

## Architecture of the Temple Of Vishnu

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**ABSTRACT:** Temple is regarded as permanent abode of a deity and one of the most important examples of religious architecture. Temple architecture is different from region to region. The knowledge of the historical development of temple and its architectural style is meagre among the people. This is because of the failure in giving proper interpretation to the known facts. In Manipur temples of historical period are found scattered throughout the land and many of them exist in its complete form. Among them the temple of Vishnu is different from other temples particularly in its architecture. **Objective:** This paper is to find out new facts and reconstruction with the help of scientific interpretation and also to interpret literary sources in the light of the information gathered from the inscription, coins, field work and to compare and bring them together. **Method:** The present work is based on the field investigation in cross sectional mode. The temple of Vishnu has feasibly been selected to be study site. Measuring tabs, high-tech Compass, Camera and other simple engineering measurement tools are the tools of the field survey. This technical works have been incorporated with appropriate Engineer(s) and Field Expert(s) on hiring basis. With a systematic research procedure, the field report has explored very new information giving a complete picture of stylistic affiliation so as to make many comparative results. **Results:** The historical development of the temple of Vishnu and its architectural style offer an almost uninvestigated and unexplored field of study. This temple threw significant light on the development of the art and architecture and religious life of the people of Manipur.

**KEY WORDS:** Architecture, Art, Temple, Vishnu, Porch-hall, Arch, Column, Cornice, Railing, Plinth, Pilaster, Sanctum, Shrine, Dom.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is situated in the North-East frontier of India sub-continent bordering with Myanmar on the North-East, East and South, on the South-West by Mizoram, on the North-West and West by Assam and on the North by Nagaland. Physiographically, the valley is the centre surrounding by the ranges of hill. Manipur is a meeting point between South-East Asia and the India sub-continent. Manipur is very rich in archaeological sites and relics. There are hundreds of historical monuments, caves, inscriptions, coins, rock shelters etc. in the hill and valley of Manipur. Among the monuments temples were in good condition. These temples throw significant light on the development of the art and architecture and religious life of the people of Manipur. Manipur has a long history of art and architecture. Before the coming of Hinduism and their contact with the South-East Asian Countries, the Manipuri's had developed an independence type of architecture of their own. Whole concepts and designed different from those of the Hindu and Muslims. However, the migration of Brahmin and the process of Sanskritization in Manipur reflected in the art and architecture. A synthesis was created with the local culture. The popularity of the icon of Hindu gods and goddesses caused erection of Hindu temple in the valley of Manipur. The temple remains shows that the Manipuri rules were the great devout of Hinduism. Staunch and devout Hindu rulers with their patronage helped to built number of temples in each and every parts of the country. These temples became the seats of Vaishnava culture. Among the temples, the temple of Vishnu was one of the most popular temple in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### II. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The temple architecture of Manipur is practically a virgin field of study and no proper work has so far been done. The objective of this paper is to find out new facts and reconstruction with the help of scientific interpretation based on the report of field work and original sources. The aims of the work is not only to find new information but also to evaluate and critically examined the material which is already existed and make an attempt for reconstruction on a reasonable condition. Attempt has been made here to interpret literary sources in the light of the information gathered from field work and to compare and bring them together. Emphasis has also been laid on the study of the general lay-out, ground plan and vertical features of the temple. These results have been critically assessed with the previous known material on the archaeology of the area. Thus the work undertakes the study of the architecture in a critical and exhaustive manner. A comparative study of the architectural remains of the temple with those of some other parts of the country has also been attempted.

