

Jain Temples of Lalitpur: A Window into Socio-culture Heritage of Chantela Period

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Abstract

The Jain temples of the Chandela period Located in Chanpur-Jahajpur, Lalitpur represent an exceptional fusion of artistic brilliance, religious devotion, and architectural ingenuity. This abstract delves into the significance and characteristics of these temples, which flourished between the 8th and 12th centuries CE. During this period, Bundelkhand witnessed a flourishing Jain community, evidenced by the construction of numerous temples dedicated to Jain Tirthankaras. These temples, scattered across the region, stand as testaments to the cultural and religious vitality of the era.

The architectural style of these temples is characterized by intricate carvings, majestic spires, and elaborate facades. The use of sandstone, a hallmark of Chandela architecture, lends these temples a distinct reddish hue, enhancing their visual allure. Intricately carved sculptures depicting Jain deities, celestial beings, and scenes from Jain mythology adorn the temple exteriors and interiors, reflecting the artisans' impeccable craftsmanship and devotion.

The layout of these temples typically follows a tripartite division comprising a sanctum (garbhagriha), a vestibule (antarala), and a pillared hall (mandapa). The sanctum houses the principal deity, while the mandapa serves as a space for congregational gatherings and religious rituals. Symbolism plays a significant role in Jain temple architecture, with every aspect meticulously designed to convey spiritual teachings and philosophical concepts. From the celestial beings guarding the temple entrances to the lotus motifs symbolizing purity and enlightenment, each element embodies the Jain worldview. Despite centuries of weathering and natural disasters, many of these temples have endured, albeit in varying states of preservation. Efforts by conservationists and archaeologists aim to safeguard these architectural marvels for future generations, recognizing their historical, cultural, and religious significance.

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In conclusion, the Jain temples of the Chandela period Located in Chanpur-Jahajpur, Lalitpur, Bundelkhandstand as enduring legacies of an era marked by artistic splendor and religious fervor. Through their architectural grandeur and spiritual symbolism, these temples continue to inspire awe and reverence, serving as timeless reminders of India's rich cultural heritage.

Keywords: Temple Architecture, Jain Temples, Garbhagriha, Shikhara, Antarala, Maha Mandapa, Mandapa, Dwarshakha.

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Bundelkhand Region located in the heart of India is well known. The pages of history and culture are direct proof of this. There are many reasons for the importance, glory and prestige of this region, the most important reason which is reflected in it is the very ancient and rich culture here. Important ancient religious centers of culture, which are direct evidence that this area has been a center of devout, well-mannered and thoughtful religious souls since the beginning. Change is the law of nature and this field is also no exception to it. The ancient culture of this region indicates that this region was a prosperous, advanced and developed region of the country in ancient times, but it is our misfortune that today we are indifferent towards protecting this valuable ancient culture. The treasure of our extremely valuable ancient culture is gradually getting destroyed, if timely attention is not given to it, then that day is not far when this entire treasure will unexpectedly disappear into the lap of time.

There are ancient religious places of all religions in Bundelkhand. The religious tolerance of the then rulers is not only reflected in the construction of temples, but at the same time, the unique beauty of indirect art prevalent in the hearts of skilled artists is also clearly visible. Not only this, while on one hand the art-loving rulers have demonstrated their love for art in the construction of these temples, on the other hand the people of that time also demonstrated their immense religious sentiments by building many temples.

Jain temples built in ancient times have come to light from places of Bundelkhand like Devgarh, Chandpur-Jahajpur, Dudhai, Madanpur, Banpur, Pavagiri, Siron, Sironji (Siron Khurd), Girar, Lalitpur, Jhansi, Khajuraho etc. most of them are in very bad condition.

Chandpur-Jahajpur are under the Lalitpur district. Chandpur is located at 24° 30' North Latitude and 78° 18' East Longitude, about 3 K.M.s to the north-east of Dhaura station on the Lalitpur-

Bina line of the Central Railway.¹ This village is situated in the middle of dense forest. Near this, on the other side of the railway line towards the west, a village named Jahazpur has been settled.² Thus, Chandpur is towards the east and Jahazpur towards the west.

The ruler of Chandela dynasty Chandravarman (Chandravarma) had established Chandrapur on his name. This Chandrapur later got transformed into Chandpur. This is known from this inscription of Samvat 1207 here. The builder of the temples of Chandpur was a person named Udayapala of Vachha (Vatsaraja), who was probably a contemporary of the Chandela ruler Madanvarman (1128-64 AD). He may have been a Kshatriya of the time of Madanvarman or a rich person.³

On the basis of the inscriptions found in the remains of temples in Chandpur-Jahajpur and nearby areas, it is known that the temples here were built during the great Chandela reign between the tenth century to the twelfth century. The temples and sculptures are can be called the best link of Chandela art, although the temples of here have now mostly been destroyed due to the cruel blows of time and the harsh blows of Muslim invaders.

