, the temples of Ellora, Badami and Pattadakal are famous.

The Pallava period witnessed a major transformation in architecture. The Dravid (Southern) style flourished during this period. The chariot temples of Mahabalipuram and the Pallava sculptures are good examples of this. Following this, during the Rashtrakuta period, the Kailashnath temple at Solora was built, a fine example of rock-cut architecture.

Later, temple construction became even more grand. Temples began to feature pillars, arches, and sanctums, and were adorned with sculptures and beautiful designs and decorated with carving.

Although the construction of temples has been prevalent in India since ancient times, it was only during the Middle Ages, from approximately the ninth to the thirteenth century, that temples began to flood the region. Temples were built in all parts of India, including Odisha, Bundelkhand, Central India, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Bihar, Kashmir, and Nepal. Numerous Mandari temples dedicated to the Sun God were built in India. There are approximately twelve famous Sun temples in India. These include the Sun Temple at Konark, the Sun Temple at Maudera, the Sun Temple at Martand, the Sun Temple at Osian, the Sun Temple at Katarmal, the Sun Temple at Unnao, the Sun Temple at Shnakpur, the Sun Temple at Jhalapaltan, the Sun Temple at Lohagil, and the Surya Narayan Temple. These temples were bequeathed by different kings at different times. Here we will explore some of the major temples.

II. THE SUN TEMPLE OF KONARK

Among the famous temples of Orisa the temples of Bhubaneswar, Jagannath Puri and Konark are outstanding examples of architectural beauty. The Parashurameshwar Temple, Mukteshwar, VaitalDeul, Raja Rani Temple, and the world-famous Linga-Raj Gadhira in the Ira region are special. Of the three Sun Temples mentioned in the Puranas related to solar worship, the Sun Temple at Konark is considered world famous. After Samba built the Sun Temple at the original site and installed his idol, Lord Surya granted him a boon.

"Sanidhyam Mam Purvahe Sutire DrakshyateJanah :

Kalaapriya Cha Madhyahe Aparahne Chann Nityashah: "

That is to say The living beings will get my company in the morning at Sutir (Konark), in the afternoon at Kalpriya and in the evening at the original place.

Among India's Sun Temples, the Konark Temple in Odisha is considered unique. Located on the seashore, approximately 30 kilometers northeast of Puri, its ruins remain magnificent. It is also known as the "Black Pagoda" because it appears black from a distance.

Konark has been known as "Suryakshetra" in the SkandaPurana, "Konaditya" in the Brahma Purana, "Maitravana" in the ShambPurana, "Ravikshetra" in the Kapil Sanhita, and "Arktirtha" in the Prachi Mahatmya. Other temples were built in Odisha between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, but the Sun Temple at Konark stands out for its art, craftsmanship, and grandeur. This temple has been renowned for its artistic beauty for nearly seven hundred years.



Fig.1 Konark Temple



Fig.2 Konark Temple

Sir John Marshall also writes in praise of this temple that "Among the monuments of Hinduism, there is hardly any monument as wonderful and authentic as this."

Built in the Kalinga style, this magnificent temple was commissioned in the mid-13th century by the Ganga dynasty king LangulaNarasimha Deva, a great devotee of the Sun God. There is a village on the Bay of Bengal, approximately sixty-four kilometers from Bhubaneswar, the capital of the Indian state of Odisha. The Konark Sun Temple is named after that village. Built in the shape of the chariot of the Sun God, the temple is renowned worldwide for its beautiful carvings.

Many artisans were employed in the construction of the Sun Temple and Sadashiv Samanta Ray Mahapatra was appointed as the presiding deity in the construction work. A huge statue of the Sun God was made in this temple. Scenes related to religious, natural and human life have been engraved on the walls of the temple, in which dancing girls in traditional postures and singing figures are depicted. Beautiful sculptures of animals and birds have been depicted in various postures.

The Sun Temple at Konark is built in the shape of a chariot. It is believed that this chariot is pulled by seven horses. These seven horses either symbolize the seven days of the week or the seven colors (violet, blue, green, sky blue, yellow, orange, and red). These seven horses are described in the Vedas. It has been done in the name of meters like Gayatri, Ushnik, Anushput, Vahton, Tushtup, Pantak and Jagati etc. The chariot has twelve huge wheels which probably represent twelve months or Ragas. Each wheel has eight spokes. Which symbolizes Ashta prahar. The circumference of these wheels is about six feet. In the middle part of each spoke, there are third panels made. In which couples and gods and goddesses are made. On these wheels, creepers, flowers, birds etc. are made. Very fine and beautiful carvings have been done on these wheels. These wheels work like incense burners and tell the time accurately.