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### III. DISCUSSION

#### I. Chief features:

The temple of Vishnu is situated at Kha Leikai, Bishnupur; Bishnupur district, Manipur, India. The temple is built of burnt bricks and lime mortar. The sizes of the brick are (i) 24cm. long, 17.8cm. broad and 4cm. thick and (ii) 34.3cm. long, 17.8 cm. broad and 4cm. thick. The Vishnu temple (Plate-I) is a square free standing structural temple. The whole structure consisting of Adhishthana, basement; Jangha(bhitti), wall and body of the temple; porch hall and Shikhara, superstructure of the temple. The temple is stand on a ground plan of 4.38X4.38 square meters (Plate-II). Adhishthana or basement in which temple is stand is formed by moulding of series of brick one above another, consists of stepped back in six receding courses. The base is forming a distinct architectural feature supporting walls and pilasters consisting of distinct moulded tiers. The basement is 60cm.height from the ground level. The Garbhagriha or sanctum hall is prepared over the raised basement. It is facing south. Other three sides of the Garbhagriha are enclosed by a massive wall. The Garbhagriha, the most sacred part of the temple is a square chamber in which deity is kept. Its area is 2.10X2.10 square meters. The sanctum is preceded by a narrow porch and a flight of steps in the front towards the southern side. The ground plan of the porch hall is rectangular. It is 1.33m broad and 2.88m length. This antechamber immediately interconnected with the Garbhagriha essentially forming the entrance framework for the main shrine. It has a corbelled arch opening supported by two pilasters or Pada as doorframes, through which the devotee's entered the sanctum. This arch is an upward arrangement of blocks of bricks consisting of 14 courses of bricks used to span a gap and support a structure above it. The pilasters is not a free standing, shown as relief on wall-surface, constructed by placing brick one above the other and bulges at the middle of the pilasters. The pilasters are 1.30m height. The walls of the porch hall raised vertically up to the semicircular eaves. East and western sides of the wall of the porch is 2.57m height. The internal area of the porch hall is 1.5m broad and 1.80m length. The arch doorway is 1.5m broad and 1.96m height.

The walls of the sanctum rise vertically from the basement up to the Sikhara or superstructure, which look like a double storied. Jangha(bhitti) or wall of the temple is divided into two by a Bandhana or waist belt round the thigh. The two Janghas are the Tala-Jangha or the lower body of the temple and the Uppara-Jangha or the upper body of the temple. The Bandhana(horizontal patti) or band running across the exterior wall of the temple is a mould of a series of bricks consists of nine courses of bricks, stepped out and stepped back position, which joined the Tala-Jangha and Uppara-Jangha. The height of the porch hall reaches up to the cornice. The height of the wall is 2.65m. The southern side of the Tala-Jangha is the façade or doorway of the temple. The sanctum wall is 80cm. thick. Other three sides of the wall is designed with corbelled arch niches and provided small holes just below it functioning as a small opening which supply light to the Garbhagriha. These arches are 52cm broad and 2m height. The Uppara-jangha or the upper parts of the temple above the Bandhana are consisting of projected windows in the four sides of the wall. Griva or the neck of the superstructure is supported by four pilasters in each corner. The Griva of the temple is connected with the roof. The four sides of the Uppara-Jangha provided fenestrated window as air openings. These windows failed to supply light to the sanctum. These false windows framed by a pilaster on either side.

The distinct feature of this temple is dome like curvilinear roof, Sikhara with a single finial. The four sides' eaves, projecting lower edges of roof are designed as semi-circular arches. These arch consists of seven courses of brick one above the other. The finial of the Sikhara is crowned by a circular disc-like structure. The whole portion of the roof looks like the head portion of Lord Buddha and the disc like-cape seems to represent the head protuberance of the Buddha.(Mutua Bahadur:1983:7) The ceiling of the sanctum hall is curved inward by the juxtaposition of bricks until it comes to central axis. The roof of the porch hall is a replica of the sanctum roof. Its ceiling is spanned by eleven courses of corbelling. The temple is stand without a Prakara or outer wall and the mandapa or congregation hall.

#### II. Stylistic Affiliations:

The style of the Vishnu temple is difficult to recognise any one of the Indian temple style such as Nagara, Dravida and Vesara mentioned in Vastusastra or Silpasastra texts. However, the shape and styles of this temple is closer with the Nagara style particularly it's four sided curvilinear tower (Sikhara) and the surmounted disc shape.

The temple is a hybrid one, borrowing elements and features, from the Bengali and Burmese styles. The curvilinear roof and semicircular eaves probably modelled on the thatched hut of the Bengalis. In Bengal the curvilinear roofs and eaves are natural in bamboo huts to rain off quickly the waters of heavy rains. The curvature of the roofs and semi-circular eaves of the bamboo huts appealed to the sense of beauty of the Bengalis. They never change this style in monumental architecture particularly in Brick temples. The curvilinear roofs, semicircular eaves and flight of steps in front, its replica applied in the porch hall of the Vishnu temple is a borrowing element of the medieval Bengali temple style. On the other hand it is probable that the Vishnu temple was also modelled on the Burmese temple styles of dome like roof and corbelled arch. Dome,

