
Interpretation of Society and Culture of Amarkantak Through Temple Architecture of Kalachuri Era (11th - 12th Century CE) and Modern Times

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Abstract: Amarkantak is situated at the meeting point of the Vindhya, Maikal and Satpura mountain ranges between 22°41' N latitude and 81°46' E longitude in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh (India) at an altitude of 1065 m. Since the ancient times the Kalachuri rulers Gangeya Dev(1019-1041CE) and his successor Karna (1041-1073CE) paid great attention to the architecture of this area. Both the rulers had religious inclinations and the residents here also possessed religious artistry. At present there are more than 30 new and old temples found in the area. They can be classified into two groups. The First Group includes the Narmada and other small temples surrounding it, all seen located inside a tall fortification. The second group consists of the temples which are found outside the fortification. These temples are not used for religious purpose but are preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, Bhopal. Though it is currently a tribal dominated area where Bali Pratha (animal sacrifice) is very common, there was no evidence of sacrificial practices in the past as there were many temples of Goddesses, of pure Mantric Vedic tradition present here. Earlier researchers looked at the temples here from an architectural point of view but none of them focused on the societal connection. This study focuses on architecture but also concentrates on social connections and tries to establish a relation between history, architecture, and society of the Amarkantak region. This study uses secondary analysis that is using data that other social scientists have already collected.

Keywords: Amarkantak, Society, Culture, Architecture, Pavilion, Garbhagriha, Kalachuri Era

Introduction

Amarkantak is a holy site, and this unique natural area is located in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh. It is located at the meeting point of the Vindhya, Maikal and Satpura mountain ranges. Narmada, Sone and Johila rivers originate from this site (Bhattacharya 1977: 76). The area of Amarkantak was under the empire of the Kalachuri rulers of Tripuri in the ancient times. It is known from genealogy and

Kalachuri history that the area of Amarkantak developed during the times of Ganga Dev and Karna. Karna was a powerful, skilled and great empire builder of Northern India. Based on antiquities, it appears that this area must have been very prosperous and religious in nature from the ancient times. The reign of Ganga Dev and Karna is considered to be the climactic end of architecture in the area. These rulers were very religious in nature which was evidenced by the temples they built with great artistry along with simple and gentle looking ornamentation (Dwivedi 2019).

Currently Amarkantak has more than thirty modern and ancient temples. Although the construction work of the temples had started in the eighth century, the task of completing this temple complex was undertaken by King Karna Dev, who ruled between 1043-1073 CE (Panwar 2013). Although the composition of these temples was not devoid of simple geometry and ornamentation, the geo-architecture had mouth pavilions, pavilions-interiors and sanctum sanctorum. The outer walls of the pavilions are open and the roof rests on ornate columns. The Narmada Temple and its adjoining temples are situated inside a tall '*parkote*' (Mishra 2014).

Research Objectives and Research Methodology

The religious and literary significance of Amarkantak is familiar, but the architecture here is as ancient and historical as the religious faith found in this place. Apart from belonging to the Kalachuri era, the architecture of Amarkantak achieves perfection even in later times. As the temple complex developed from a long period of eight centuries from Kalachuri (1043-1073) to Maratha (1741-95) rule, (Dwivedi 2019) there has been a linear effect of various period and traditions. Therefore this study aims to understand the effects of various Vedic traditions; to identify the influence of Maratha rulers; to study the presence of other religious places connected to the Vedic belief system; to identify the emergence of Narmada as a goddess; to study the connections of modern temples in Amarkatak region; to find the societal connections of academic institutions from ancient to modern times; to study the architectural changes with the change in social and political structure and composition.

This study uses the method of secondary analysis which means using data that other social scientists have already collected. The use of publicly accessible information is known as secondary analysis and is most common in situations where collecting new data is impractical or unnecessary. Along with this some reports were made by looking through historical books, interviews, and the site itself for trying to complete this research paper. The photos of temples here have been taken by the authors.

