

## *The Hindu Śāhi Temple at Nandana*

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Nandana, as a place name, has been variously recorded in historical accounts. It is Nārdīn of Utbī<sup>1</sup> and Jurbādhqānī<sup>2</sup> Nāzīn of Reynold<sup>3</sup> and Nandana of Gardīzī,<sup>4</sup> Nizām ad-Dīn<sup>5</sup> and Badāoni.<sup>6</sup> The reason why it is called Nārdīn and Nāzīn is inexplicable and may be due to copying errors. However Nandana<sup>7</sup> (a divine park in the world of mythological gods and goddesses) seems to be the most appropriate nomenclature.

The topographical details of this part of the Salt Range show the important strategic position which this place occupied among the barren hills, both for defence and ritual observances. Its natural defences, comprising narrow sinuous gorges, precipitous slopes and steep heights encircling the fortress, display all the qualities of a model station for military purpose. In addition, it bears all the essential features of a most suitable site for the building of a Hindu temple. According to the *Vastu* text (derived from *Vasta*, to dwell), the construction of a temple is governed by several considerations. Firstly, temples should invariably be located on an elevated plane. For fixing the exact position of a temple the site should not merely be superior in class but also have a slope admitting good drainage and must be close to a large and clean tank, on the bank or junction of rivers, on the sea shore or on the top or bottom of hills.

This dilapidated relic of history i.e. Nandana temple is buried close to Bāghānwālā in the Jhelum district. All that now remains of the building is a ruined fortification, a mosque,<sup>8</sup> a



massive structure of uncertain character and an extant Hindu temple which constitutes the subject of the present paper.<sup>9</sup>

The temple is located on the narrow but fairly level top of a projection which, in turn, forms part of a bold rocky ridge rising to a height of about 457m. above sea level. In its gross size it is, after Amb, larger than any of the average Salt Range temples. But unfortunately, this monumental building is in an advanced stage of decay. It has already lost the major portion of the cellas and almost the whole of the facade (plate A). The *antrāla* which once faced the main shrine has disappeared, and similarly also the doorway.

Cunningham says,<sup>10</sup> "The whole face of the outside wall was once covered with stucco, of which a portion is visible in places. These wall faces were decorated with an elaborate scheme of trefoil arches, niches, *amalaka* topped pilasters, all carved in rather flat relief, and showing motifs from late Greco-Buddhist art. But all this ornamentation has badly decayed since it lost the protective cover of stucco."

Standing on a massive *jagati* of which only traces survives, the *trianga Prasāla* at its base measures 7.30 m. on its north-east face and 7.62m. on the north-west. As already stated, the *jagati* has suffered much damage, therefore the details of the mouldings and decorations have now disappeared. Cunningham has, however, recorded that *Kalasa* and *Padma* were part of the mouldings and decorative scheme respectively. When Stein<sup>11</sup> cleared the debris below the northern corner of the temple, he also found the top of the platform which showed a moulding decorated with a string of lotus petals.

The remains of this dilapidated but certainly elegant edifice conceal the mysteries of the faith and stand witness to the glory of the original building. Like most other temples of its group, Nandana is also created in *Kanjur* stone. The Śāhis *sathapati* generally preferred this soft stone for building their temples because it was easy to give it the desired shapes. The blocks used vary in size and are highly finished with different patterns and motifs. They are set in mortar and fitted together in horizontal courses of remarkable precision.

This double story *Sandhara* temple attains the height of approximately 9m. from the foot of the base and faces west like the big temple of Amb and the temple at Kafir Kot south (Bilot).



## Interior

The *garbhagriha*, a symbolic cave-womb out of which creation is supposed to have emerged, is a square of 3.50m. It provides a junction between the divine and human world and acts as a place of transition invoking the potential for transformation of the worshipper. As usual it has only one entrance and is without any window, thus enhancing the effect of a dark inside which indeed is a pre-requisite of a Hindu temple. Inside, the sanctum is plain and without any ornamentation. The hemispherical dome is at about 4.2m. from the floor level and built in horizontal courses resting on pendentives about 1.25 m. high at the corners. Since the temple is two storied, it has also got an upper cella measuring 2.90 m. square,<sup>12</sup> approached by a flight of steps, of which only traces are left, on the left side of the doorway. It, too, carries the domed roof which rested in the corners on squinches formed by four projecting courses. The cella is enclosed within a wall 1.80 m. wide. An enclosed path 55 cm wide is provided on the upper storey as a corridor within the fabric of the temple which allowed a worshipper to circumambulate the cella in order to observe the central divinity. The walls in between the cella and the surrounding corridor have windows 68 cm wide and a door probably once situated above the entrance of the lower cella. On each side of the enclosing wall there is a narrow loophole-like opening splayed towards the interior and intended to receive light and air.