a curved roof and the crowning feature of the temple, is evolved from the arch and seems to have originated in the ancient Near-East where it was a feature of Sassanian architecture.( J.J. Norwich:1990:132.) It was first used on a monumental scale by the Romans.( J.J. Norwich:1990:132.) The dome like roof used for the first time by the Buddhist in India in monumental architecture. They might have copied this style from the Greeks. The true arch is never found in any indigenous building in India.(Percy Brown:1976:45) The few occasions in which the Indian builder experimented the arch, occur in the brick temple of Bhitargaon (Uttra Pradesh) of the Gupta period and the shrine of BudhGaya.(Percy Brown:1976:45) However, in India the true arch is the gifts of the Kushan.(Indian History congress:1978:1005) The archaeological excavations at Kausambi, Kushan Palace, noticed the true arch on a large scale for the first time in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.(Indian History Congress:1978:1005) The superstructure of the Palace, especially its Sikhara was built on the principal of the corbelled arch. The dome of the Kushan palace is the Sikhara like shape of the surmounting structure, which is closely associated with the majority of the Hindu temple.

In India the used of arch in brick building began to appeared from the fifth century A.D. on a large scale. The styles of corbelled arch of the Vishnu temple can be attributed to the Burmese masonry. These styles introduced by the Burmese masons during the process of reconstruction by them in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.(Percy Brown:1976:45) The style of corbelled arch and doom like roof of Vishnu temple can be seen in many of the buildings of Burma of the medieval period. Similar arch also can be seen in the Pettak Pagoda of Pagan (Burma) of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.(Percy Brown:1976:45)

Manipur was the meeting point of western school of architecture and south-east Asian style of architecture particularly Burmese styles. The migration of Brahmin from 15<sup>th</sup> century onward and the cultural relations with Burma produced a new synthesis of the two cultures. The best example is Bishnu temple of Bishnupur. Architectural features of the Vishnu temple is found in Bengal and other south East Asian countries particularly in the temples of Java called Chandis. The design of the curvilinear roof, cornice of the temple of Vishnu at Bishnupur and its porch hall were copied from the well-known thatch-huts (Kutir) of Bengal. On the one hand, this style is more akin with Bengal hut type temples. The roof and eaves of the Vishnu temple of Bishnupur is more similar with hut styles of the Char-Chala types, such as Simha-Vahini temple (1490), Midnapore (Bengal).(David J. Mccutcheon:1993:71) Similar architectural features of South - East Asian temple also found in the structure of the Vishnu temple. Narrow porch with corbelled arch in Borobudur of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., ventilation holes as in Chandi Pawan of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and corbelled projected on the wall of Chandi Kalasan temple, middle Java, 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. also indicated the stylistic affiliations of the Vishnu temple of Bishnupur.(B.Rowland:1959:243)

### **III. Built by:**

Generally believed the temple as an attribution of king Kyamba (1467-1508 A.D). But the material remains and the literary evidence proved that the temple belongs to king Charairongba period (1697-1709 A.D). In 1467 A.D., Thawai Ningthouba, son of king Ningthoukhomba ascended the throne at the age of 24.(L. Iboongohal & N. Khelchandra:1989:19) In 1470 A.D. king Thawai Ningthouba with the alliance of king Choupha Khekhomba, king of Pong, upper Burma, defeated the chief of Kyang, a Shan kingdom, in the Kabow valley, Burma.(L. Iboongohal & N. Khelchandra:1989:19) The combined forces of Manipur and Pong captured its chief Chaosengba along with some other members of his family. After the end of the war king Thawai Ningthouba assumed the title of Kyamba, the conqueror of Kyang. By a treaty the conquered was equally divided between them and gifts were exchanged between the two kings. Among the presents given by the king of Pong, there was a little image of Vishnu. The image is seen riding Garuda and holding a conch, a Chakra (disc), a mace, and a lotus in four hands. The image is covered with gold except on the neck.(M.Kirti Singh:1988:57) It is reported that king Kyamba received back the Bishnu image from Khekhomba, the king of pong, which might have taken away by Khekhomba's predecessor as a war trophy when he conquered Manipur.(L.Iboongohal Singh:1987:170) The image of Vishnu originally belong to Manipur and that it was lost during the reign of Ningthoukhomba. The Vishnu image was installed in a masonry temple at Vishnupur (Lamangdong), the old capital, 18<sup>th</sup> miles to the South West of Imphal. After installation of the image, the Lamangdong become to be known as Bishnupur or Bishenpur. Bhanu Narayana a Brahmin from Lairikyengbam Leikai who looked after the temple and his descended come to be known as Phuralailatpam; worshipper of the god of masonry temple.(M.Kirti Singh:1988:56)