Nagara Style of Temple Architecture

All the temples in North India are built in the Nagara style and almost all the temples of Amarkantak are seen built in this style. This style developed in the north of the country, that is, in the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya region. It originated during the Gupta period; the following are the salient features of temple architecture established in the Nagara style: -

Kalash (Figure 1): it is a symbolic water vessel. It is also a symbol of fertility, productivity, and birth. Almost all the temples of Amarkantak have this characteristic. In Figure 2, the kalash has a vase as well as a stone disc at the top of the temple and this feature is commonly seen in North Indian temples. The shape also resembles a lotus flower. Shikhar, in Figure 3, represents the highest part of the temple, it is seen symbolizing a mountain. The Shikhar is found in all North Indian temples while the Vimana is a specialty of South Indian temples. Shikhar is spiral in shape while Vimana is a pyramid-like structure. The pyramid-like structures found in the crest of the pavilion of the ancient temple groups of Amarkantak, is a characteristic of the Dravidian style of South India. This adaptation in the structure shows not only acceptance of differences in architecture but also shows a cultural connection of two different traditions. The shrine is the sixth part of the temple which symbolized personal communication with the deity. It literally means 'Garbha Griha' (Figure 4) and in the early temples, it is a small cubic structure with an entrance which later developed into a large complex. The sanctum sanctorum is built for the main deity and is always located below the highest tower or dome.

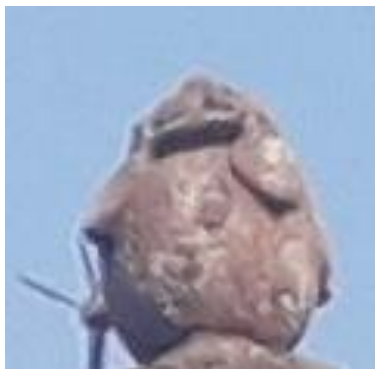


Figure 1: Kalash



Figure 2: Amlaka



Figure 3: Shikhar



Figure 4: Garbha Griha



Figure 5: Antarala

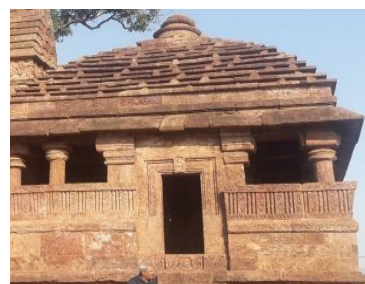


Figure 6: Pavilion

Antarala in Figure 5 is a transition area between the sanctum sanctorum and the main hall (Mandapa) of the temple. The Antarala is located in all the Shiva temples in Amarkantak. In Figure 6, the entrance to the temple is shown. It is a hall resembling a series of columns placed at regular intervals which contains space for a large number of worshippers to sit. It is built purely from a scientific point of view, which was created to collect cosmic energy and transfer it to worshippers. The temple construction shows the understanding of the confluence between scientific and spirituality of its

makers and artisans. Bhajan (rhythmic prayers), dances and other activities are conducted here. Some temples have many mandapas of different sizes, known as Ardhmandapa, Mukhamandapa and Mahamandapa. Some pavilions of Amarkantaka do not have roofs and are open pavilions.



Figure 7: Shree Narmada Temple

Narmada Temple

There are 24 temples in the Sri Narmada Temple complex. Shri Narmada Temple (Figure 7) is the thirty-ninth Chandika Peetha or Shakti Peetha. Other temples here are Sri Rama Darbar, Sri Vishnu Temple, Sri Satyanarayana Temple, Sri Lakshminarayan Temple, Sri Suryanarayan Temple, Sri Rohani Temple, Sri Narmada Udhagam Temple, Sri Banseshwar Temple, Sri Ghanteshwar Temple, Sri Durga Temple, Sri Kali Temple, Shri Siddheshwar Temple, Sri Shiva Family Temple, Shri Ramjanaki Temple, Shri Radha Krishna Temple, Shri Eleven Rudra Temples, Sri Gorakhnath Siddheshwara Temple, Sri Chaturbhuj Vishnu Temple, Sri Bhairav Stambha, Sri Bhairava Chora etc (Shastri 2011: 12).

Sri Narmada Temple is located at the place of origin of the Narmada River which was covered with bamboos in the past (baans) The main Shivalinga here was established by Adi Guru Shankaracharya Ji Maharaj hence, this place is known as Banseshwar Mahadev. Shri Narmadeshwar Mahadev is always anointed with the water from Narmada.

