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# Restoration of Martand Sun Temple, Kashmir

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**Abstract:** *Kashmir, paradise on earth is unique with its cultural and heritage identity. The temple architecture is one of the most important part of Kashmir's architectural distinctiveness. The present scenario of heritage temples is in a re-constructive developmental phase. Martand Sun Temple at Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir is a heritage monument built in eighth century AD. The temple is in ruins because of failure in its restoration. The aim of this paper is to identify the problems and provide suggestive measures for restoration. To achieve that, some objectives are: importance of restoring the monumental site, the agencies involved in restoration and their failures, current scenario, historic importance of the site and how a heritage site can lead the way of economic development of the area after restoration.*

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**Keywords:** Temple Architecture, Kashmir, Martand Sun Temple, Restoration, Heritage, Monument, Archaeological Survey of India

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## Introduction

Kashmir is one of the provinces of Jammu and Kashmir which is a part of Republic of India. Located near the Himalayan range of mountains, Kashmir valley is known for its intrinsic beauty. Kashmir has been under administration of different rulers over different time periods of history. Each dynasty having influence of their own culture and tradition on society. From different time periods of rulers like Gondana-I (3188 BC) to Maharaja Hari Singh (AD 1961), Kashmir has witnessed a thorough transition of architectural developments (Kalhana, 12th Century AD). Temple architecture in Kashmir was introduced after the construction of Stupas by Ashoka in third century AD. Temples in Kashmir have characteristics like two tired and high pitched and straight edged pyramid roof to face the harsh climatic conditions during winter season. Most of the temples were constructed by using stone. Stone had an important physical significance as it represented the strength of structure to withstand ages. Some of the temples were also constructed of mud like Martand Temple at Anantnag district in Kashmir. Going through different time periods Kashmir saw a gradual significant growth in Islamic architecture. With growing population of Muslims, temple structures saw their slow rate of progression. Even some of the temples were demolished during long political turmoil across Kashmir valley. Today in Kashmir valley there are a total

1842 temples, shamshans bhoomis, holy springs, holy caves (Tickoo, 2019). Among these different temples, some are recognized as architectural heritage monuments by govt. bodies such as Archeological Survey of India (ASI) and INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage).

### **Brief History of Martand Sun Temple**

Martand Sun Temple (Figures 1-4) is a heritage monument recognized by Archaeological Survey of India. situated near town Islamabad (officially called Anantnag). This temple is one of the main three major Sun Temples in India, Modhera Sun Temple, Gujarat and Konark Sun Temple, Orrisa respectively. Constructed by King Lalitaditya, which the emperor got built in honor of the Sun God (Wasim, 2018). The main shrine is 220 feet long and 142 feet wide and there are 84 smaller shrines that surround it (Majid, 2018). It is a fine example of architectural masterpiece (Figures 5-6) which is reflected from a far distance while approaching towards the shrine. It is still unbelievable how such a huge and tall structure could have been constructed during eighth century. Chiseled details into the stone of various Hindu Gods can be identified as a quality of fine workmanship. Temple is not of its original shape because of its demolition by a Muslim ruler Sikandar Butshikan in the early fifteenth century AD (Wasim, 2018). Even in a dissembled state, the temple still pleases the admirers or visitors. Therefore, this temple is of immense value considering its historic and religious aspect.



Figure 1: Entrance of Martand Sun Temple



Figure 2: Entrance of Martand Sun Temple



Figure 3: General View of Martand Sun Temple

## The Decline

The temple condition is degrading every year and it would be atrocious if an immediate action would not be considered for its restoration. From past six to seven years the concern body has failed for its restoration and this can be visualized on the site itself. Initial developments were made in this decade but these developments proved to be miserable with time. The general problem here is the process of restoration is at meagre pace. Nobody can be blamed for this negligence but indeed a positive impact can be considered from its previous failures. This not only proves a vital point but also a solution for the restoration process. Therefore, with this a new process has to be developed for the restoration of this heritage site.

An introduction of new method and avoiding a conservative process, for example taking consideration of quality skilled labor instead of those having less skillset. A well-defined project management is required for its proper working. A lack in negligence can prove fatal for this marvel of history. Work can only be finished within a prescribed time only if the acting body can provide proper academic sources (historical & archeological) as well as working in accordance with the process.

## **The Analogy of Development and Failures**

**Efforts by the Agencies:** This monument came under the State Archaeology Department. But with the collaboration of State Archaeology Department and Archeological Survey of India in 1958. Now the site is under the authority of Archeological Survey of India. The first excavation was done in 1969 -1970 by the authority. Progressive development was made in different stages. However no official progressive statement has been initiated till now except the expenditure cost of conservation. The statement detailed the non-planed expenditure of Rs. 26 00 000 in 2010-11 and Rs. 80 900 in 2011-12 for the minor works done on site. The Archeological Survey of India has put maximum efforts in restoration of the heritage site but are unable to restore to its full extent (2012).