There is no authentic record to prove the temple was built by king Kyamba. Before the installation of Vishnu image the temple was known as Ngangom Phura (temple of Ngangom) constructed by Ngangom clan, which was dedicated to traditional deity.(Mutua Bahadur:1983:32) The name of temple Ngangom Phura prior to the installation of Vishnu indicates that the temple was not built for Vishnu. The royal chronicle did not mention the presentation of Vishnu image and construction of Vishnu temple during the Kyamba period. Many Brahmin who are migrated in Manipur during the reign of king Kyamba worshipped gods and goddesses including Vishnu. However, king Kyamba was the follower of the traditional religion. He did not initiate to

Vaishnavism. Similarly, the Pong king, who presented the Vishnu image, was also not a Vaishnavite. From the material content and the literary sources it is cleared that the Vishnu temple belongs to king Charairongba period (1697-1709 A.D). Some local scholars, who have studied about the religious development, mentioned that the image of Vishnu before installation to the masonry temple kept in a temple constructed with thatch and bamboo. The royal chronicle did not mention the use of bricks during the Kyakba period for the construction of house and palace, except thatch, bamboo and wood. Bricks were not available during this period. For the first time brick factory (chekshang) and use of bricks on a large-scale began during the reign of King Charairongba for the constructions of palace and temple. (L. Iboongohal & N. Khelchandra:1989:62)

Many Burmese mason (craftsmen) visited in Manipur during the reign of Charairongba. (L. Iboongohal & N. Khelchandra:1989:70). They helped in the construction of temples and palace, which marked the beginning of the monumental architecture in Manipur. King Charairongba constructed Krishna temple and Kalika temple. He initiated to Vaishnavism and worship Vishnu and its incarnation. The styles and sizes of the brick of Vishnu temple are more similar with other bricks work of Charairongba's period, particularly its superstructure which copied from Bengali-hut type. Construction and installation of 'three storied houses and three storied temple' mentioned in royal chronicle indicated that the story building or temple began to start from the Charairongba period. (L. Iboongohal & N. Khelchandra:1989:69,70) The storied building is possible only in brick structure. The Vishnu temple is also style of double, storied temple. The Vishnu temple has the influence Burmese style of architecture, which is possible only with the Burmese mason. They were visited only during the reign of Charairongba not before him. Towards the end of his reign the Burmese craftsmen returned to Burma. From the above evidence, the builder of Vishnu temple may be attributed to the Burmese masonry. The employment of Burmese artisans is significant as Manipur did not usually use brick and mortar for the construction of dwelling houses but mostly thatch, wood and bamboo. There are references to three storied royal dwelling houses and temple which were influenced by the Burmese architecture.(Gangumei Kamei:1991:236) The use of brick for the construction of house and temple during the period of Charairongba and appearing Bengali and Burmese contact style on the Vishnu temple indicated that the temple belongs to king Charairongba period.

### III. CONCLUSION

Manipur was ruled by a powerful dynasty called Ningthouja dynasty founded by king Nongda Lairen Pakhagba in the first century A.D. Most of the rulers were staunch and devout Hindu such as King Charairongba(1697-1709 A.D), Maharaja Garibaniwaz (1709-1748 A.D) Maharaja Bhaigyachandra(1782-1798), Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D). Maharaja Chandrakriti (1850-1886 A.D) etc. Their royal patronages helped in the spread of Brahmanism and Vaishnavism. They donate lands, built temples and excavated tanks. After conversion to Hinduism the Manipuri Hindu used Vastusastra for the construction of religious and secular buildings. They followed the pattern of Hindu Architectural styles and later adopted Islamic styles. This led to the development of Indo-Islamic architecture in Manipur. They freely employed Hindu and Burmese master-craftsmen for designing and constructing their building including temples. However, availability of raw materials, climatic conditions, religious revivalism and contacts with neighbouring countries responsible for the stylistic difference. The body of the temple of Vishnu is divided along the vertical axis into four principal parts i.e., Adhithana, the plinth part or pedestal; Bhatti or Jangha, the wall part or body of the temple; Sikhara, the superstructure; and Kalasa, the topmost part of the temple. According to this structure, the temple is stylistically affiliated to the eastern India and South East Asian temple style. The material remains and the literary evidence proved that the temple belongs to king Charairongba period (1697-1709 A.D). The temple of Vishnu, like other temples, was one of the most important religious and cultural centre of the Manipuri Hindus. The temple offered employment at the time of its construction and renovation to architects and thereafter to a number of managers, priest, cooks etc. The income of the temple was used for the maintenance of the temple structure, festival, payment of the priest and other employee. During the religious festival and ceremonies people not only of the locality but also of the neighbouring region got together under the auspices of the temple. People often assembled there to hear the exposition of sacred literature such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Gita. Thus, the temple was remain busy throughout the year with socio-religious activities such as scripture reading, devotional singing sessions, ritual, feasting, weddings, and funeral ceremonies. The temple received contribution from the disciples on the occasion of religious ceremonies and festivals. The architectural style of the temple is the indicator of his period of prominence.