## Exterior

### a. *Kati*

This is the most significant portion of the entire elevational scheme, as it comprises a vertical face reserved exclusively for figural decoration. It is distinguished from the rest of the tower by a separate form of surface treatment. As already mentioned, the temple possesses *trianga* form, so the *Kati* accordingly displays three proliferations, viz. *bhadra* or central offset, *karna* or corner offset and *pratiratha* or an additional offset inserted between *bhadra* and *karna*.

These proliferations prevent monotony and also provide shadows around it to bring about a mysterious effect. Of these projections, the *bhadra* is the most notable as it carries incarna-



tions of the interior divinity. It generally is decorated by niches for installing images of gods and goddesses which once embellished the exterior of the temple.

The *Kati* consists of the following district divisions:

i. *Jhanghs*

It is the lower most moulded portion of the wall which, because of its ruined state, does not help in determining the details. There are however traces at places of *vedibandha* (the altars bounding) type of moulding, a common feature of Salt Range temples.

ii. *Lower Barandi*

The portion above *jhangha* and below *bhandana*. The *bhadra* of this section contains a niche which in the present state measures 1.80m x 98cm and is sunk to a depth of about 1.10m. These niches have lost their original form due to the disintegrating influences of time and climate. The present ill restored from certainly does not correspond with the actual one. *Karna* and *pratirathas* are plain and do not contain any true or blind niche.

iii. *Bhandana*

This part divides the lower and upper *barandi* and consists of dentil cornices. It is decorated with a row of *ardhapadma*.

iv. *Upper Barandi*

It is the portion between *bhandana* and *varandika*. The *bhadra* here manifests a blind niche in alignment with the true niche of the lower *barandi* and is topped by comparatively elongated *udgama* obtained by arranging the *candrasalas*.

b. *Varandika*

Above the *Kati* is a *varandika* consisting of two dentil cornices and a plain heavy *pattika* above from where the *Sikhara* springs.

c. *Sikhāra (super-structure)*

It has lost most of the protective cover of stucco which does not allow us to precisely determine its details. Nevertheless, it assumes a special significance distinguishing it from other temples of this range. This *trianga sikhara* has two *bhumis* marked by



round-beaded *harna amalakas* in the *venukosas*. These *bhumis* are further marked by a prominent dentil cornice, similar to the other cornices, that runs around the whole structure. The lower *bhumi* has a slight curvature of the contour where as the upper *bhumi* sharply terminates in the upper Vedi (Plate 2). The decorative details of the upper *bhumi* are sadly damaged. However, the lower *bhumi* still retains some details and is worth-mentioning. It is ornamented by the *trisakha* blind windows each on *venukosa* and *Pratilata* and two on *madhyalatas*. Each blind window is topped by an elongated tiered *udgama* and touches the topmost dentil cornice. The *candrasālās* which form the *udgama* are generally filled with lotus rosettes. This is a very common feature in the Salt Range and in the medieval architecture of Rājputana and central India. In certain cases a floral motif grows up from the side lobes or top of the *Candrasālā*. Each *anga* is separated from the other by a narrow recess which does not contain any decoration.

### Geometry and proportion

The sanctum, 3.60m. square, is almost double the thickness of the enclosing wall, 1.80m. wide (Figure 1). It is an ideal proportion and exactly in accordance with the fundamental rules as referred to the *Braht Samhita*, an early 6th century text of Varahamihira. Moreover the ritual grid adopted by the builders of this illustrious monument seems to be based on  $8 \times 8 = 64$  squares which is the most suitable grid system for building temples (Figure 2). *Brahat Samhita* specifies in one of the chapters that a temple should be built in relation to a grid of  $8 \times 8 = 64$  squares. The central squares mark the most sacred place (the place of Brāhman) and the peripheral squares house the guardian deities.

### Date

The absolute lack of epigraphical and numismatical evidence does not permit us to work out an exact date. On general ground however, Cunningham<sup>13</sup> was inclined to believe that the temple was erected in the period of the Hindu Sahiya dynasty (A.D. 9th-10th century) or possibly somewhat earlier.