**Reason of Failures:** The restoration process has crossed 60 years but still the heritage site does not reflect its proper identity, though the temple in ruins looks majestic and magnificent. In these 60 years there has been very slow rate of the development process which can be observed from a normal human's perspective. First major reason is the political turmoil currently in Kashmir valley which results in lockdowns, curfews, and internet restrictions. Because of this no movement of public is allowed and the mobility of vehicles are also restricted. Due to this the work dynamics of the restoration process is heavily affected. The site (5400 feet above sea level) is located 8kms from a local nearby town of Anantnag (5300 feet above sea level) which makes it difficult to reach the site in situations like this. Tenders for the contract work are to be submitted online and because of restrictions either contractors are not able to access the internet or they don't have enough knowledge about the official proceedings that are required to fill the contract. Second main problem is the availability of skilled labour for the restoration work (Khan, 2020). This skilled labour is able to chisel the stones either the new one that they are going to place or an old one which needs proper alimentation. This is the most important part of restoration and need to be done in a careful manner. The artisans are called from the summer capital city, Srinagar which is situated 68 kms from the site and most of the times they are unable to reach because of difficult terrain and weather. The artisans are not only less skilled but don't carry any archeological history of conserving a monument. This not only can prove a pessimistic way of dealing the problem but as well as decadence of the monument itself. Only after proper guidance and instructions, artisans can be selected for the various minor works on site with desired skillset. Third point of failure is the non-adaptation of scientific methods to reduce weathering of stones and preserve the ancient stones as much as possible. A wide range of chemicals are been used for preservation or cleansing of variety of

materials. But what can be observed on site is the traditional or conventional methods in the process of restoration. No justice has been done to a 1200 year old monument. In addition to this there is a negligence by the governing bodies by not considering the sacredness of this monument. No information is being circulated such as in newspapers, journals, magazines or any other kind of source which can arose the physical as well as moral value of the heritage site. No collection of historic data is done to restore the monument to its original form. The carvings into the megalith are not molded to their original form because of lack of data collection. These are left untouched and new non-decorated stones are being placed where there is a requirement of a missing stone. It is a piece of puzzle that doesn't fit in (Khan, 2020).

