



Behta Temple: An Important Historical and Religious Site of Kanpur

Dr. Suchita Upadhyay

Independent Researcher

Email ID- suchita.up1@gmail.com, Mobile No.- 7355925588

Indian temples have always been a centre of reverence and attraction because of their magnificent and massive structure. The Hindu temple architecture is not only the result of theology, spiritual ideas and the early Hindu texts but also a result of innovation driven by regional availability of raw material and the local climate.¹

The *Behta* temple or *Jagannath Baba* temple is situated in Kanpur. The region was once included in the ancient kingdom of *Panchala*. The place remained under the rule of many rulers including *Gupta*, *Vardhan*, *Ayudh*, *Gurjar*-. *Pratihara*, *Chandellas*. *Gahadwala* were the last Hindu rulers of this region and in 1193A.D. after the battle of *Chandavar*, the district passed under the sway of Muslims.

The temple of *Bhitergaon*, 32km south of Kanpur city, situated in *tehsil Ghatampur* of Kanpur is a magnificent example of temple of brick architecture. This temple was constructed during *Gupta* regime.² Few kilometers from *Bhitergaon* temple there is one another temple which is locally known as '*Jagannath Baba ka Mandir*'. This temple is unique not only for its architecture but it also predicts monsoon. Both the aspects are still an unsolved puzzle.

Architecture of the temple:

Vaishvanism is a tradition in Hinduism in which Lord Vishnu and His various incarnations are worshipped as the original and supreme God, during *Rigveda* Vishnu was only a solar deity. Vishnu became popular during Gupta period. In *Behta* temple Vishnu is worshipped in the aspect of lord *Jagannath*. The salient features³ of this temple are as follows-

The temple is situated on a very high elevated platform. The size of the platform on which the temple is built is approximately 100x70 feet and the height of the platform is nearly 9-10 feet. The platform is rectangular in shape.

The main temple is not a type of typical Indian temples. There is a wide discussion about the structure and its appearance, but no solid testament has obtained yet about the history behind the structure. The structure somewhat resembles with the *Buddhist stupa*.

The outer walls are 14 feet and the inner walls are 8-9 feet thick. The walls are plain solid structure. The main entrance is east facing like other temples of India.

The chief deity is Lord *Jagannath*. A life size statue of lord *Jagannath* is almost 6-7 feet tall. The idol is skillfully carved in black stone. When we closely observe we can see the idols of *Balbhadra* and *Subhadra*, they are considered as a brother and sister of lord *Jagannath*. Their statues are also carved in the same panel on either side of the lord *Jagannath* but their idols are hardly 1.5 to 2 feet tall.

The column which surrounds the main idol depicts the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. On the second row of column we can see the figure of *Yakshi*. *Yakshi* was important in early Buddhist monuments as a decorative element with the passing of time, a standard decorative element of both Indian sculpture and Indian temple architecture.

The startling fact is that the idols of *Jagannath*, *Balbhadra* and *Subhadra* are carved in black stone which is not found in vicinity. Another important feature of sanctum is that the idol of lord *Jagannath* is sitting atop a large pedestal or *argha* of the *Shiva lingam*. No other example of this type of idol can be found in India. Local villagers connects it with a story of *Shiva Purana* according to which when lord *Shiva* started to seek *Samadhi*, he asked lord *Vishnu* to take care of the burden of this earth, firstly, Lord *Vishnu* forbids but later on agreed on the condition that if Lord *Shiva* give it to His base then, only he will bear the burden of this earth. The idol of lord *Jagannath* on the *argha* of *shiva lingam* depicts the same story.⁴

By looking carefully, it is seen that the statue of lord *Jagannath* is not in alignment. It is said that due to the earthquake this idol has become unaligned which has been supported by joining the back wall in later years.

Another type of statues we get in the temple is the statue of lord Sun, which is now closed in a room. The height of the idol is about 4 feet and it appears to be made of lime stone. Both the hands of lord Sun are raised up to the shoulder. This Sun image does not have any kind of Greek influence. It is said that such type of idols were made before the *Gupta* period. There was also a rare statue of *Panchmukhi Ganesh*, made of lime stone. It is said that the idol has been stolen now.

The difference in the structure of the pillars at the entrance of the sanctum sanctorum is clearly visible. The pillar on the right hand side looks slender, circular and ordinary whereas the left hand side pillar is rectangular, beautifully carved in black stone.

Technical aspect of the temple:

The *Jagannath* temple at *Behta* is not only popular for its unique architecture and contradictory origin, the other astonishing fact of this temple is that it also predict monsoon. The ceiling of the temple sanctum gets dampened 7 days before rain. If it is only moisture it will rain moderate and if the water droplets fall on the floor then it may rain heavy. It is very important for agriculture point of view and the local farmers perform farming activity accordingly. The reason for this is a discus mounted on the top of the temple. The metal composition of the discus is unknown. It is also believed that metal has some magnetic effects. This instrument works like a hygrometer and it is certain that the rain is detected due to this device.

This temple is popular in this area. Here people come to visit lord *Jagannath* with reverence. Lord *Jagannath Rath Yatra* is celebrated on the same day and with the same kind of rituals what *Jagannath* temple of *puri* observes. Now traditional worship is banned by the ASI as the temple is now under ASI.

According to the villagers, there were many temples in this area which were either destroyed by the Muslim invaders or fallen due to nature's outbreak. The types of images we found here and the difference in the building material strengthen this fact. It is a proven fact that this temple was lastly renovated in 11th century.⁵

Though the architecture of this temple is not of magnificent kind but still it needs further research because of its different architectural style. If this is known how this discus has been built it can be very helpful for the agricultural sector. Most of the scholars who visit *Bhitergaon* temple do not know that another temple of great significance is nearby. Its' antiquity and technology needs to be researched so that it can be useful not only for the scholars of history but for the scholars of science as well.

Reference

¹ George Michell, *the Hindu Temple: An introduction to its Meaning and Forms*, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 88-89

² V. Prakash and T.N.Roy, Bulletin of U.P.Historical Society, No.4, Sites and Monuments of U.P., Lucknow, 1965, p.35

³ Based on the personal observation of the temple.

⁴ As told by main priest of the temple Mr. K.P.Shukla.

⁵ Munshi Dargahilal, Tarikh-i-Kanpur, NA