A careful study of the monument as also of all the available sources, has enabled the author to assume that the broad 9th to



10th century date of Cunningham can be narrated down to a more precise limit.

Ānandapāla<sup>14</sup> the son of Jayapāla, is known to have served as the governor of the Punjab under his father since some time before A.D. 990, when he led his first invasion of Lahore. It is difficult to determine the Śāhi capital of the Punjab during the time of his governorship. The cities of Jailam (Jhelum), Tākeshar (Taxila) and Nandana are known to have existed at that time, but which of them was the seat of government is not known. The fact that intelligence of Bharat's invasion of Jailam and Takeshar was supplied to Jayapāla by the chiefs of these places, implies Ānandapāla's absence from them and thus rules out the possibility of any of them being the provincial capital. It seems, therefore, that Ānandapāla ruled the Śāhi possessions in the Punjab from Nandana which later on also became the national capital at the beginning of his reign.

Shifting of the Śāhi capital to Nandana immediately after the fall of Udabhāndapur in March-April A.D. 1002 is evident from his predilection for the site in question. Thus it may safely be assumed that Nandana was the seat of his government during Ānandapāla's governorship of the Punjab.

In the spring of the year 396<sup>15</sup> (March-April, 1006), the Ghaznavid Sultān Mahmud, on his way to punish Dauud, the ruler of Multan, sought permission of Ānandapāla to pass through his territory. Infuriated at the refusal of the Śāhi, Mahmud decided to teach Ānandapāla an instructive lesson. Ānandapāla suffered a severe defeat on the battle field of Chacch and, deserting his capital, took to flight. He was pursued as far as Sodra, a small town to the east of Wazīrabād, where he eluded the Sultān by escaping into the hills of Kashmīr.

These historical accounts, indeed, provide us with the two ends of the chronological bracket for the construction of the temple. Thus we must necessarily place the date of construction between A.D. 990 and A.D. 1006. Another aspect for determining the building date is the auspicious character of this edifice. No doubt the temple, was built in the honour of a god or goddess, so, logically and traditionally, it was given the first priority. I am therefore, inclined to believe that the temple was originally built during the governorship of Ānandapāla Śāhi. Therefore the most probable date for its construction would be circa A.D. 990.



## Dedication

The absence of any solid evidence, such as an inscription or an idol or any symbol relating to a particular god, prevents us from determining the true nature of this divinity. There is however, a clue in the word Nandana itself and the Hund Slab inscription<sup>16</sup> of the time of Jayapaladeva may elucidate the puzzle.

The word Nandana means Indra's garden or the divine park in the world of the devās'. Besides, it has also been recorded in chapter two of the *Śiva Purana, Uttara Khanda*<sup>17</sup> that Nandana, the son of Hiranyakasipu had been ruling over the Svata Island, and had obtained boons from Śiva and had become invincible. He ruled over the kingdom for over ten thousand years and then attained Kalasa and became a gana of Śiva .

The other available source, certainly the most reliable and efficacious also, is the Hund Slab inscription which helps in determining their sect. The inscription is engraved on a stone slab, in 24 lines of neat Śarada character. The original inscribed surface is about 26x20 cm and the average height of the letters is approximately 0.64cm. The particulars of the lines i, ii, viii, xii and xiii are as under:

- i. I reverence the eye in the brow of Bhutanatha (Śiva), of which, through the burning of Kāma, his enemies are afraid even today.
- ii. May I, the son of Pangula, bowing my head to the eternal Śarva (Śiva), produce by my own powers fame in the realm of the Black-necked (Śiva).
- viii. Though he is terrible, through Pinakin (Śiva) there is the re-birth of him whose origin was desire (i.e. Kāma, to love-good), who was burnt up by himself (i.e. by Śiva), through (Śiva's) desire, but not through the terrible enemy (was Bhima restored to life).
- xii. In the kingdom of that Śri-Jayapāladeva, Cangulavarman, son of Pangula, has made an above of Śankara (Śiva).
- xiii. When a hundred years with six and forty added were completed, on the fifth (tithi) of the bright half of Madhave (the month Vaiśākha), the lord of Uma (Śiva) has been set up.

What precisely may be derived from the above etymological analysis of the word Nandana and the epigraphical details of the Hund Slab is that Jayapāladeva and his lineage were Saivites. It



may therefore, be suggested without reluctance that Ānandapāla, the son of Jayapāla, had erected this temple in honour of the Lord Śiva.