The fragmented statues of Lakhan and Udal are situated in front of the Narmada Kund and in the context of these fragmented statues, Aurangzeb is said to have been responsible for the destruction of many temples during his reign and these statues

may have become fragmented due to this temple annihilation exercise. The Banseshwar Mahadev Shiva temple is situated in front of Sri Narmada Temple. The pavilions of these two structures are interlinked and face each other. The Narmada Temple has a very beautiful black granite stone statue of Mata Narmada, which is said to be sitting on her vehicle Makara (crocodile). This statue is a perfect example of the art form of Kalachuri period. To the right and left of the idol of Shri Narmada Mata is the idols of the gatekeepers named Jai and Vijay. Facing the idol of Shri Narmada, is a temple of Shri Mata Parvati and Amarkanteshwar Mahadev Ji. Sri Bhairavi Chakra is inscribed on a stone inside the main temple. There is no authentic written information relating to the antiquity of these temples. These temples were probably built by Maharaja Karna in the Kalachuri period. The installation of the statue of Reva Nayak definitely bolsters its literary evidence (Dwivedi 2019). These ancient temples have been renovated over the years. The temple of Maa Narmada and its dome were renovated by Queen Ahilyabai (1767-95) (Dwivedi 2019). A gold bowl weighing a kilogram is placed in the dome of the temple. These temples were also renovated by the Bhosle kings). It was in this time that Shri Narmada's origin Kunda (cistern), Snan Kunda (bath cistern) and Dhawan Kunda (laundry cistern) were built (Srinivas 2005:9). Later, Baghel Raja Gulab Singh of Rewa in 1939 CE, constructed the topmost part of the present temple cistern along with the Narmada's rampart (Gherao) (Srinivas 2005: 12).

The entire series of temples, including the Narmada temple, is built of bauxite rocks, which are rough rather than smooth. Currently they have been painted white. The summit of the Narmada temple is not curved but is seen in a decreasing order in the form of small rocky plates with small rocks, in the form of a square. The summit is actually much higher than the sanctum sanctorum. The Amalaka and Kalash are built over it in the Nagara style.



Figure 8: Karna Temple

Karna Temple

As seen in Figure 8, the complex is built on a high-rise platform. It consists of three separate temples built on a single establishment called Tri Aayatan Mandir. These three temples are incomplete in nature. Their summits are high, and the outer walls are simply ornate (Mishra 2014). The three temples are combined by a square Mahamandapa which is open. The main temple is east facing, and the entrance of the other subsidiary temples is towards the north-south direction. The gaps and sanctum sanctorum of these three temples are square. There is a structure in the complex which is a Shiva temple fashioned in Saptarath style (Sarangi 2017) from outside. The temple is built in the Nagara style, and the land is rectangular with a gradual plane on both sides in the middle, due to which it is completely folded. The middle part of two-plane is called Pancharatha, the three-plane part is called Saptrath and the four-plane part is called Navratha. These planes are made from the middle to the final height of the temple. The top of the Shiva temple is built in the Nagara style, and these temples are protected by the Department of Archeology. The unique feature of the Karna temple, which I came across during my visit is that, the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple is fitted with a drainage system (Figure 9) made of stone which looks like a pipe resembling those of modern times. This system is unique in style. It drains the water offered to the Shiv idol to the nearby pond named Sooraj Kund (Figure 18) or it might also lead somewhere else.



Figure 9: Drainage System

Machhendranath Temple

It is a Shiva temple, whose main deity is known as Machhendranath (Figure 10). He was the promoter of a branch of Shaiva sect in this region. The temple has a sanctum sanctorum, gables and pavilions with a Shivling. The sanctum sanctorum of this temple is in Pancharatha style while the dome is in Nagara style. The pavilion, built in Fasana style (Dakers 2018), has its roof damaged from the top. The Fasana style is one of the three types of Shikhara. The Rekha's roofs are made of many rocks, which are above the central part of the building, while the line offerings appear like tall domes rising straight up. The roof of the Fasana style is not turned inward but slopes straight upwards. Mostly trapping style is used in the pavilions, while Rekha Prasad is built above the main sanctum sanctorum. Dancing Ganesha is carved on the doorsill of the entrance to the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. This temple is believed to be of Kalachuri period dating to the 11th-12th centuries (Panwar 2013). Its pavilion is rectangular, and the sanctum sanctorum is square in shape, which currently has no idol. The temple is '*Panchastha*' in nature. The thigh of the temple is divided into two parts by a binding, where the upper part is smaller than the lower part. This temple is located to the north of Karna temple and has a spectacular Mandapa with 16 pillars. The archway and summit of the temple are built in Kalinga style. Kalinga style in itself (Mahapatra 2020) is divided into three (Table 1). This temple and its subsidiary shrines are also protected by the Department of Archaeology (Mory 2020).



