



Figurative Art and Iconographic attributes in Champavati Temple, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh.....

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In the memory of beloved daughter Champavati, this temple was constructed by Raja Sahil Verma. This temple is located in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. The temple situated near local market of the area and constructed in the Shikhara style, with intricate stone carvings. It has a wheel roof and is large as the Laxmi Narayan Temple. An icon of the goddess Mahishasuramardini (Durga) is worshiped in the temple. The walls of the temple are full of superb stone sculptures. On account of its historical and archaeological importance, the temple is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India.

The picturesque town of Chamba, located on the right bank of the river Ravi is said to have been founded by king Sāhilavarman in the first half of the tenth century (Pl.1.). Sāhilavarman shifted his capital from Bharmaur to this place. The city continued to be the capital of the Chamba kings, one of the longest ruling houses in the world, till present times and is now the district headquarters of the same name. The entire town is studded with beautiful temples from the time of its founder to that of the modern times. Even in the surroundings of Chamba, places like Saho, Mindhal, Chatrarhi, Devi-ri-Kothi, Gum, Svaim (Sai), etc. have several temples of great antiquity. No wonder the region has attracted the attentions of several scholars who have devoted to various aspects of antiquarian interest. The earliest and foremost is perhaps the name of J. Ph. Vogel who did pioneering work in region and produced a volume on the *Antiquities of Chamba State* almost a century back in 1911.¹ His work was followed by that of his equally worthy pupils Hermann Goetz² and B. Ch. Chhabra.³ Thereafter several scholars have written about its temple and art remains in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Sāhilavarman, the founder of Chamba town is generally credited with the construction of three temples in the town, viz. Champāvātī, Chandragupta Mahādeva and Lakshmī-Nārāyaṇa temple between c. A.D. 920-940. Their exact date and order is a matter of debate amongst the scholars of the subject. We have taken the Champāvātī temple as the earliest on the stylistic grounds (Pl.2.). The temple, as the legend goes, is named after Champāvātī the daughter of Sāhilavarman, who is now worshipped as a goddess. It is also said that the town was also named Champā (Chamba) after the name of this

princess/goddess. It has been customary amongst the rulers of Chamba to start and end their pilgrimage and worship of local temples on special occasions from this temple, which may also be an indicator of its being the oldest in the town.

The temple, which is in bad state of decay, has a *saptaratha* plan of sanctum, with *pīṭha*, *jaṅghā* walls with niches surmounted with miniature *nāgara* style temple *śikhara*s as elevation. It has a seven storeyed *śikhara* with an *āmalaka* and *kalaśa* on the top. The roof has an umbrella like canopy. The *śikhara* also has the miniature temple design carved on it. There is a small porch in front of the temple before which a *maṇḍapa* has been added at a much later date (Pl.3.).

The façade of the *ardhamaṇḍapa* is interesting in carvings. There is an image of a goddess seated on lion on the *lalāṭabimba*. She carries a trident, mace, pot and *akshamālā* in her four right and left hands respectively. Above this is a panel depicting nine images seated on their mounts in niches. Figure 2 from the left has a big crack cross and the 5th and 6th figures are completely damaged. The second figure seated on bull seems to be Śiva. The third seated on peacock carries a pot and *akshamālā* and should be identified as that of *Brahmā*. The fourth figure is Vishṇu seated on Garuḍa. The seventh figure seems to be seated on a goat or ram. The next figure is seated on lotus and the last one is broken. The panel thus is not a *navagraha* panel but as in the case of rock-cut temples of Masrur, it shows various deities. Below this panel are two *śākhās* of *padmapatra* and *patralatā*. Above this is a panel of miniature *nāgara* temple designs with *pūrṇaratna* in the centre. A *gaṇaśākhā* with dancing figures carrying musical instruments like *vīṇā*, drum, *ḍholaka*, cymbals, etc.

The doorway of the sanctum measures 36" in width and 75" in height (Pl.4.). The frame is thickly coated with lime and is in very poor state of preservation. The door frame has five bands. The innermost *śākhā* is plain. The next two bands have *patralatā* designs on them. The fourth *śākhā* has lotus flowers within *ratna* motifs. The fifth band is again absolutely plain. At the base of the frame on both sides are images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā carrying pots and lotus flowers. Beyond them are figures of two door keepers, one on each side. The figures are badly mutilated for any detailed description. An image of four handed Gaṇeśa seated in a pillared niche with lotus base is shown on the *lalāṭabimba*. He carries usual *danta* and *paraśu* in the right hands and *modaka* in the lower left hand. The upper left hand has an indistinct object. Overall the frame in its present state has no artistic merit or any important features.

NOTES AND REFERENCES :

1. *Catalogue of Antiquities in the Bhuri Singh Museum, History of Punjab Hill States, 2 Vols, (Jointly with Hutchison) etc.*
2. *The early Wooden Temples of Chamba, Leiden, 955.*
3. *Antiquities of Chamba State, Vol.II.*



P 1.1.



P 1.2.



Pl.3.



Pl.4.