### **Conclusion**

This glorious page of our cultural heritage, though in an extremely ruinous state, certainly conceals a lot of mysteries of human intelligence. It may be assumed, in view of the analysis of historical events given above, that the temple was erected by Ānandapāla deva, son of Jayapaladeva, during his governorship of the Punjab, about A.D.990, in honour of the Lord Śiva.

The problem of the origin of its style and relationship with other assumingly contemporary monuments needs detailed study and requires a separate paper for discussion. Cunningham, Stein and Walliullah Khan have conjectured that the temples of the Salt Range have drawn inspiration from the Kashmirian style of temple architecture. According to Percy Brown<sup>18</sup> "the temples of Amb, Katas, Malot and Nandana are more nearly related to the Kashmir school". He prefers to call them, on the whole, a provincial off-shoot of Kashmiri architecture.

But the conspicuous absence of the salient features of Kashmirian temples, such as (a) a double Pyramidal roof, (b) triangular Pediment (c) fluted columns with Doric or Ionic capitals, and a (d) colonnaded peristyle surrounding the main shrine, does not inspire our confidence in that assumption. The temple at Nandana in fact shows many points of difference, and, inspite of the alleged Kashmirian influence, still needs to be properly understood.



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 'Utbī, Abu Nāsr Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Yamīnī* or *Tārīkh al-Yamīnī*, Vol. II, Cairo 1286, p.146.
2. Jurbādhqānī, *Tarjuma Tārīkh-i Yamīnī*, Tehran, 1345, p.331.
3. Reynold, J. The *Kitāb-i-Yamīnī*, London, 1885, p.388
4. Gardīzī, 'Abd al-Hayy b. 'Abd Dahhāk, *Kitāb Zain al-Akhhār*, ed. 'Abd al-Hayy Habībī, Iran 1947, p.181.
5. Nizām ad-Dīn Ahmad Bakhshī, *Tabaqāt-i-Akbarī*, Calcutta, 1913, p.270
6. Badāonī, 'Abd-al-Qādir b. Malūkshāh b. Hamid, *Muntakhabat-al-Tawārīkh*, p.295.
7. According to the *Mahābhārata*, (Chapter 25, Stanza 45), those who had brought the organs of senses under control and who had not killed any living being, would be permitted to enter this park. See Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, Delhi, 1989, p.524.
8. The mosque stands in front of the temple at a distance of only a few meters, and measures 20.25m x 16.50m. It is comprised of a prayer hall and an enclosed forecourt and appears to have been built within the ruins of an old and large structures of which a portion still survives on the north-west side. The entire structure of brick and cement is certainly of the present era but I am presuning that its foundation was originally laid by the Ghaznavid Sultān as a token of his victory.
9. The Hindu temple literally and essentially is a dwelling place for the god. Cella, the *garbagriha* or womb-house is the essence of it where the god in the form of an idol or emblem is duly installed and consecrated. All other components of the temple are additions and mainly the result of an elaboration of the procedure of rituals. According to the craft manual (*Silpa-Sastra*) of the Hindus, the temple is the body of the cosmic man (*Purusha*), and the square form of the cella indicates the manifested universe.
10. Cunningham, A., *Archaeological Survey of India*, Report for the year 1872-73, Vol. V, Calcutta, 1875, p.40.
11. Stein, A., *Archaeological Reconnaissances in North-Western India and South-Eastern Iran*, London, 1937, pp.36-43.
12. Presently access to the upper cella is dangerous and rather impossible. The measurement of the upper cella is therefore taken from Cunningham *op.cit.*, p.40.
13. *op.cit.*, p.41.



14. The following details are taken from Abdur-Rehman. *The last two Dynasties of the Śāhis*, pp.147-148.
15. Muhammad b. Mansūr, *Abād al-Harb wa-Shujā* also called 'Abāb al-Malūk wa Kifāyatal-Mamlūk, ed. Ahmad Suhaile Khwān Sari, Iran, 1346, pp.308-09.
16. The Hund Slab inscription was deciphered by Dr. Abdur-Rehman Professor of Archaeology, Peshawar University. The details of translations are taken from his book, *op.cit.*, pp.309-313.
17. Vettam Mani, *op.cit.*, p.524.
18. Brown Percy, *Indian Architecture, Buddhist and Hindu Period*, Bombay, 1959, p.161.