Figure 10: Machhendranath Temple

Table 1: Three Divisions of Kalinga Style Temples

Rekha Deula	Pidha Deula	Khakra Deula
This is a tall straight building, which is built over the sanctum sanctorum. This style is used in the temples of Amarkantak.	It is a pyramid shaped roof which is built above the pavilion.	This is a rectangular building, which has a pointed pyramid shaped roof. The sanctum sanctorum of the female deities is usually built in this style.

Pataleshwar Temple

As seen in Figure 11, this temple is situated on the east side of the Machhendranath temple. The planning of the temple is similar to the Machhendranath temple. The temple is backward oriented. It is a grand temple of Lord Mahadev built in Pancharatha style while the Mandapa is seen in a pyramidal style (Panwar 2013). The Pyramid style which is usually a characteristic of temples of South India, is called the Dravidian style. The Mandapa has 16 pillars, and the sanctum sanctorum is built in Bhoomi style which is easily visible (Panwar 2013). The pavilion is rectangular, and the sanctum is square. This temple is also of Kalachuri period.



Figure 11: Pataleshwar Temple

According to mythological beliefs, Adi Shankaracharya established the Shivling here. This temple was probably built by Kalachuri Naresh Karnadeva during 1041 -1072 CE. The temple is considered to be a typical example of Kalachuri architecture. The sanctum sanctorum of this temple is quite low, probably 1.40m below the floor of the

Mandapa. For this reason, it must have been named Pataleshwar Temple (Panwar 2013). Worship is still performed today, but it is now preserved by the Department of Archeology.

Kesavanarayan Temple

As seen in Figure 12, it is also a grand and beautiful temple. This temple complex has two temples and is adjacent to the Machhendranath temple. The main temple is built on a high structure and on the western side, a small temple has been added later. The temples have very beautiful idols installed in them (Mishra 2014), but there is no statue in the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple. It is believed that Bhagwati Lakshmi resided here after the birth of Ksheer Sagar. According to mythological beliefs, Maharishi Bhrigu got Shri Lakshmi to be married to Lord Vishnu at this place. The idol of Lord Vishnu installed in this temple is extremely artistic; the statues of ten incarnation of Lord Vishnu is engraved on black granite stone. Nearby this is the idol of Lakshmi ji (Srinivas 2005: 13). Hence its grand hall serves as the pavilion of both temples (Mishra 2014).



Figure 12: Keshav Narayan Temple

Panchmatha Temple

The Panchamatha Temple (Figure 13) is located near the main gate in a series of historic temple groups. It is a temple complex with five shrines situated on the same platform, which are devoid of Mandapas. These temples are built with bauxite ore, which is red in color. The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is open and the walls are devoid of artwork. The shattered, square roof is completely spiral and is adorned with

a Kalsh (urn) on the top. (According to researcher's own observation) This temple is believed to have been built during the late 15th-16th century amidst the Gond rule. (Archaeological Survey of India, Bhopal Division Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh). According to legend, this temple is dedicated to Maa Narmada and was built as her residence. The temple is also called Rangmahal (Patel 2017). The complex having a series of five small temples with different architectural styles and located on a single raised platform may have two interpretations i.e., these temples were either built on the same period showing the architectural prosperity of the time or the temples were built with a considerable gap in time showing the continuity of cultural occupation and acceptance of novelty in that area.



Figure 13: Pachmatha Temple



Figure 14: Jwaleshwar Temple



Figure 15: Place of Origin of Johila River

Jwaleshwar Temple

About 6 km north of Amarkantak is the origin of the Jwala River. (Now called Johila River.) There is a temple of Banilang called Javaleshwar Mahadev (Figure 14). It is stated in the Matsya Purana, that the temple is located where the Jwaleshwar Tirtha was served by the Siddhas, which helped humans attain heaven after bathing in it. It is also said that the person who gives up all the pleasures of life on the occasion of lunar

eclipse, becomes free from all deeds and after completing his studies in knowledge and science, resides in Rudra Lok till the Pralaya (Holocaust). Being in a dense forest, one should come here with a guide to visit the temple (Srinivas 2005).