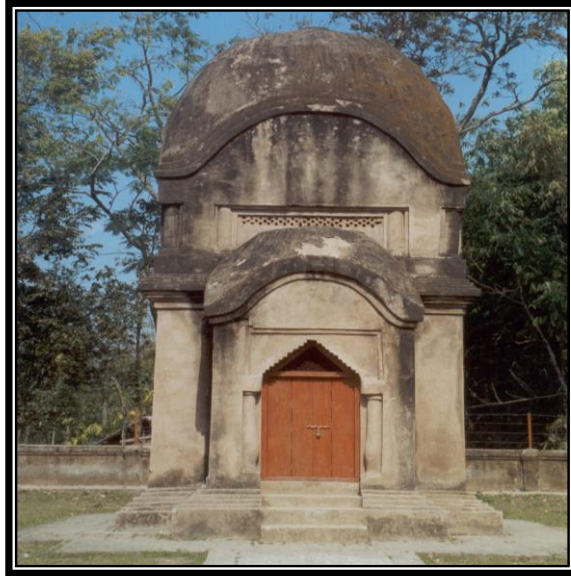


Fig. 1 Front View



Fig. 2 Side View

PLATE - I.  
TEMPLE OF VISHNU

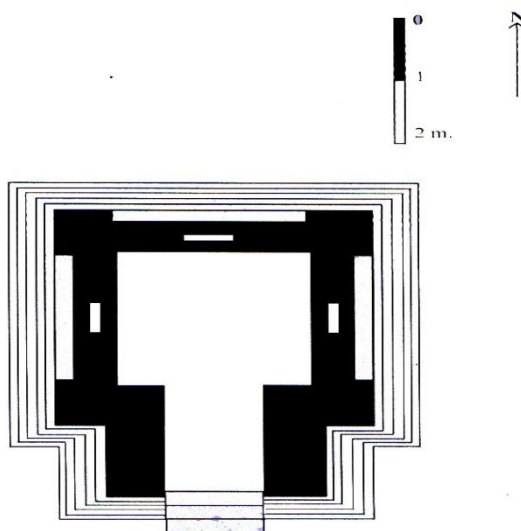


Plate- II  
Plant- over- plinth  
TEMPLE OF VISHNU

#### IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The history of Indian architecture as a whole remains incomplete without a thorough understanding of the origin and development of the art and architecture of Manipur. The state is closer with the rest of India religiously, politically and culturally, but the study of this topic appears so far to have remained incomplete because of the failure in giving proper interpretation to the known facts. The work is an attempt to fill up the incomplete chapters of the history of Indian architecture. The paper has not been published either in part or in full. No attempt has so far been made to present a systematic account of the temple architecture, fast and festivals and the rites and rituals associated with them. An attempt is made in this paper the architectural patterns of the temple from the remains. I have described them with my critical observation. The main sources of information have been the temple structure. Besides field investigations, I have made use of old literature, Royal Chronicles, archaeological information and contemporary accounts after careful scrutiny and examination. Emphasis has also been laid on the study of the general lay-out, ground-plan and vertical features of the temple structure. The age of the most of the temples is not known, except a few are recorded in the royal Chronicles. Therefore, an attempt is made to determine the type and chronology of the temple by comparing with the existing temples of known dates. The methodology adopted for the study is mainly based on primary sources and field survey with the support from the secondary sources. The work was undertaken with utmost care and strictly following the rules of research methodology.

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