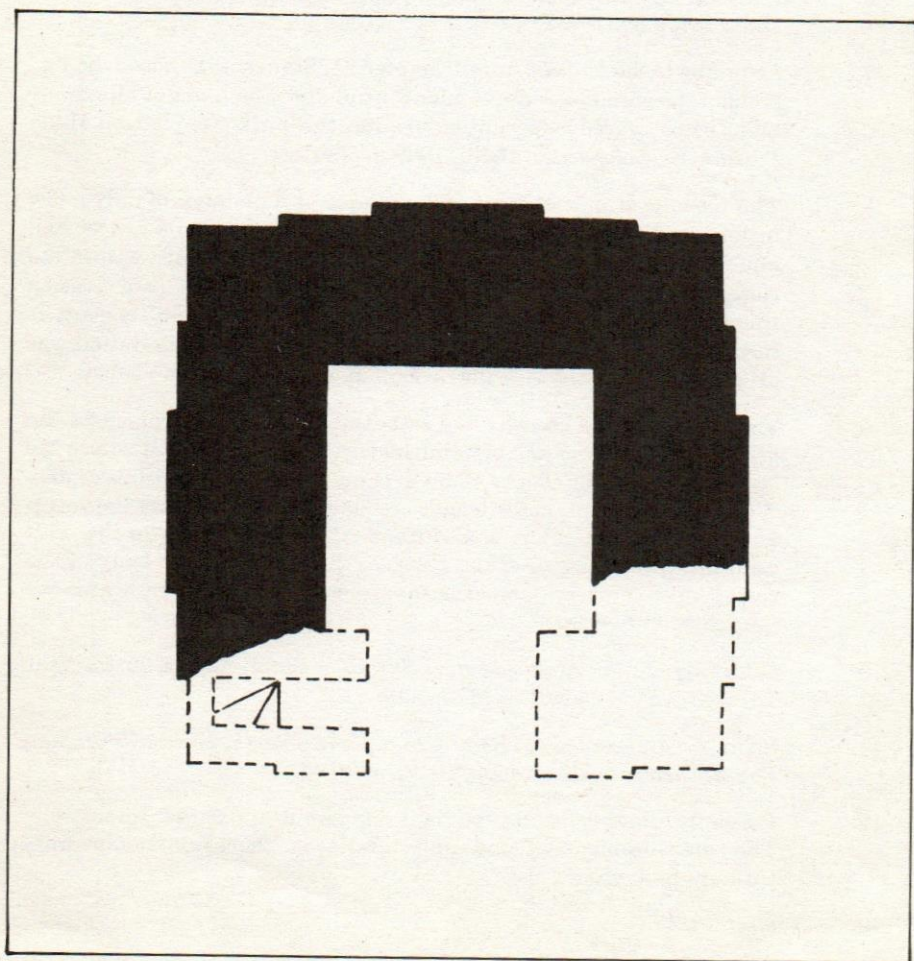
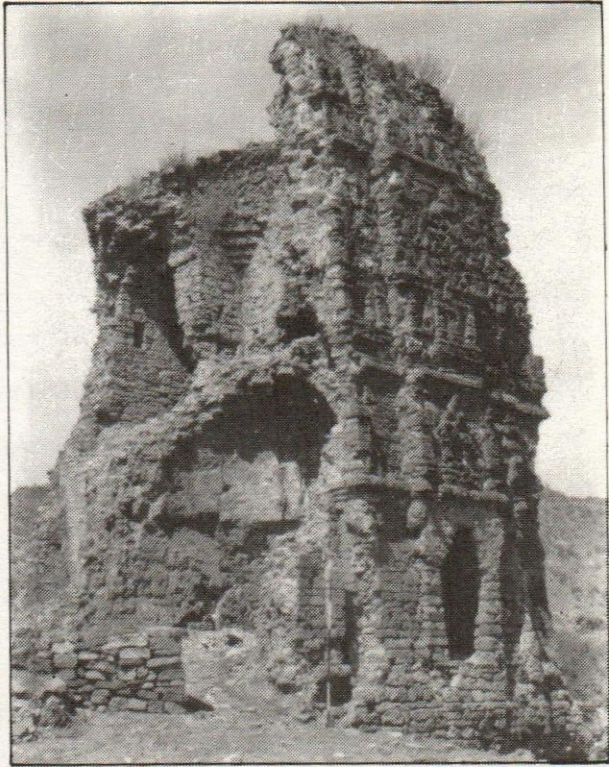


FIG:1 Nandana Temple: Ground Plan.  
Scale. 1mm = 10cm.



Nandana Temple:  
View from the  
South - West



Nandana Temple:  
View from the  
South - East