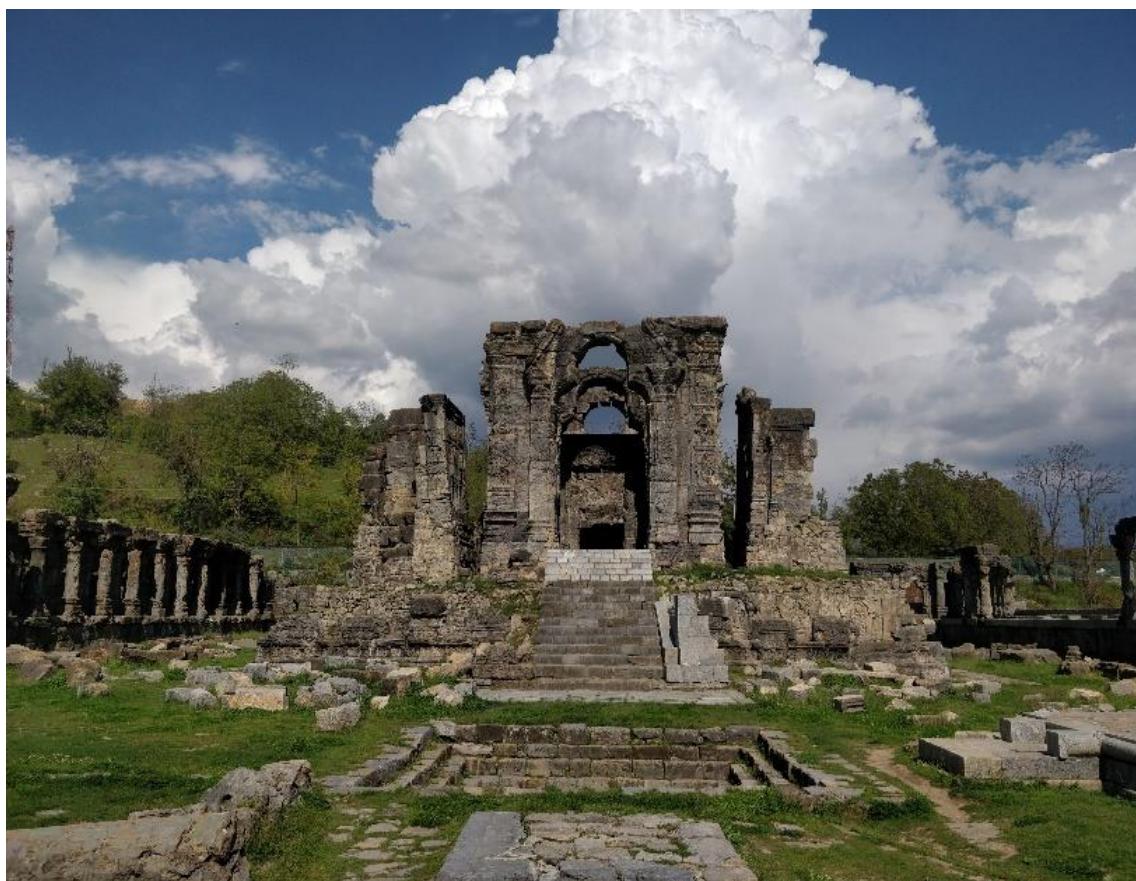


Figure 4: Main shrine in Martand Sun Temple



Figure 5: Section of site topography - left to right (Courtesy: Google Earth)

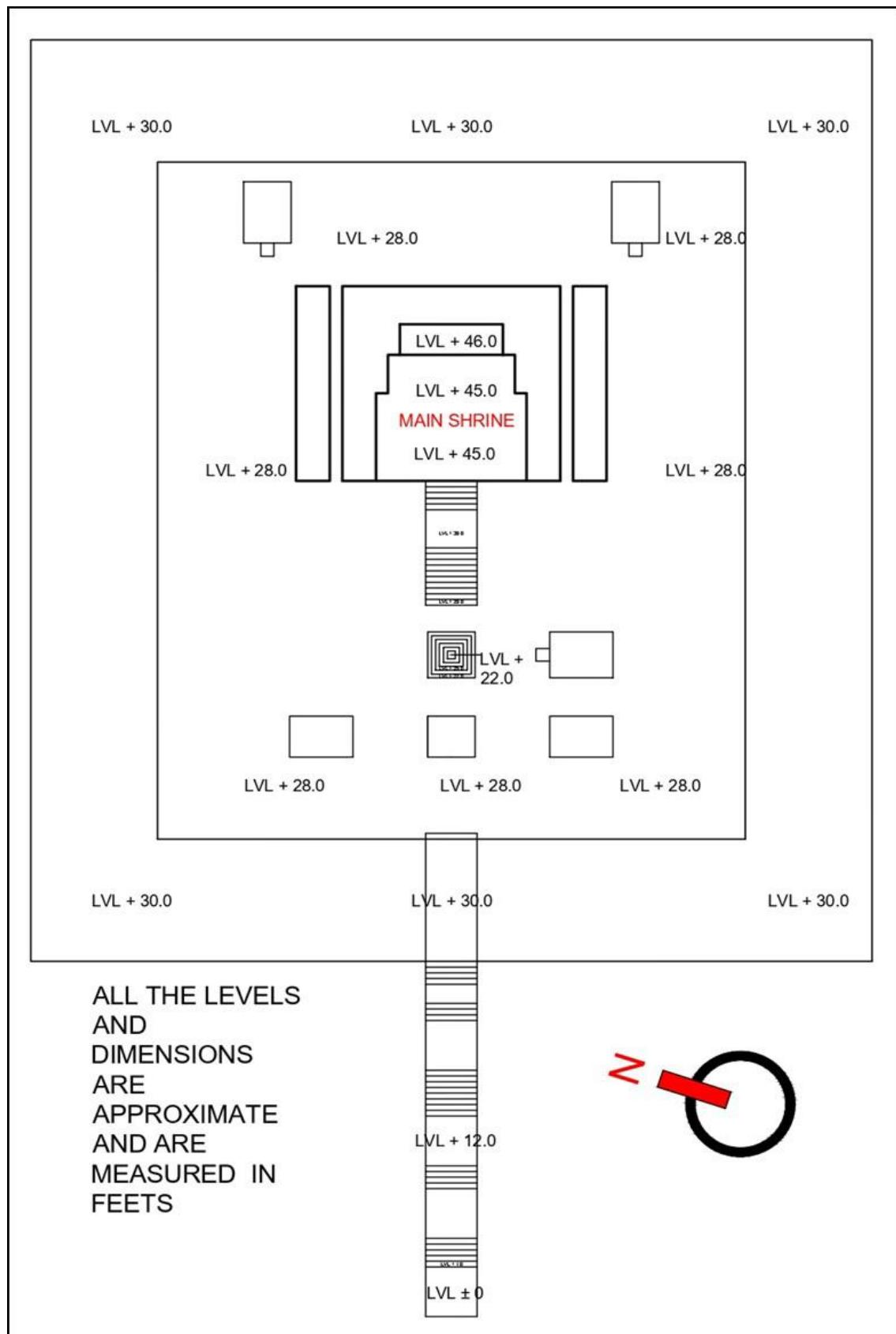


Figure 6: Site plan showing approximate levels and dimensions

An appreciable work has been done by the Archeological Survey of India but it is a sluggish development over a longer period of time. Until and unless there are no enhancements from the mistakes done periodically there cannot be a face-lift of the Martand Sun Temple.