The temple courtyard houses the Navagraha Temple, carved from stone and featuring a striking array of sculptures. Around 1,452 elephant statues in various postures are lined up on the temple grounds. A large complex surrounded the temple, encompassing the main temple and a dance hall. Three entrances provided access to this magnificent Surya Mandir, spread over eleven acres. Entering through the main entrance led first to the dance hall, then the Jagmohan, and finally to the sanctum sanctorum.

It is believed that three black stone idols of the Sun God, placed outside the main temple on the south, west, and north sides, represent three distinct forms of Surya. The Vedas describe Surya as Brahma (the creator) in the morning, Maheshwara (the destroyer) in the afternoon, and Vishnu (the preserver) in the evening.

Udaye brahma rupe, madhyahne tu maheshwarah:

Asta Kale savayam Vishnu, trayamurti Diwakarah:

The first rays of sunrise passed through the Nriyashala and Jagmohan and fell on the Prabhat Surya idol located in the south. In the afternoon, the rays of the sun fell on the midday Surya idol in the west, and the evening rays fell on the setting Surya idol located in the north. The rays of the sun fell on these idols at different times. In these idols, the Sun God is shown wearing ornaments, which is different from the idols of other gods and goddesses. The Surya idols are excellent examples of sculpture.

Ravindranath Tagore had said about this temple that "The language of stone is greater than the language of man."

The Konark Sun Temple is the last of the numerous temples built in Odisha during that period. Both the temple's craftsmanship and architecture are a beautiful example of the culmination of its achievements. Like other temples in Odisha, the Konark Sun Temple is built in the Nagara style and is a remarkable example of the principles of the Shilpa Shastra. The temple is divided into the sanctum sanctorum (sanctum sanctorum), the Jagamohana, the NatyaMandap (natyamandap), and the BhogaMandap (monastery). Its walls are beautifully carved. The NatyaMandap walls are adorned with sculptures of dancing girls and musicians, and in some instances, mithuna (couple) figures are also depicted. The Konark sculptures are characterized by dynamism, grandeur, and beautiful expressions. The large Surya statue installed in the sanctum sanctorum displays the full-fledged features of the Sun God.

III. THE SUN TEMPLE OF MODHERA

Located on the banks of the Pushpavati River in the Mehsana district of Gujarat, the Modhera Sun Temple is a large and magnificent temple. Built by Bhima I of the Chalukya dynasty between 1126 and 1063 AD, the temple is a unique example of exceptional architecture and craftsmanship in India. It is also known by other names, including Modhereka and Modheraga.

The Sun Temple at Modhera is built in the Gurjar style. The temple is divided into seven sections: the sanctum sanctorum, the Mukhakhhalinda (internal chamber), the Gudha Mandala (secret chamber), the MukhaChatushkisa (half chamber), the Rangamandap (congregation hall), the Torana (architectural hall), and the Surya Kund (suryakund). Beautiful statues of the Sun God and other deities are carved into various parts of the temple. This temple is a fine example of Hindu and Iranian architectural styles.



Fig. 3 Modhera temple



Fig. 4 Modhera Temple

The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is large in size, measuring approximately 51 feet in length and 25 feet in width. The temple has a total of 52 pillars. These pillars are carved with images of deities and scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. A key feature of these pillars is that they appear octagonal when viewed from below, but appear circular when viewed from the top. At sunrise, the first rays of the sun enter the sanctum sanctorum, a key feature of this temple. In front of the temple, there is a tank called the "Surya Kund." This rectangular tank is called the "Ram Kund." Locals call it the "Ram Kund." Platforms and stairs have been built around the tank to reach the water level. Several small and large temples have also been built within the tank, dedicated to deities such as Goddess Sheetalmata, Ganesha, Shiva, Shevasayai, Vishnu, and others.

The Sun Temple at Modhera is a prime example of Gujarati architectural art. Lime was not used in its construction, making it even more special. This temple is an important monument of Indian archaeology.

Pucca stairs lead to the Modhera Sun Temple. The temple has three main parts: the Surya Kund, also known as Ram Kund. After this, one enters the Sabha Mandap. This Sabha Mandap is built with 52 pillars, representing the 52 weeks of the year. The entire temple is built in the shape of a lotus flower, as the Sun God is considered to be fond of the lotus flower. Statues of gods, goddesses, apsaras, and dancers surround the temple. In this temple, the Sun God is depicted wearing knee-length shoes, whereas idols of gods generally do not wear sandals. The Modhera Sun Temple is a beautiful blend of architecture, dance, music, and religion. The Gujarat Tourism Corporation celebrates the "UttarthMahotsav," a three-day dance festival, at the temple every year in the third week of January, following the Uttarayan festival. Its purpose is to present classical dance forms in the same setting in which they were originally performed.