Figure 16: Johila Temple



Figure 17: The Idol of Johila



Figure 18: Sooraj Kund



Figure 19: Ancient Well

Mahant Dnyaneshwar ji of Juna Akhada is currently overseeing the Jwaleshwar Mahadev Temple without any administrative support. According to the organization, this temple is a Bhumi Linga, which emerged in the Satyuga and has survived till today. This temple is distinguished by Mahasiddha Kapil Muni. This temple was earlier taken care of by Mahant Niranjan ji, who has passed away now (Gyaneshwar 2019). The river called "Johila"(Figure 15) originates from Shri Jwaleshwar Dham. This river is seen originating from the well in a cryptic manner, which flows at a distance.

The ancient temple with the same name as the Johila River, called the Johila Mata, dates back to the 14th century (Srinivas 2017).

Johila Temple

The temple seen in Figure 16, is named after the flowing Johila River. The temple is believed to be built around the 14th century CE during the Baghel dynasty of Gahora (Panwar 2013). The fragmented idol of Maa Johila (Figure 17) is kept in the sanctum sanctorum. The portion above the waist is missing; the womb of the temple is not seen managed properly. The outer walls of the temple are adorned with carved figures. Red bauxite ore is used for the construction of this temple. A staircase is built outside the sanctum sanctorum and the entrance to the temple stands within two pillared columns. The entrance is actually small where one can enter only by bending their head. It is not known whether the entrance had a door. Presently, a small gate has been fitted here by the government. Above the gateway of this temple, beautiful figures are carved in rectangular shaped panels while the shikhara is curved, on top of which the Amalaka and Kalash are situated. The temple's Mandapa is open and tall which can be reached by a ladder.

Suraj Kund

It is believed that during the 8th century CE, Adi Shankaracharya built the Surajkund (Figure 18), which is also considered to be the origin of the Narmada. This tank was renovated later by the Kalachuri ruler Karnadeva in the 11th century. According to 'Janashruti', this kund was the source of Narmada in the past, but for some reason she became dissatisfied and changed her course. The Pataleshwar Mahadev Temple which is seen near the south-eastern part of the same pool, was also established by Adi Shankaracharya in the form of Shivling (Chandrakar 2007).

Ancient Well

A well (Figure 19) is located to the west of the Kesavanarayan temple made with bauxite ore and is seen having an iron ring which might have held a pail to extract water. There is no written information regarding the well's antiquity. Since the ancient well is located near the group of temples, it might probably belong to the Kalchuri period too. Water is currently available in this well as well (Panwar 2013).

Conclusion

Historically in the 5th-6th century, the Panduvanshi kings of Maikal emerged. Their archival evidence is known to us from Bamhni and Malhar Tamrapatra. The mentions of King Bharatabal and his descendants is seen on these copper plates. These rulers later became independent due to the loss of power held by the Gupta dynasty. This region is also said to have been ruled by the Gupta kings but no archaeological and historical sources of it are available in Amarkantak. From 528 CE to 606 CE, the area was ruled by the Chedi kings after the Gupta rulers, but there is no authentic mention of any construction work from this period in Amarkantak (Panwar 2005).

The Kalchuris emerged in the region of Baghelkhand amid political chaos and tried to bring political unity and social equality. The entire Baghelkhand region developed into a religious and political center during the reign of the Kalchuris and the archaeological remains which support this claim also exist in Amarkantak (Joshi 1992). In later periods, the area of Amarkantak remained under the Marathas for some time. The previous constructions in this area are seen renovated from time to time by Bhonsle kings and Baghel kings of Rewa.

It is clear from the above facts that most of the temples of Amarkantak were built in the Kalchuri period and later constructions continue uninterrupted thereafter, due to which the ancient temples are being maintained in accordance with ancient craftsmanship till today in this religious area. The proof of this is the Shri Yantra Mandir, which has been under construction since 1998-1999. It is not an exaggeration to say that ancient and modern temples have been found in every village in the area, which further confirms this fact of continuous construction. Tribal elements can also be seen in the temples here, which is natural because the population here is currently tribal dominated. Evidence of this is the findings of a big-bellied elephant statue and some fractal figurines, which have large stomachs. Looking at the idols from the point of view of Vedic traditions, other than the idol of Ganesh, the stomachs of other idols should not be enlarged, and the waists are generally showed to be thin. The finding of the idols with tribal features shows that the tribal kings must have ruled here, and they too must have shown interest in temple construction work. The construction of all the temples have taken place in various time periods. It is understood from these findings that there is a need to survey the area on scientific grounds.

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