Figure 7: Two columns (part of pradakshina path) in Martand Sun Temple

### Reorganizing Process of Restoration

**Current Scenario:** At present, the restoration process has vaguely come to a halt mostly because of the restrictions placed in accordance with the political turmoil. The on ground work has remained dormant by the later part of 2018 and still continuous to be recessed. These hindrances in restoration can further lead to more consequences. The work during the restoration is basically done by the dressing of rocks. There are two different type of dressings done on the site by the appointed workers or artisans, plain dressing and molded dressing. In plain dressing, stones are designed into fine straight horizontal and vertical shapes while as in molded dressing stones are designed with a curvature. The detailed work of chiseling into a stone back to its original form depends upon the availability of proper data (Khan, 2020). In most of the megaliths, different Hindu gods are inscribed, for example the sun god Bhaskara. The garden inside temple complex is being maintained by the Jammu and Kashmir department of Horticulture. In this garden different types of flower species are planted which adds more to the beauty of this magnificent creation. Some seating spaces are also provided for the

visitors. Inside the temple. The pradakshina/parikarma or ambulatory path inside the temple now consists of mainly stones which are disseminated on the ground (Figure 7). These stones on the ground are majorly new ones, which are to be chiseled or placed (Figures 8 and 9). But no displacements of these stones can be seen from past three years by comparing the photos from 2017 and 2020 respectively. The temple is in the vicinity of a residential houses and no commercial cluster is surrounding the temple complex. The temple is easily accessible by the public transport and the number of vehicles per minute crossing the entrance road is one in an average. This time site is not open to public because of the global pandemic COVID-19.



Figure 8: New Stones and collapsed stones of the Martand Sun Temple



Figure 9: New Stones and collapsed stones of the Martand Sun Temple



Figure 10: Partially damaged carvings in Martand Sun Temple



Figure 11 a, b, c and d: Partially destroyed carvings in main shrine of the temple

**Improvisation in the Current Process:** By studying the failures in detail, we can overcome each problem with a particular solution which can help in the process of restoration. The political turmoil currently in Kashmir valley heavily effects the

number of people visiting the site. And the ground situation presently will consume a lot time as the situation prevails since past decades. To overcome the major problem of transportation of materials and men, a system has to be developed such as a proper training among the local artisans or workers so that they are easily available at any cost of time. A structural training program can benefit the motive as well as can provide a way of contribution of local people for restoration. This can also help in gaining the ethical importance of site in present society. Another solution to this can be the temporary settlement of workers in nearby localities either on tenant based or government residences. In order to restore collection of evidences from the archeological units across the country especially from the Kashmir division. The study of other Sun temples like konark and modhera can also be vital for the resemblance of different elements like sculptures and carvings (Figures 10 and 11) of Hindu deities. Most of the people across the country do not have any information about this temple. To address this problem, different types of sources can be used to spread the information such as articles in journals, newspapers and magazines. Even e-technology can be used such as advertisements in social media and television. More the spread of word more people can realize the importance of this monument. And can be used as a purpose for education across the globe.

## **Post-Restoration: Economic Development**

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the richest spot for tourists or devotees. In 2017 total number of tourists arrived were 14.32 million out of which 14.24 million were domestic tourists and 79.77 thousand were foreign tourists. (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2020) After initial developmental stages of restoration of the heritage Sun temple is completed, it can prove a crucial point for the tourism industry of Jammu and Kashmir. Not only the government but the local people can also boon its benefits. District Anantnag consists of Mughal gardens and shrines but none of them is a heritage site and 1200 years old. Because of the presence of ancient motifs this monument can vividly lure international community. This altogether can prove beneficial for economy and can solve many problems within society such as unemployment, lack of knowledge, less-exposure, rigid approach of people. Foremost it is to benefit the local people directly. With the increase in the number of visitors can lead to the increase in the needs of people visiting that in further can create a commercial opportunity in the surroundings. A proposed cluster of commercial can be a solution to the needs of visitors. With a proper integration of works in department of tourism and department of commerce, a vision of prosperity is actualized.

## **Conclusion**

The restoration process should be completed in consideration with the actual archeological sources and should contemplate the value of this heritage. By remodeling the events of failures and adapting to the conditions, the process will be an important step towards the conservation of heritage monument. It is responsibility of every individual to overall preserve and carry forward a motion of history to the next generation.

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