To understand the construction style of these temples, it is very important to study the construction style of the temples of India, built at that time. The medieval temples are divided into three categories on the basis of famous artist Fergusson and Shilpashastra as follows.⁴

S. No.	Area	Shilpashastra	Fergusson
A	North Indian	Nagara style	Indo-Aryan style
B	Central India	Besar style	Chalukya style
C	South India	Dravidian Style	Dravidian Style

Concept and Stylistic Features Indian Temple Architecture

Main features:

The Chandella temples are built in the central Indian Nagara style of architecture. In this style, the spire (*Shikhara*) is curvi linear in form. Although

the temples are affiliated to different religious sects - Hindu and Jain - they have a cognate architectural style. They are unified structures consisting of four or five units: a cella or sanctum (*Garbhagriha*), a *Antarala* (*Antarala*), a large hall (*Maha Mandapa*), another hall (*Mandapa*), and a porch (*MukhaMandapa*). Most of the temples are erected on the east - west axis and therefore face the direct rays of the rising sun.

The *Garbhagriha*, literally 'womb chamber', is the name given to the innermost sanctum in an Indian temple. The temple is conceived of as an abode of God, whose emblem or icon is installed in this innermost chamber. The sanctum is a dark, peaceful place, where the devotee is born to higher life. It is a hollow chamber resembling a cave (*Guha*) and its center is considered to be the center of the universe. The temple's spire rises exactly above the center of the sanctum. The invisible axis joining the center of the sanctum at the ground level and the finial of the superstructure above is conceived as the Cosmic Axis connecting earth and heaven.

The earlier temples in India, built in the fifth century CE, generally consisted of only the sanctum and an attached porch. Gradual, with changing requirements for rituals, more structures were added to this simple scheme. A hall for dance performances and another for food offerings to the deity were added and the original two-unit scheme was expanded to have four or five units.

The Indian temple is built according to the canons laid down in the texts called the *Vastushastra*. These texts cover every aspect of architecture, from the selection of the site to the construction of the temple from the plinth to its spire. They give measurements and proportions for the different portions, images, and sculptural motifs that adorn the walls, pillars, and other areas.

Adornment (*alankara*) is an important feature of Indian culture. Decoration is considered to be auspicious, and the temple is adorned with various sculptural motifs such as creepers, birds, apsaras, mithunas (couples), and vyalas. These are considered to be magico-protective motifs, and are supposed to bring good luck.

Elevation:

The Khajuraho temple has three main divisions on its elevation: the plinth or basal story (*Peetha*), the wall (*jangha*), and the roof or spire (*Shikhara*). In addition to the tall platform (*jagati*) on which it stands, the temple has a high basal storey with a series of ornamental moldings depicting human activities (*narathara*), masks of glory (*grasapattika*),

and geometrical designs.

Above the plinth is the wall section, *jangha*, divided into two or three sculptural zones. It is here that we see lovely figural sculptures – apsaras, griffins, couples or mithunas, guardian deities of space (*Dikpalas*), and so on. The famous erotic groups are situated on the portion of the *jangha* that joins the large hall and the sanctum. The balconied windows of the temple alternate with the carved walls creating an interesting juxtaposition of light and shade. Similarly, the numerous indentations and projections on the ground level are carried upwards to the superstructure of the temple, adding to its dramatic effect.

The roofs of the subordinate structures such as the porch and halls are pyramidal in shape, while the tower over the sanctum is curvilinear, with graded peaks clustering around it. The architect has clearly focused the progressive ascent and descent of superstructures converging to the highest pinnacle, and has created a semblance of a mountain. In fact, inscriptions at Khajuraho compare the temple with Mount Kailasa, the abode of Shiva, or Mount Meru, the center of the Universe. The architectural imagery of the Khajuraho temples indeed helps us to conceive of the temple as the center of the universe.

Jain Temples of Chandpur-Jahajpur

In Chandpur-Jahajpur, there are wonderful views of the love for art as well as religious tolerance of the Chandela rulers. On one side they built Hindu temples and on the other side they also built Jain temples and sculptures. These Jain temples and sculptures have great importance.