IV. THE SUN TEMPLE OF KATRAMAL

The Katarmal Surya Mandir is an ancient 1st- or 21st-century temple located in the Almora district of Uttarakhand, built by the Katyuri king Kataramalla. Renowned for its above-sea level. Situated at an altitude of approximately 1350 meters, this temple is famous for its excellent architecture, intricate stone carvings, and a central idol dedicated to the Sun God, it is the only Sun temple in the Kumaon region. Located in the Katarmal region, it is known as the Katarmal Surya Mandir. Built on a high platform, the ruined spire still reflects its grandeur and grandeur.

It is considered the second oldest Sun temple in India after Konark. It is 200 years older than the Konark temple. The temple is preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India.



Fig.5 Katarmal Temple



Fig.6 Katarmal Temple

The Katarmal Sun Temple dates back to ancient times. It is believed to have been built during the reign of the Katyuri kings. This temple is also known as the "Aditya Surya Temple." It is also called the Sun God. The idol here is made of wood, not metal, which is a key feature of this temple. The door to the sanctum sanctorum is also made of wood, not metal.

This temple is built in the Nagara style. The temple's architecture is very beautiful. The Katarmal or Aditya Sun Temple is an important example of Indian archaeology and our culture and civilization.

V. THE SUN TEMPLE OF MARTAND

Among the major Sun temples located in India, another major Sun temple is known which is famous by the name of Martand Sun Temple. This temple is situated at Mattan place in Anantnag district of Kashmir valley of Jammu and Kashmir. Here the worship starts as soon as the first rays of sunrise fall on the temple every day. This temple is situated between high mountains and beautiful nature. Due to its location at a height, a beautiful and picturesque view of nature is visible from the northern side of this temple. Extremely beautiful mountains and views are visible. This temple looks very grand and attractive due to its location in the hills.

The Martand Sun Temple was built in the seventh-eighth century by King Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Bhaktika dynasty. The temple is approximately 60 feet high and 38 feet wide. The entrance hall is located on the eastern side of the temple. Beautifully carved doorways and arches are considered a key feature of the temple's architecture. The temple's pillars bear some resemblance to the Roman Doric style. The Martand Sun Temple is an excellent example of Kashmir's royal architecture. This temple reflects the architectural style and culture of the region. Therefore, this temple is of great importance from both historical and cultural perspectives.



Fig.7 Martand Temple



Fig.8 Martand Temple

The Martand Sun Temple was built on a high plinth. The remains and archaeological finds of the Martand Sun Temple indicate that it is an excellent example of Kashmiri architecture. It displays a beautiful blend of Gandhara, Gupta, Chinese and possibly Syrian-Byzantine architectural styles.

The Martand Sun Temple was built during the reign of King LalitadityaMuktapida. During his reign, temples were also built at Parihaspur, Baniyar, Narastan, Wangath, and Tung, in addition to the Martand Sun Temple. The sculptures in all these temples display a beautiful blend of the Gupta style and the local Kashmiri style. The sculptures in the Martand Temple are influenced by both the Gupta style and the traditional Kashmiri style. This blend is known as the royal style of Kashmir.

The sculptures at the Martand Sun Temple are distinctive. They have heavy bodies, large foreheads, broad faces, relatively short feet, and protruding eyes. This style distinguishes it from other temples. The Martand Temple's major sculptures include those of apsaras, Surya, Vishnu (Vishnu), and Bhairava. These sculptures are artistically beautiful. The influence of Gupta art is clearly visible on these sculptures. The Sun God is depicted holding lotuses in both hands. The design of Surya's crown, similar to that of the later Sun God, appears to be largely the same even centuries later. Therefore, the Martand Sun Temple is significant for both its architecture and sculpture.

VI. CONCLUSION

Looking at all these Sun Temples, it becomes clear that in India, not only religion but also art and society have a deep connection.



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These temples, built in devotion to the Sun God, were constructed at different times, by different kings, in different artistic styles. Each temple has its own unique identity and special features that make it special from other temples. These Sun Temples are excellent examples of Indian art, culture, and architecture. These temples also reflect our glorious history and religious traditions.

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