

Influence of Buddhist Architecture on the Hindu Temples of Avantiverman (Avantiswamin and Avantiswara)

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Abstract: *Avantivarman selected a commanding site of Avantipura on the right bank of Vitasta and under the foot of one of the spurs of the mountain Wasterwun. It is situated at a distance of 18 miles South-East of Srinagar and still retains its old name. He along with his officials and relatives built numerous shrines but at his capital city his two temples, one dedicated to lord 'Vishnu' called Avantisawmin and the other to lord 'Shiva' called Avantiswara are the out-standing works of art and show a considerable advance in sculptured decoration. However with the growing Vishnava and Shaiva faiths in this period and in the periods that followed, Buddhism in particular remained overshadowed, though its popularity as a religion, of-course on a minor scale lingered till the advance of Muslims. Both the temples follow the same plan and lay out as observed at Martanda temple though they are smaller in size. The larger one is that of Avantiswara out-side the village of Jaubror, half a mile the town of Avantipura. In size and dimensions it was second to that at Martanda.*

Keywords: *Temples Buddhism Avantivarman Vishnu Architecture Shiva Martanda Pillars Kashmir Avantipur Mughal Shrine*

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I. Introduction

Avantivarman, who ascended to the throne of Kashmir in the latter half of the 9th century ushered in another memorable era of architecture. He built a group of temples at Avantipur, a township eighteen miles from Srinagar, among which that of Avantiswami, dedicated to Vishnu, still survives in part. It has been said that whereas the Martand temple is the expression of a "sudden glory", the Avantiswami temple shows greater maturity of experience and has therefore more sophistication and elegance. Graceful colonnades of pillars form an arcaded portico around the shrine and a monolithic pillar before the entrance bears a metal figure of **Garuda**, the king of birds and vehicle of Lord Vishnu.(1)The stone with which they are erected is so friable and the temples themselves are so ruined, that there might be a difficulty in ascertaining to what religion they were dedicated, if the 'Rajatarangini' were not so distinct in describing this monarch as conducting himself as a follower of Shiva, whilst he had been brought up as a worshipper of Vishnu, and naming these temples as dedicated, one-built before his accession--to the latter, and after that event, the temple of Avantiswara to Shiva. (2, 3)The two principal ruins stand in courtyards of nearly the same size, about 200 ft. by 160 ft. or 170 ft. internally. One has pillars all round, like Martand, and almost identical in design and dimensions. The other is astylar, but the temple itself was much more important than in the first example. (4)The central shrines of both have been reduced to heaps of stones, and it is now impossible to determine which was the Vaishnava and which the Shiva shrine. Of the smaller temple, owing to part of a court having been long since silted up, there are more remains than of the other, from which every pillar has been removed, possibly by Shah Jahan and other Mughal emperors, for their summer palaces and Shalimar gardens near Srinagar. Portions of the gateways of both still remain. (5, 6, 7)The characteristic that seems most clearly to distinguish the style of the temples at Martand from that of those at Avantipur is the greater richness of detail which the later exhibit; just such a tendency, in fact, towards the more elaborate carvings of the Hindu style as one might expect from their difference in date. Several of these have been given by the three authors to whose works I have so often had occasion to allude, and to which the reader is referred; but the annexed fragment (Woodcut No. 150) of one of its columns is as elegant in itself, and almost as interesting historically, as the Doric of the examples quoted above, inasmuch as if it is compared with the pillars of the tomb of Mycenae, it seems difficult to escape the conviction that the two forms were derived from some common source. At all events, there is nothing between the Peloponnesus and Kashmir, so far as we now know, that so nearly resembles it. (8, 9)Motifs borrowed from many sources, both foreign and indigenous, appear in the decorative carving, but these have been tastefully integrated into an ordered system with a recognizable unity. Designs reminiscent of Buddhist stone carvers of the Ashokan age and of the craftsmen of the Pala school are frequent, and symbols traceable to Byzantium, ancient Persia and Syria are also found. The conspicuously angular aspect of this temple is derived from the

wooden houses of the valley where accumulation of heavy snow on roofs is prevented by their sloping character. (10)

1.1 Buddhist Influence

Presently we find the temples of Avantivarman in ruins. The first ruin is the Avantiswamin dedicated to Lord Vishnu, **Vaikunta Vishnu** was the presiding deity. This imposing monument has been built on a two-tiered base in the centre of a paved courtyard. Buddhist influence is quite evident in the architecture. The outer boundary wall or the courtyard has four shrines in its four corners. The entrance to the temple is located in the middle of the west wall and can be approached by a flight of steps. The walls have beautiful designs and images of gods. Even though the temple is dedicated to Vishnu, images of Shiva can also be seen on the pillars and stones. Even after 1200 years, the sculpted images are distinctly visible and impressive. (11)The Avantiswamin temple repeats the plan of Martanda on a smaller scale. The temple consists of a colonnaded peristyle comprising of 69 miniature cells, enclosing a stone paved courtyard. The main sanctum built on a double base in the centre of the courtyard and at its four corners are four subsidiary shrines. The double chambered gateway of the temple is profusely carved both externally and internally. Among the elegant sculptured reliefs, are the scenes representing Kamadeva seated with his consorts Rati and Priti; king Avantivarman before his accession and at the coronation ceremony with his queen and attendants. The Avantiswamin temple repeats the architectural development as the older structures but one does see increased refinement in architectural unity. (12)The other temple built by Avantivarman is Avantisvara temple, dedicated to Shiva. The temple is *panchayatana* type, having main temple at the centre of the Court and four subsidiary shrines at four corners of the main sanctum. The gateway of the temple is double chambered and is devoid of any ornamentation. The main sanctum is raised on a high platform. It has staircase on each of its four sides. Among the sculptured stones in this temple is one of the king Avantivarman and his queen. (13)

II. Conclusion

The conclusion that I reach on the bases of remarks made above is that there was the influence of Buddhist architecture on the temples of Avantiverman which is depicted on the walls, pillars, gateways etc. of Avantiswamin and Avantiswara temples. It is almost definite that the Buddhist architecture of Kashmir made much development and progress from 3rd century B.C up to the last days of the Hindu rule i.e. 13th century A.D. Probably all the Buddhists and many Hindu rulers of different dynasties during their periods gave liberal patronage to the Buddhist architecture of Kashmir, among the Hindu rulers, Avantivarman gave liberal patronage to the Buddhist architecture which can be seen on the temples of Avantiverman.

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