Here, the ruins of ancient monuments are scattered in an area of about 1k.m. According to Alexander Cunningham, all the temples here are divided into five groups. The first group of temples is also on one side (east side) of the railway line and it contains all Jain temples.⁵ The other four groups have Vaishnav and Shaiva temples, which are located on the other side of the railwayline. At present, all these temples have been taken under protection of the Archaeological Survey of India and they have also been protected by boundary walls around these temples. Now only the ruins of 3 Jain temples remain in the place surrounded by a huge boundary wall.⁶

Temple 1

This temple is built on a high platform on one side of the railway line. At present only *Mandapa* of this temple is safe. The remaining main architectural

parts of the temple, the *Garbhagriha*, *Antaral* etc. have been destroyed due to which nothing can be said with certainty about the construction style of this temple. The *Mandapa* is equipped with four pillars which are in relic form. The roof of the *Mandapa* is planar and the peak portion above the roof has been destroyed. The *Garbhagriha* of this temple has been destroyed, but in the inner part of the present *Mandapa*, the gate of the *Garbhagriha* adjacent to the pillars is still safe. The door branch (*Dwarshakha*) of the *Garbhagriha* is ornamented, in the middle of which is a bearded two-armed figure holding a lotus flower in his hand. On one side of it Naagi or Ambika or Shalabhanjika are depicted on the other side. The stone slab below the *Dwarshakha* is decorated with figures of elephants, lions etc. On the sill of the *Dwarshakha*, the statue of Shantinath engrossed in meditation posture and the figures of Navagraha are decorated. On this basis, Temple 1 is considered to be related to Temple Nath.⁷ There are some ruined statues kept outside this pavilion, one of which is a huge statue of Jain Tirthankar Shantinath in Kayotsarga posture, about 12 feet high, the denotation of this statue is clear. No, but scholars have accepted it as the statue of Shantinath. On the pedestal of this idol, two deers are depicted in the middle and two lions around them and the figures of Shashandev and Shashandevi are displayed around them.⁸

Temple 2

Near Temple 1, there is Temple 2 towards the north-east. This is the second one of temple which is dedicated to Shantinath. The *Garbhagriha* and *Mandapa* of this temple are safe and its entrance is towards the south, which is very small in size (about 3 feet long and 3 feet wide). It is called Bhonvara in Bundeli people's language.⁹ One can go by bowing to enter the *Garbhagriha*. Above the entrance of the *Garbhagriha*, there is a sculpture of a goddess seated on a throne, carrying a child in her lap. The figure of two men sitting on the throne is also engraved on the left side of the goddess.¹⁰ Inside the sanctum sanctorum, there is a huge sculpture of Shantinath in Kayotsargamudra, about 15 feet high, which is grand and attractive. Apart from the pair of deers in the center of the pedestal, there are also the pair of lions and on either side of them, one Tirthankar absorbed in meditative posture is displayed. On the stone slab on the right side, there are attractive statues of two Tirthankaras in Kayotsarga posture in the middle and below them are Kalpavriksha, below which the central figure has been destroyed but around it the figures of a man and a woman are displayed in Abhangi posture. There is a

Mandapa with four pillars in front of its *Garbhagriha*. From this it appears that this temple was built in Panchayat style.¹¹

Temple 3

There is a temple in ruins near the south-east side of the above-mentioned temples. Here only a *Mandapa* with 3 pillars is left in the name of the temple. The fourth pillar was broken but at present it has been conserved and given the form of a *Mandapa* by installing a new fourth pillar in it.¹²

Some traces of Jains are found in only one temple in the west on the other side of the railway line and in Jahazpur. There are very few remains of another Jain temples and sculptures at a short distance from here, but they are completely destroyed.¹³

CONCLUSION

The art of the Chandela period in Bundelkhand was based on the native tradition which suited the socio-religious needs of an elite feudal society and it reflects the contemporary trends and concepts prevalent during the time of the Chandela rulers. The love for art of that time can be understood from the temples and sculptures of Khajuraho of the Chandela period, located in the Bundelkhand region itself. Through this research paper, an effort is made to draw the attention of the society towards the heritage inherited by our ancestors present in Chandpur-Jahajpur and to preserve it further. Even today, due to lack of proper conservation and maintenance, our priceless heritage is on the verge of destruction due to cruel attacks and cruel blows of art. Through the presented research paper, an attempt has been made to study the architectural remains of the Jain temples built during the Chandela period in the area under reference and to place them on the global archaeological scene, which will be useful not only for art lovers who are curious about art and architecture but also for tourism. It is also very important from point of view. It is noteworthy that although the contribution of elite classes was more in the art of Chandela period related to Jainism, the role of laborers, traders, forest dwellers and common people was no less in it, which is also confirmed by inscriptional evidence. In this way, the joint efforts of all sections of the society are reflected in the art of the Chandela period located in the referred area, which is very relevant in the present social scenario from the point of view of the possibility of all religions and harmony.



Temple 1



Temple 2



Temple 3



Shantinath in Garbhagriha of
Temple 2



Devi figure on the Dwarshakha of Garbhagriha of
Temple 2



Male figures on the Dwarshakha of
the Garbhagriha of **Temple 2**



Temple 3

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